DISCOVERING THE "WE" IN THE "ME" OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

PREACHING UTILIZING A SOCIAL MEDIA MINISTRY TEAM

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ABSTRACT

DISCOVERING THE "WE" IN THE "ME" OF SOCIAL MEDIA

PREACHING UTILIZING A SOCIAL MEDIA MINISTRY TEAM

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Preaching utilizing a Social Media Ministry Team attempted to discover the "we" in the "me" world of social media. Throughout this project, an expanded notion of the preaching moment explored the possibilities of creating conversations "before, during, and after" Sunday morning worship.

The project was two-fold. First, the Lay Advisory Committee divided into three groups to establish the first Social Media Ministry Team (SMMT). These three teams were the Design Team, Participation Team, and the Message Team. They were tasked with responsibilities to implement a social media ministry team alongside the preaching moment. Second, the SMMT was assembled, trained, and commissioned to engage the congregation using sermon content to create interconnectivity and interactivity via social media.

As a result, the church experienced increased activity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram through many additional friends and followers. Moreover, utilizing a common hashtag (#GuiltyGod), conversations were created that led to more engagement and reach with sermon content. Probably the most striking measurement was the overall quality of

conversations that occurred on social media prompted by the preaching moment. The SMMT observed engagement with their friends and followers that occurred because of this project's emphasis on creating conversations.

Finally, the SMMT investigated the functionality of incorporating an intentional focus on social media alongside the preaching moment. It proved successful learning the good, bad, and ugly aspects of doing cutting edge ministry. While in its infancy, this project endeavored to create a new paradigm of preaching employing a "before, during, and after" approach to developing a conversational method crafting, delivering, and reflecting on the content of the sermon via social media. It is noteworthy to mention, many good things happened, but this project attempted to accomplish too much. Yet, developing a SMMT at Frazer UMC is paying dividends in the church's long-term vision of incorporating the latest technology into a fully-fledged Media Ministry. Social media will continue to play a major role in the church's communication platform for years to come.

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CHAPTER 1

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

The Theology of Being "Social"

Humans are social beings by design. We were made for relationships, built by our creator for community. Humans have been imprinted with the image of God. This image bears the nature of a creator who from the beginning is determined to create relationships with creation. Moreover, we were made for human connection, lived out in the social contexts of family, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors. Christian theological understanding grounds our relational orientation in the Trinitarian nature of God. As one God in three Persons, our creator exists in the continually active and perfect relationship of overflowing love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As creatures formed in the image of God, humans share this relational bent. The biblical narrative affirms this when we hear God say of Adam, "it is not good for him to be alone." (Gen. 2:18) Likewise, redemption history begins with Abraham's call, not merely to follow God as an individual, but as the "father of many nations." (Gen. 17:6) Israel is to be a community of faith, not isolated worshippers.

Jesus radically reforms this community around himself as the Incarnate Deity; the very fact that he calls twelve apostles indicates that he does not abandon the commitment of God to creating community even as the salvation plan of God reaches beyond ethnic

Israel to incorporate the Gentile nations. On the contrary, the experience of love for "one another" as a reflection of love for God is at the core of Jesus' teaching, and the unity of the people of God through the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the New Testament church (see John 13:33-34).

The findings of modern social scientists reinforce these theological foundations. They have come to redefine concepts of the individual personality in terms of social relationships.[1] Simply put, there is no "me" without "we." "Connection is one of the absolutes of life. We don't choose it; it is hard wired within us."[2]

As one preacher put it, "We cannot live for only ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects."[3]

Section 1.2: The Theology of "Media"

Humans are also communicating beings. Once again, this aspect of our identity comes from the *imago dei*. God communicates, revealing the divine nature and acting in the world through the Logos, the Word. Because God said, 'let there be light,' there was light (Gen. 1:3). God's communication is also the means of relationship between God and humanity. Scripture contrasts the Living God who speaks to Abraham, to Moses, and to the Prophets, to the deaf and dumb idols of the nations who are unable to communicate

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[1] See, for example, McLeod, S. A. (2008), "Social Identity Theory," accessed February 10, 2015, Retrieved from http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html.

[2] Leonard I. Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2012), 1.

[3] Henry Melville, *The Golden Lectures* (1865), accessed via Google eBooks, accessed November 20, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=lt8EAAAAQAAJ&dq=fibres%20fellow-men%20melvill&pg=PA884-IA126#v=onepage&q&f=false.

(Psalm 115:5). The New Testament writers identified the living Logos with Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (John 1:1-3)

Communication occurs through a medium: spoken words, written words, radio and television signals, etc. are all media for communication. In this sense, the incarnation of Jesus was the ultimate medium, the highest form of communication, for he expressed perfectly the nature and power of God as well as his message. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) Gould emphasizes the importance of this verse in forming a Christian understanding of communication: "We start with this verse because it captures what we believe about the radical power of communication, namely, that God has spoken all creation into being and continues to speak to us and through us."[4]

Like God in Christ, human beings communicate to create, and to relate. We cannot create ex nihilo as God does but we do express outwardly the ideas and feelings we form inwardly and thus realize them in the world around us. We do not relate perfectly as God does, but we can seek to approximate God's use of relationships by attempting to know others, and to make ourselves known to them, through communication. In order to accomplish these goals of creating and relating, like God we also utilize media that to one degree or another "incarnate" our inner minds in a way that we can be seen, heard, and touched by others.

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[4] Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 7.

Bringing It Together – "Social Media"

The theological and anthropological observations about relationship and communication I have made are perhaps obvious, but they matter if we are to form a correct understanding of phenomenon that has come to be known as "social media." For purposes of this paper, I will define social media as any form of communication other than face-to-face interaction, which has the capacity for immediate relational interaction. Thus, teaching a class in someone's living room or preaching to a congregation in a worship center would not be "social media" because there are no "media" involved. Conversely, writing a book or broadcasting a sermon via television would not be "social media" because such mass media lack the "two way street" that would allow the reader or viewer to respond in a living relationship that could be characterized as "social." Examples of current digital social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google Plus, as well as a host others, and new forms are emerging frequently.

Social media demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity with human history: continuity, in that this form of communication flows out of the same basic theological foundation of the desire to create and relate; discontinuity, in that the potential scope of relationship is exponentially greater than ever before. If we treat social media as some strange, technological phenomenon that is completely new, we ignore the continuity between this generation and all those who have gone before. We risk missing the connection between centuries of tradition surrounding the philosophy and ethics of communication, and today's latest expressions of human nature. Kay points out the social media aspect that has been present in every period of human history: "The concept of social media is hardly original. Often, when we discuss social media, we do so in a way

that refers to contemporary variations of media, chiefly Facebook or Twitter. However, such discussions would be stilted if we didn't consider social media to be more than simply Facebook or Twitter. As long as there has been media, there's been social media."[5]

On the other hand, if we ignore the discontinuity between contemporary social media and prior forms of communication, we risk underestimating what is at stake in the church's response to social media. A brief overview of the history of media helps to clarify this discontinuity. Face-to-face communication was limited to a few hundred or perhaps thousands of people who could gather in one venue. In practice, face-to-face communication meant connecting with only a handful of people, for the majority of humanity who lacked the power or status to command large gatherings. Written communication overcame the barriers of time and distance, but limited the social aspect. The advent of mass media heightened this limitation—first the printing press, and later radio and television. Mass media also were cost-prohibitive so that only an elite percentage of humanity had access to them. The telephone gave rise to an interconnected network that facilitated social relationships, but it was designed in such a way that it limited the scope of communication to a one-on-one conversation or at most a small group, and it required all the participants to be available simultaneously. The rise of computers and the digital age lowered the cost of production for texts, sound and video, putting them within reach of more than an elite core of producers. However, the tipping point came when the Internet brought together the best features of mass media, digital

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[5] Trent M. Kays, "Young social media users could learn from previous generations," *Minnesota Daily*, (March 31, 2014), accessed October 23, 2014, http://www.mndaily.com/opinion/columns/2014/03/30/young-social-media-users-could-learn-previous-generations.

production, and telecommunications. For the first time, a platform exists that makes it possible for an individual to reach a potentially large audience at low cost, and have the capacity for that audience to respond interactively. "For the first time in history, the majority of humanity is connected. In a world of hyperconnectivity, when three-quarters of humanity may be connected by mobile communications … amplification of resources and capabilities is exponential."[6]

The quantitative scale of communication that has changed, but its qualitative nature has changed as well. As Marshall McLuhan stated, "the medium is the message."[7] McLuhan may have overstated the case, but there can be no doubt that the medium we choose cannot help but influence the presentation of the message. The invention of the printing press, and the corresponding creation of literate societies, changed the nature of communication, because literate people not only read and write, they think as readers and writers, so even their spoken communication becomes different from that of strictly oral cultures. Likewise, people who are accustomed to consuming television and radio think differently than those who gain most of their information from reading. Many have noted the shortening of the average attention span. Although the ramifications of social media on our thought forms are still unfolding, we would be foolish to think the generation of "digital natives" raised in a world immersed in social media will communicate or think in the same way as others. Today's communication has morphed into status updates, tweets, selfies, and short videos. Our consumption of social media will inevitably change our production and subsequently our comprehension of information as we live in dialog with one another. This digital world will influence our physical world. There is no evidence

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[6] Sweet, *Viral*, 162-163.

[7] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Sphere Books, 1964).

to believe the saturation of social media will stop. Digital natives are everywhere: "The trends around social media show skyrocketing adoption rates with no indication of slowing down. There is a 91 percent adoption rate of social networking amongst American adults ages eighteen to thirty four. The average Internet user is spending 4.6 hours on social networking per week, more than any other category."[8]

An example from the field of language translation elucidates the connection. Christian missionaries have learned that to adequately express the gospel to a new people group, translation is a fundamental task. Translators now understand that there is no such thing as a one-to-one correspondence of words between languages, so that the task is not as simple as finding the words to express biblical truths. Instead, words exist in a complex interrelated web of ideas, values and stories known as a worldview. The missionary must seek to understand this worldview deeply, in order to find within it the right combination of images and phrases to adequately communicate the truth of the gospel, always relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to give understanding. Missionaries are committed to this difficult task because at the heart of it is the theology of incarnation; that God made Himself one of us in order to communicate His love to us, and if we are to follow Christ we must be willing to express God's love to people who are different from us in deeply incarnational ways.

In the same way, the church must be willing to "translate" the message of Christ faithfully into the thought-forms and communication patterns of digital natives in order to incarnate the love of God to a new generation. The sharing of life is integral to the human experience; social media has revealed this truth to us again. Like Tyndale, Wycliffe, and

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[8] Justin Wise, *The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 48.

others who stood up to the established church and insisted that the Bible be translated from Latin into the common speech of the people, we need voices in the church today who will insist on adapting our communication to the "heart language" of digital natives.

Wise emphasizes the courage needed for this translation project: "Becoming a social church means we need leaders who are willing to serve as heretics. Not theological heretics, mind you. I mean to say we need men and women who are willing to challenge long-standing and widely beloved methods of communicating the gospel message."[9]

What is at Stake–Opportunities and Risks

The opportunities inherent in social media are great. The unprecedented scope and scale of interconnectivity afforded through social media allows the gospel to be proclaimed to more people more quickly at lower cost. Like the roman roads, which in the providence of God allowed Paul and others to rapidly transport the early Christian movement around the Mediterranean world, the World Wide Web provides a providential tool for evangelism and discipleship. Social media complement the Protestant doctrine of the "priesthood of the believer," because they put tools in the hands of every follower of Christ to share the gospel, rather than only a few high-profile preachers and teachers with access to broadcast studios or publishing houses. The "viral" nature of social media, which allows easy multiplication of a message as it is shared across bridges from one social network to another, counterbalances the exponential increase in world population. At a time when there are more people alive in the world than ever, and the task of fulfilling the Great Commission can seem overwhelming, surely it is no coincidence that

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[9] Wise, *Social Church*, 24.

there are also more effective tools at our disposal than ever before for spreading the message rapidly.

The opportunities for utilizing social media do not stop with the initial proclamation of the gospel. Because of their relational nature, social media can be used in a way that mass media never could for building relationships in which believers can disciple one another, encourage and challenge one another, care for one another, and build one another up. Those who are physically isolated due to health, location, work schedules, etc. can find community that would otherwise be impossible. Even those whose primary form of relationship is face-to-face, such as members of a small group, can maintain contact between personal meetings through social media to enhance their connection to one another. "Virtual community is real community," asserts Gould. "Online communities of faith are real to members who have come to rely on them for inspiration and support…Time and energy put into quality interaction is what makes a group of individuals who share interests and concerns become a community no matter where it's located."[10]

I have witnessed this phenomenon in recent years with the number of weddings I have officiated in which the couples first met online through a dating service. I have also experienced it first-hand in the process of pursing my doctorate: fellow students and I connected through social media between in-person class sessions and our relationships were deeper and more vibrant as a result. Social media can indeed connect people into "real" relationships.

Here again, I see the hand of providence, for just when the modern trends of urbanization are effectively pulling apart the bonds of family and neighborhood that were

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[10] Gould, *Social Media Gospel*, 27.

common in predominantly rural societies, tools are becoming available that counterbalance those trends and make it possible to maintain interpersonal relationships despite separations of time and distance. In short, using social media can enhance both the quantity and quality of communication, aiding the church in its mission of evangelism and discipleship as well as providing new expressions of love. "Ultimately this is where the value of social media lies–in its ability to use technology to facilitate connection and relationships between real people," writes Wise. "Emerging generations see little to no difference between an "online" and "offline" world. They are becoming the same. If half of the world's population is under thirty, ambassadors of the gospel message need to understand the preferences, patterns, behaviors, and values of the people living in a twenty-first century world."[11]

Because of these opportunities, I believe the church is poised to see a great revival, an explosion of making new disciples in part through the tools now in our hands. We all now have front row seats with millions of storytellers sharing their experiences, many of which share the story of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

However, I also recognize the risks of social media. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of social media usage is narcissism. Most users post primarily about themselves: their thoughts, their opinions, their activities, right down to posting what one ate for breakfast for the whole world to know. The word "selfie" was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 because of the overwhelming use of social media to post

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[11] Wise, *Social Church*, 50.

pictures of oneself. Panek notes that social media users curate a "second self" [12] and can become so obsessed with this (re)presentation of this idealized self that they are more concerned with posting about their experiences than actually *experiencing* those experiences. Witness the crowd of parents in the front of the room with cell phone cameras lifted high when a children's choir performs, or the roller coaster rider more concerned with getting a high quality video than with enjoying the thrill of the ride. Adolescents can come to base their self worth on the number of "likes" their latest post received. Of course, narcissism can be present in any relationship: one can stand face-to-face with others and still only talk or think about oneself. However, social media seem to promote a greater capacity for self-absorption. The image of the couple sitting at a restaurant on date night, each absorbed in his or her device rather than practicing conversation is enough to make many in the church believe that social media will be the death of genuine human relationships.

Nevertheless, these risks should not dissuade the church from engaging in the world of social media. Instead, the church must bring the full truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear on this aspect of life just like every other. The church must teach the ethic of "one another" based, mutually giving relationships. Long before social media, Paul saw the need to tell the church at Philippi, "each of you must think not only of your own interests, but also those of others…let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:4-5) As followers of Jesus are transformed from narcissism to concern for others, their distinction from the rest of society becomes a witness to the power of the gospel. Elmore asks, "What if we used social media for redemptive purposes? Instead of using it

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[12] Elliot T. Panek, "Mirror or Megaphone? How relationships between narcissism and social networking site use differ on Facebook and Twitter" (*Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 29 No. 5, Sept. 2013), 2004-2012.

for some narcissistic promotion, what if we utilized it to build a community of people who supported each other, in both the wonderful moments and the non-glitzy moments? I wonder if we really could help each other through social media."[13] Thus, the manner in which the Christian community engages with social media is an opportunity to mark ourselves out as different from the culture around us, rather than merely retreat from that culture into a Christian ghetto of social media isolation. The church must bring the "we" to the "me" of social media. The potential of a viral revival and a return to the days of Pentecost is available in the "we."

The battleground, then, is not between social media and other forms of community, but rather between narcissistic behavior and mutually self-giving behavior, in any relationship. Harsh lines of distinction between virtual and "real" worlds are not helpful. The conversation within the church has been preoccupied too often in whether embracing social media would undermine the physical community experienced when "two or three are gathered" in Jesus' name for worship, communion, discipleship, etc. In fact, new media have historically been layered over other forms rather than replacing them. People did not stop speaking face-to-face when books were printed; they did not stop telling each other stories in person when radio and television came along; they did not stop traveling to visit family members when telephones became available. Today, we see complex layers of interaction between physical and virtual communities. The church can and should offer both.

I am not arguing that it is inappropriate for the church to continue to emphasize the importance of face-to-face relationships. Paul often laments in his epistles that he

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[13] Tim Elmore, "The Real Purpose of Social Media" (June 25, 2013), accessed November 1, 2014, http://growingleaders.com/blog/the-real-purpose-of-social-media/.

longs to see his congregations in person.[14] Thank God, though, that this did not keep him from writing letters! The question is not, "should we invest time in personal communication or social media;" we must engage social media in order to speak the language of our era. The greater question is, how do we engage social media in ways that are consistent with the way of the cross, the way of "we" vs. "me." As Paul reminded the Corinthians, "The weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 10:4-5) Our task is not to oppose social media, nor to accept it uncritically, but to "bring it captive," into the service of Christ as marked by the way of the cross.

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[14] 1 Thes. 2:17, 3:10, Rom. 15:23-24, 2 Cor. 1:16, Phil. 1:25-26, 2 Tim. 4:9, Philemon 22.

CHAPTER 2

THE PREACHING MOMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Importance of Preaching

I could explore the church's use of social media further in many contexts: lay-led relational evangelism, mentoring and discipleship, Christian friendships, small group community, student and children's ministry, to name a few. However, the signature communication event of the church is the preaching moment, especially in the evangelical tradition where the sermon is the primary focus (or at least one main focus) of the worship gathering. With due respect to the sacramental traditions that place less emphasis on preaching, there is biblical warrant for assigning importance to preaching. Jesus characterized his own mission in part as "preaching the gospel" to the poor, (Luke 4:18, 43) and he commissioned his disciples to preach first to the cities of Israel (Luke 9:6) and afterward to "make disciples of all nations" in part by "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). The apostles made it their business to preach in the temple and from house to house in Jerusalem (Acts 5:42) and then in every city where they were scattered (Acts 8:4). Paul considered himself called to preach the gospel (Acts 16:10, Gal. 1:16, Eph. 3:8). He placed this as a higher priority within his calling than baptizing (I Cor. 1:17) and he instructed those whom he commissioned to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5), charging Timothy to "proclaim the message;

be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and

encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching." (2 Tim. 4:2)

Paul specifically argues for the priority of preaching as the primary means of

communicating the gospel, over philosophy and prophetic signs:

> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through
> wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to
> save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,
> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and
> foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and
> Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's
> foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger
> than human strength. (I Cor. 1:21-25)

Philosophy, prophetic signs and demonstrations of miraculous power are certainly

not bad things, but God has chosen to use the verbal proclamation of the Word in a

unique way. God uses the Word both to create and to relate, and preaching corresponds in

the church to the creative power of the Logos. We relate to one another in many ways

through words, and thereby grow in love. However, the initial experience of faith is

created in response to the proclaiming act of preaching (Rom. 10:17).

Preaching and Change

If church leaders are to engage with social media, then, we must consider how to

engage it in the realm of preaching, or we risk allowing the form of communication that

God has placed a special importance upon to become irrelevant to the world around us.

To use Charles Duhigg's phrase, preaching is a "keystone habit" in the church that can

have a domino effect on many other habits if effectively changed.[1] Because of its

prominence, preaching is not only an example of communication within the church, it is

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[1] Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, and How to Change* (New York: Random House, 2012), 100-101.

also a model for how all other forms of communication take place. The church that does not learn to use social media to preach is unlikely to use it effectively in discipleship, congregational care, etc.

Yet, it is precisely in the practice of preaching that Christian leaders tend to have the greatest resistance to change within the church. For example, preachers used the King James Version of the Bible, and language similar to it, long after they ceased to use such language in any other communication context. While there is value in tradition and appropriate formality, forms of preaching can become counterproductive. Often this happens because the forms become embedded in institutions where they take on a life of their own. This includes ways in which the teaching of preaching is embedded in the seminary experience. A mark of institutionalization is if a a group considers a mediocre preacher who conforms to the expected forms to be preferable to an outstanding communicator (one who effectively connects with people) who does not conform to "what a sermon is supposed to sound like." When we judge a preacher's performance against the expected form, and not against the intended outcome, we make an idol of the form. The community of Christian leaders must beware lest we become like the Pharisees, who swore by the gold of the temple instead of by the temple itself (Matthew 23:16-17). God desires to give His people new wine, but it will burst if placed into the old wineskins, to use Jesus' metaphor (Luke 5:36-39).

Giving a full history of the form of the sermon, or a comprehensive survey of the variety of sermons used today, would be outside the scope of this project, but suffice to say that most sermons today are structured around a literary culture, i.e. one where the primary use of media is the written word. When preachers develop outlines, formulate

linear arguments, and make tidy divisions between interpretation and application, they use a process that would be foreign to oral cultures more accustomed to using storytelling and narrative to structure ideas. Likewise, delivery that is centered on the writing and recitation of a manuscript will seem foreign to a culture accustomed to television, where shorter bursts of communication are the norm and where speaking is expected to sound spontaneous, not scripted, if it is to be taken as authentic. The traditional vision is of a preacher closing the door of his study, receiving a word from God in isolation, and giving it to the people in the form of a monologue, to which they listen passively and silently. This vision clashes with a culture of dialog, in which the community puts the most credence in those ideas worked out collectively and discussed openly.

Wise points out how accustomed the church has become to one-way communication. "When a church had something to say (Bake sale! New worship service! Potluck!), they found the appropriate channel to broadcast the message (mailing postcard, bulletin, announcements, etc) and then sent the message. The expectation was there was no expectation. Churches broadcasted a message and never anticipated a moment where the congregation would start speaking back."[2]

To be sure, some aspects of preaching ought to be timeless and unchanging. The minister of Christ holds a responsibility to put the living voice of the Holy Spirit ahead of his or her own ideas and speculations, which in turn requires treating the scripture as foundational. Preachers must offer exegesis of the meaning and application of the text, rather than isogesis of our own ideas propped up with proof texts.[3] The preacher can appear to be in tension with the congregation because of this responsibility to God and to

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[2] Wise, *Social Church*, 30.

[3] See 2 Tim. 2:15-18, 4:1-5; 2 Pet. 1:20-21, 3:14-18.

the sacred text: "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully." (2 Tim. 4:3-5 NRSV)

However, these concerns for faithfulness can inadvertently become a cloak for resisting change when we place a label of theology on what is actually only a cultural preference. For example, simply because it is one preacher's tradition to always read from the text first, and then offered a teaching, does not guarantee that that sermon will be more biblical than another tradition in which the preacher reads from the text later in the sermon. Although someone could make a theological rationale for reading the text first, it does not follow that the form is theologically required, or that no other form can meet the same theological objective equally well. Paul preached very differently in Athens than Peter did in Jerusalem, but both were faithful to the Spirit.

The shift in our culture from a literary culture, to a mass-media oriented culture, and now to a culture which is social media-oriented, requires us to reexamine our preaching, and discern what is truly a scriptural non-negotiable, and what is merely a cultural form. As Johnston argues, "For preachers to become "viable conversation partners" entails both a demonstration of understanding and listening to postmodern people. "[4] Social media presents forms of post-modern communication that utilize a string of short stand-alone ideas (known as "posts") rather than a single long-form argument. Social media savvy communicators value the authenticity of the personal

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[4] Graham M. Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001)*, 78.*

narrative over the authority of "experts." Habitual use of social media encourages a dialog, developed and shared in the context of a community.

These trends in communication flowing from the adaptation of social media are already challenging the producers of mass media. As Gould points out, "Social media has forever changed what it means to participate. Seriously, did you ever imagine network television stations would invite viewers to join in real-time online conversations about prime-time shows and news events? Welcome to the global living room and worldwide peanut gallery – social media culture!"[5] Preachers likewise must confront these realities. They must decide whether these and other social media trends are contrary to scripture or, if not, how they should reshape our preaching.

Preaching and The Preacher

Hudson Taylor made waves in the world of missions when he chose to adapt traditional clothing as part of his work in the Inland China Mission, at a time when most missionaries maintained Western garb[6]. Taylor's willingness to adapt for the sake of the gospel echoes that of the Apostle Paul:

> For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (I Cor. 9:19-23 NRSV)

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[5] Gould, *Social Media Gospel*, 6.

[6] Mark Galli, "Hudson Taylor: Faith missionary to China," *Christianity Today*, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/131christians/missionaries/htaylor.html?start=1.

In the same way, the preacher who wishes to communicate effectively in a social media world and reach digital natives must do more than add a hashtag or tweet to the end of the sermon as an addendum. To be authentic, preaching must be incarnational. This means the preacher must work out for himself or herself what it means to be fully engaged in social media, not simply dabbling in the "latest thing." As Brogan and Smith warn:

> In order to part of the culture of the Web, you must actually be part of it.
> You don't have to try to emulate human behaviors. You have to actually
> be human, in every possible way. Otherwise you enter what could be
> called the uncanny valley of social networks: You appear almost human
> but not quite, and that 'not quite' throws off the whole equation.
> Everything falls flat and the illusion fails."[7]

To simply give the appearance of being in the social media world without actually immersing oneself in it would portray a modern version of Docetism, the heresy that claimed Christ only "seemed" to have become human. The effective preacher in a social media era must not merely *seem* to be proficient in social media, but truly engage with it. Meredith Gould's contemporary version of a famous prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila, entitled "Christ Has No Body" is enlightening:

> Christ has no online presence but yours
> No blog, no Facebook page but yours
> Yours are the tweets through which loves touches this world,
> Yours are the posts through which the Gospel is shared,
> Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed.
> Christ has no online presence but yours,
> No blog, no Facebook page but yours.[8]

People now live in social media communities as much as they live in their physical neighborhoods and relational networks. Ed Stetzer once quipped, "I've said

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[7] Chris Brogan and Julien Smith, *The Impact Equation: Are You Making Things Happen or Just Making Noise?* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2012), 211-212.

[8] Quoted in Gould, *Social Media Gospel*, 8.

before, only half jokingly, that pastors who are not on Twitter are in sin. Social media is

a valid ministry of the church. Online community can enhance the physical

community."[9] In order to become all things to all people that by all means we might save

some, Christian communicators must be willing to be invested in the digital world with

the people, and allow it to influence who they are and how they communicate as

preachers of the gospel.

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[9] Ed Stetzer, "Is an Online Church Really a Church?" accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/april/is-online-church-really-church.html.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

(Re)signing the Congregation

The changing culture of the participants in worship should cause those of us

charged with the task of organizing and implementing worship services to pause and

analyze our audience. Who is the 21st Century churchgoer? They are fully engaged in

the digital world. Barna reports:

> "In the hyperlinked age, people now view life—from its smallest details to
> its monumental moments—through a digital lens. And through this lens,
> they experience faith as well. In fact, there's not much that adults today
> don't experience through a digital lens…Because the relationship to
> personal devices is so strong, it naturally affects personal relationships—
> for better and for worse. Social media, of course, lives up to its name. As
> Barna data show, more than one-third of adults (36%) stop whatever
> they're doing to check their device when they get a new text or message."[1]

With more than one-third of adults checking their devices instantly upon

receiving a notification, the meaning of being present for any activity today must be

clarified to include one's digital as well as physical presence. This not a moment to

resign from the preaching task because of the changing times; it is an opportunity to

reflect and (re)sign congregations to an even more comprehensive engagement in

worship. To (re)sign the congregation means to lead a digital congregation to new

commitments in worship appropriate to their new identities.

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[1] Barna Group, "Three Digital Life Trends for 2014," accessed March 11, 2014,
https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/657-three-digital-life-trends-for-2014.

When the average churchgoer enters into worship, they attempt to be both physically present in worship and digitally present on their devices. Most churches try valiantly to dissuade their participants from the distraction of technology, but the reality is they are failing at an increasing rate. The amount of "screen time" is only rising with each passing year. (Re)signing the congregation entails seeking meaningful ways in worship to engage the digital natives in this hyperlinked age.

Consider that Millenials, the first generation entirely submersed in the digital era, have a reputation in the church for seeking ways to engage the wider culture through missions and evangelism. Barna's research shows, "…even though born again Millennials are notable for their social activism, they also defy expectations as the generation that practices evangelism most. There's more to this digitally connected tribe than meets the eye."[2] Church leaders can choose either to see the Millenials constant engagement with social media as a distraction from being present for worship, or as a means of being more present for mission in the world.

(Re)signing the congregation for today's culture, digital and otherwise, begins with a church congregation seeing themselves as a missionary outpost for Jesus, operating from the fringes of a non-Christian culture rather than from the center of Christendom. The church in America may have enjoyed a prolonged period during which the Christian worldview was dominant in our society, but that time has passed. Our culture is becoming more secular with each successive generation. The (re)signed congregation will not view the filtration of social media into sacred space as a frustrating encroachment, but as an eagerly anticipated bridge into a digital mission field.

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[2] Barna, "Three Digital Life Trends".

The digital native desires to participate at some level in every form of communication. Consider the field of medical care, where instead of simply listening to a one-way lecture from the expert medical caregiver, patients have a growing expectation that they will have a three-way conversation between themselves, their caregivers, and internet-sourced information. Future breakthrough are likely to take the form of mobile apps that can provide real time feedback between a patients medical data (e.g. heart rate or blood pressure) and receive recommendations from their doctor in return. Traditional medical professionals may feel threatened in the short term, but in the long term there are real possibilities for improved health.

In the same way, the monologue, manuscripted sermon from the "soulcare" expert will be replaced by a three-way dialog, and breakthroughs in discipleship will come as we leverage real-time life situations with the ability to provide on the spot spiritual guidance. As with medical professionals, the professional clergy may feel threatened by this new model, but long term the possibilities of improving the ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ must outweigh those fears.

We live in a new world. Pastors, staff, and church leaders that begin (re)signing their congregations will speak the language of this new world, and thus communicate the message of Jesus to future generations in ways that they can hear it.

(Re)signing the Church

(Re)signing the church suggests integrating the opportunity presented by social media into the functional strategies of the church, including how church leaders allocate

time, money, and energy. What should the 21st Century church look like? The mission of the church is to "make disciples," but what is the vision for how to do so?

In the past, the church made strategic adaptations to embrace printed media: purchasing hymnals and Bibles, equipment to produce bulletins and newsletters, etc. Later, many churches invested in radio programming to adapt to broadcast audio media: microphones, recording equipment, etc. Some churches have spent millions of dollars investing in video media for the televising of worship services, video Bible studies, etc. A few churches went a step further, and invested in television studios and broadcast channels to show Christian programming around the clock. Satellite networks make such content available around the world. Had the church in the past chosen to retreat from engaging in the media of the day, it would have created a spiritual vacuum and resigned the church to a slow death.

Now is another moment to stop and (re)sign the church for future generations. As leaders formulate new strategies, they face the same options of retreat and decline, or (re)signing the church to repackage the timeless gospel in the current language of the people. This calls for making social media an intentional, purposeful part of the church's discipleship strategy, not an after-thought or an optional extra. Most churches today are still adapting to the online world by creating websites that give them a global presence. However, they cannot think that a static website will bring them into full engagement with today's online experience. What place will social media have in the church? What is the vision for social media in the church? What investment of time, talent, and treasure should the church invest in social media?

To reiterate, the most visible space our churches is typically the pulpit. If social media do not become a part of the church's strategy in preaching, it is unlikely to become a serious part of the disciple-making strategy in any other way. What we sing, what we say, and what we do in worship directly and indirectly impacts all other areas of ministry within the church. Social media needs a proper introduction to the possibilities it has to impact our community for Jesus.

(Re)signing the Message

The online community is poised to receive good news and our churches have it to share. As stated before, the primary communicator in the church is the preacher. Therefore (re)signing the message using social media is the crux of this project. I will explore the future development of preaching beyond the delivery of the sermon during a worship service, examining opportunities to engage the T.G.I.F. (Twitter, Google, Instagram, Facebook) generation in a multi-faceted conversation about the story of Jesus like never before. I will stress that, because the gospel is alive, a conversational, relational, incarnational approach to preaching rather than a static offering of information will give the next generation "ears to hear" via social media. This approach creates space for the congregation to engage, create, and share in a sermon that constructs a deeper communal approach for the preaching moment. This is a moment to shift the preaching moment; to (re)sign it for a postmodern ear to hear the words of life.

The experiment of (re)signing the message will challenge the preacher's preparation, delivery, and post-reflection of the sermon. It will call for a greater sense of transparency before and after the sermon. Before, during and after delivery, the preacher

will be asked to include other voices in the message through the medium of social media. This means a radical departure from the traditionally trained preacher's comfort zone.

Preachers practice and hone their art over many years spent in the pulpit. One must be able to communicate the old story of Scripture in new ways relevant to today's culture. Gilmore notes, "Karl Barth was reportedly fond of saying, 'We must hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.' These days one could recast the old adage as 'hold the Bible in one hand and an iPad in the other.'"[3] The point remains that preachers interpret for their congregations sacred truths for a new day.

Jesus tells a parable with this message, reported in Luke 5:36-39:

No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'

Old wine is the best wine. Nothing wrong with new wine, but Jesus is the old wine. New wine cannot be placed into old wineskins. However, old wine can use both the old and the new wineskins. Jesus is still Jesus yesterday, today, and forever. He is found in the old wineskins of previous centuries as well as the new wineskins of today. The question for the preacher of the gospel should never be the wine—that is, the content of the message. The question is which wineskin to use—that is, the form of delivery. Many effective churches are operating with old wineskins and people can still "taste and see that the Lord is good." However, when people are no longer seeking the wine in the old wineskins, they will miss the wine. Then it is time to preach in a new way – a new wineskin that still contains the old wine.

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[3] James H. Gilmore, "Time for Culture," *Christianity Today*, June 2013, accessed online March 8, 2015, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/june-online-only/time-for-culture.html.

Think about how these statistics from Barna might shape the "wineskins" of our day:

> The advent of the Internet and, more recently, social media have shaped personal habits significantly…This digital world is the playground of the Millennials, or those ages 18 to 29 in this current Barna study… Seven out of 10 practicing Christian Millenials (70%) read Scripture on a screen. One-third of all Millennials say they read sacred Scripture on a phone or online, demonstrating how broadly the digital trends are shaping this generation… Nearly six out of 10 practicing Christians (59%) say they search for spiritual content online, but its not only Christians doing this kind of surfing. Three out of 10 of all Millennials are too….[4]

If Millenials are accustomed to experiencing scripture through apps and search engines, it stands to reason that their expectation of the preaching of scripture will differ from those accustomed to using print as well, just as the advent of the printing press altered preaching for those who previously no access to the Bible for themselves. Putting the scriptures in the hands of the people challenged the church of Gutenberg's day, but the overall results were positive. Gould argues that the effects of social media can be positive as well: "In the world of church, quality social media content informs, educates, and inspires action that's Christ-centered and anchored in Gospel values."[5] The weekly work of the preacher to prepare the sermon (including those materials that do not become part of the final sermon due to time restraints) is an ideal engine for creating just such content on a weekly basis. Preachers have the opportunity to engage hundreds if not thousands of people with the new wineskin of social media by (re)signing the message.

The cautionary note of Jesus' parable reminds us that we need a thorough integration of "wine" and "wineskin." Thus, continuing the old model of sermon

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[4] Barna Group, "How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith," accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/ /640-how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith.

[5] Gould, *Social Media Gospel*, 43.

preparation and delivery, with a social media component merely tacked on as an addendum, will not work. It would be better not to invite digital natives onto a social media platform at all, than to give the appearance of being present on social media, only for them to discover that the preacher is unwilling to hold the kind of two-way conversation that is the norm for that environment. For example, a preacher who uses social media to promote his or her sermon to a wider audience, but who does not then respond to questions or comments about the sermon, would only cause disillusionment and disappointment. That approach will "burst the wineskins" and the wine will be lost. Thus, (re)signing the message will be no easy task. However, for those who can conceive of a world that exists physically and virtually side by side, the new wineskin will draw new people in to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

Through (re)signing the congregation, (re)signing the church, and (re)signing the message, leaders can enter a thorough self-examination and emerge with a construct that authentically engages people through the use of social media. Leaders may not have all the answers, but they can begin asking the right questions.

I offer here one model for exploring that (re)signing process: the development of a systematic, intentional development of a Social Media Ministry Team (SMMT) for the preaching moment. The ultimate hope for this team is that, because preaching is the "keystone habit" in the church, implementing social media here will produce a domino effect that unleashes the power of social media in every other ministry area of the church. An intentional SMMT for the sermon can open the door of possibility and empower a church-wide to (re)signing to the social media culture. (Re)signing the church through an

SMMT is our opportunity to put into operation the redemption of social media from the

"me" to the "we."

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL MEDIA MINISTRY TEAM

Getting Started with the Lay Advisory Committee

In this section, I will share my church's experiment with a new way to engage people in the preaching moment using the tool of social media. Our goal was to develop an intentional Social Media Ministry Team (SMMT) that would work alongside the preacher to communicate the themes of the message each week in order to establish a culture of communication via social media. The hope was for the SMMT to be the catalyst for the broader congregation to participate in the sermon conversation before, during, and after the preaching moment.

In order to change the ethos of the current preaching moment at Frazer UMC in Montgomery, I invited key people to join me for this project. We called them the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). The mission of the LAC was to envision, recruit and deploy the SMMT effectively. The people selected were experienced social media users and influencers in the congregation at large. Each person brought a different perspective, but all were adept in using social media in their personal lives.

The philosophy of the SMMT rests on the idea that every individual's use of social media has the spiritual potential to morph into a form of ministry. However, at first the undifferentiated nature of most users masks that potential. As Brogan and Smith note:

The problem…is that everyone has a whatever account. Everyone is using social media. At the time of this writing, over eight hundred million people use Facebook. That's a more than one in eleven human on the planet. So just being there isn't enough. If you build it, they won't come. Definitely not right away, but in this day and age, possibly never.[1]

So, the church must begin somewhere if we hope to see an intentional use of social media church-wide. We began with the preaching moment in the Contemporary worship services at Frazer UMC.

The LAC met six times in 2014 (Jan. 22, Feb. 12, 19, 26, Mar. 6, and 10), prior to organizing the first SMMT. The committee shared ideas, debated, and determined a basic plan to implement the SMMT in our contemporary worship services. The primary goal of this team would be to increase interconnectivity and interactivity among current and future users of social media that worship regularly at Frazer UMC in person and online. The LAC decided we would track our progress through a number of measurements.

First, the LAC noted a baseline of activity on church social media pages. We analyzed our current number of followers, "likes," comments, and "shares" on the various church-related posts made by our staff Communications Team. By gathering this preliminary data, the LAC was able to measure the growth and trends that occurred during the test of the SMMT. Quantitative variables we tracked included the number of followers, and their rate of engagement. Qualitative goals that could not be tracked numerically but were looked for anecdotally included any increase in connections between members of the congregation and evidence of the influence of the sermon content on their lives.

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[1] Brogan and Smith, *Impact Equation*, 33.

The LAC decided that engagement was a top priority over reach. (Reach here refers to the total number of individuals who were potentially viewing posts by the official church social media pages or SMMT members, while engagement refers to only those users who interacted with the posts by 'liking' them, commenting on them, or sharing them.)[2] The church must "disciple" the congregation in social media as a means to encourage interactivity and interconnectivity before focusing on how far the reach of the SMMT was in the wider community. As one LAC member stated, "If we look away from reach and look toward engagement, and if we have people in worship that at any time during the week post on a social media site about the sermon, it's a win!" The LAC became more convinced that creating an atmosphere for more conversation with the people already attending worship would yield greater long-term results including an increased reach to the wider community.

The LAC planned to measure the amount of engagement before, during, and after the preaching moment. Thus, the first part of the strategy was to encourage people to become more engaged in the sermon through intentional conversation starters before the sermon is delivered. People would thereby have a voice in helping to shape the message, as well as engaging the content of the sermon before Sunday morning. Giving the congregation a voice in the sermon reflects an underlying confidence in the wisdom of the laity. As Brogan and Smith state,

> "[Now is] a time when ideas can spread, maybe for the first time ever, based not on who created them and how important or rich that person is but instead on how good the idea is… Ideas can help people change the world, and now anyone can become powerful enough to be a catalyst for what matters to them."

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[2] The terms "like" and "share" on Facebook are roughly equivalent to the terms "favorite" and "retweet" on Twitter, with similar terms on other social media sites.

Those who choose not to use that voice would still be better prepared to engage the sermon by being aware of the topic before Sunday morning.

The second part of the LAC's strategy was to integrate social media content into the delivery of the message itself. One way for this to occur was for the preacher to include content drawn from the pre-sermon conversations via social media into the message. Another way was to create prompts to use social media during the worship service. This will be a catalyst for people to use social media to reach beyond the worship space even as worship is happening through a permission-giving style of social media sermon.

Finally, the LAC also planned to measure the conversations after the message was delivered. Through the SMMT intentionally posting their reactions, reflections, and questions after the message, the LAC hoped to foster authentic community throughout the remainder of the week.

Next, the LAC planned to monitor and measure the engagement with social media posts created by SMMT members. The number of comments, likes, and shares will aid in assessing the effectiveness of intentional social media posts and help to determine if there is a correlation between interactivity with the preaching moment and interconnectivity with one another. The LAC also hoped this might energize the SMMT members as they saw their individual pages become places of connection and community for others. If that were to happen, the LAC believed the SMMT's followers would organically begin sharing similar posts on their pages and the movement would begin to spread virally throughout the congregation.

Moving from engagement to reach, the LAC hoped to see an increase in the reach of the church's social media platforms as a secondary result of greater user engagement. The church, Frazer United Methodist in Montgomery, Alabama, has a regional impact the Central Alabama are through a large membership (approximately 8,000 with around 2,500 in average Sunday morning adult worship attendance), and a 24/7 low-power television ministry that at one point was syndicated nationwide. As broad as those platforms are, the internet-based delivery of church content through its website and social media platforms have the capacity to reach far more people (and for far less cost) than the television ministry did during its peak in the late 1990's.

A certain amount of uncertainty necessarily accompanied the project. It is not possible to track every user touched by an SMMT post, or to determine whether the sermon influenced any given post. Nevertheless, the LAC expected to be able to observe general trends that would help to answer key questions: Will the SMMT's influence on their friends and followers on social media yield more engagement, creating exponential growth in the reach of our social media sites? More importantly, will the impact of the sermon be greater on the lives of those touched and influenced throughout the week–before, during, and after Sunday morning?

Even small shifts would be an encouraging sign. "A huge body of research has shown that small wins have enormous power," points out Duhigg, "an influence disproportionate to the accomplishments of the victories themselves."[3] Jesus taught that "[The kingdom of heaven] is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make

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[3] Duhigg, *Power of Habit*, 112.

nests in its shade." (Mark 4:31-32) Our hope was that the work of the SMMT likewise would have enormous potential and future victories in communicating the gospel to generations yet to be born.

The before, during, and after segments of the preaching moment set the platform for measuring engagement and reach as people interacted with the message and with one another. The last LAC task was to critically assess the work of the SMMT after the trial period in order to evaluate its viability on an ongoing basis. In order to organize and implement this project, the LAC divided into three sub-committees: a Design Team, a Participation Team, and a Message Team.

<div align="center">The Design Team</div>

Of the three teams assembled to do the work of establishing a Social Media Ministry Team, the Design Team had the most complex task. The Design Team developed the criteria and structure for the SMMT. Gould points out the importance of clear criteria for social media effectiveness. "Social media is a tool that must be selected and used with purposeful forethought. There's no getting around this if you ever hope to get specific message to specific audiences to inspire specific actions to generate specific results."[4] This team divided their process into two main areas of responsibility: determining social media criteria and structuring the SMMT's weekly activities.

The Design Team's members took on the challenge of designing the criteria for developing a SMMT. Mansfield's book, *Social Media for the Social Good*, offered some key insights on preparing training materials for Frazer UMC's SMMT. "An

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[4] Gould, *Social Media Gospel*, 36.

organization's social media policy should provide basic guidelines to staff members and volunteers about what is appropriate to post on social media sites, an overview of privacy and legal issues, and some general rules about using social media during office hours. The overall message should be one of empowerment, not control and restriction."[5]

The development of a systematic process that would empower all SMMT members while establishing guidelines for suitable activity on social media when representing the church was a top priority for the Design Team. With the ever-evolving nature of social media, the team must update such training regularly to stay relevant with online activity. The Design Team began their work by crafting this mission statement: *The mission of Frazer's Social Media Ministry Team is to spread the word of Christ and proclaim the exciting things that are happening in the Frazer family to the glory of God.* This set the stage for developing the "Ethics Guide" for each volunteer team member to follow when acting on behalf of the church. Every volunteer received training on proper social media etiquette as well as best practices for being part of the SMMT at Frazer.

Part of the training included helping team members develop sensitivity and awareness before publishing to social media. Each team member was encouraged to ask themselves a series of questions before posting:

- Is this worded in the most respectful, kind way possible?

- Is there a way that this might be misconstrued?

- Is this all true?

- In light of current events, past circumstances and future goals, is this wise?

- Is this going to further the cause of Christ?

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[5] Heather Mansfield, *Social Media for Social Good: A How-to Guide for Nonprofits* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 52.

In addition, the Design Team's training provided general tips on posting as part of the SMMT. These best practices helped to guide the SMMT to make better choices when participating as a volunteer on Frazer's social media sites. A few of the best practices are listed below:

- Avoid comparative statements about Frazer

- Don't belittle non-church goers

- Excitement is key, people are drawn to positive excitement

- Don't say something you don't feel – be genuine

- Avoid saying the same thing every week, try to be creative in your posts

Social media platforms can be places where intense debate happens between people or groups of people. The Design Team wanted to make sure that every SMMT member thought carefully before engaging with others in any conflict or perceived disagreement. Often people publish statements on social media that they would never say to a person face to face. Some of the advice compiled by this team included:

- Learn to recognize the trolls[6] from the people who are really asking questions.

- Never make it personal. Disengage if they start to make it personal.

- Stay on the original subject; don't let the argument splinter.

- Agree to disagree, most people will be shocked if you can be a Christian and respectful at the same time.

Next, the Design Team spent a considerable amount of time discussing the SMMT member's posts that are not church specific. In other words, what responsibility, if any, should a SMMT member have in regards to their personal social media content

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[6] A common internet term for persons deliberately seeking to provoke conflict or anger.

that they publish, unrelated to the church? The Design Team decided that the church should address this concern during the training sessions. Below is some of the guidance provided as well as the expectations given to members as voices of the church via the SMMT concerning non-church social media posts:

- Keep in mind that all of your posts represent your church

- Count the cost; if you post something offensive (even if you believe it to be true) you will lose an audience with someone that may need to hear the message of Christ

- The message of Christ is the most important message you can communicate; please do all you can to preserve your platform and not muddy that message with competing thoughts

- If you support something controversial do so respectfully

- Ask the "before posting" questions before posting anything on a controversial subject

The Design Team also had the task of structuring the Social Media Ministry Team. The Design Team spent time asking several questions: What are the best ways to staff the SMMT? How many people should participate on the SMMT? What type of leadership will be needed? The Design Team decided to ask the SMMT volunteers to commit one week per month. Therefore, the SMMT needed to be comprised of four teams, one for each week in a month. In addition, each of the four teams would be assigned one of the "fifth" weeks to cover throughout the year. Each weekly team of the SMMT would be assigned a captain. The four volunteer captains would report to our staff Director of Digital Ministries for direction, training, and content specific to the effectiveness of the

SMMT. Each of the four teams would be made up of 4-6 volunteers, ideally representing the diversity present in our congregation. Moreover, the Design Team would ensure that each team had one or more members active on each of the three major social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) in order to maximize saturation of the primary social media platforms every week.

Finally, the Design Team organized the four teams into a workable structure for the "before, during, and after" strategy. Considerable conversation went into the best way to structure the teams' weekly activities. Questions included: Will each team volunteer from Sunday-Saturday or is there a better day to begin and end? What actions will team members be asked to take, and when? What will the team need throughout the week to do this ministry successfully?

Once again, the Design Team gave us a plan moving forward to implement our first SMMT. The weeklong commitment would run from Wednesday-Tuesday. Each week will divide into three sections coinciding with the project's "before, during, and after" focus for the SMMT. Beginning each Wednesday during the project phase, the preacher and Director of Digital Ministries would finalize a suggested "before" list of questions to deliver to the team captain for that week. These questions would guide each team member as they post on Twitter, Facebook, and/or Instagram. These posts and subsequent online conversations would occur from Wednesday-Saturday in preparation for the Sunday sermon. Each team member would also invite 3-5 friends to share or retweet the team member's post, encouraging additional online conversations.

Next, the weekly SMMT members would be asked to post something on Sunday morning "during" the preaching moment. This post could be anything related to the

worship service: music, sermon, videos, pictures, etc. The desire was for the SMMT to create an atmosphere of interactivity and interconnectivity during the Sunday morning worship alongside the preacher to engage as many people in the congregation as possible via social media. This also promotes the use of social media "during" worship, especially the sermon, as the preacher responds to posts from the "before" and "during" portions of the SMMT member's intentional conversation starters.

At the conclusion of the worship service, the "after" portion of the SMMT member's work would begin. We asked ach member assigned to that specific week to post a reflection, question, or other conversation starter based upon the message preached on Sunday morning. We intended this post-message reflection to be an authentic reaction to the material presented during the preaching moment. The SMMT member's are free to interact with the material in whatever manner they wished, of course within the bounds of respect for of the word of God preached. Disagreements, agreements, additional information, outside sources, questions, and any other form of communication with their social media platforms were considered acceptable. We designed this virtual "after party" to create a welcoming space for honest conversation among everyone who listened to the morning message, with the additional hope that people who had not yet heard the message would engage in these conversations and be prompted to go back and view the message via our online video archive.

As a point of technical clarification, the Design Team's training of the Social Media Ministry Team also included a focus on tracking "touches" produced by each team member. There are two focal points relating to "touch:" primary and secondary. We defined the primary touch as an online post created by the SMMT member for the

purposes of creating conversation. The primary touch has its origins with the team member as part of their goal in starting conversations. We defined the secondary touch as an online post in response to another user's post. The secondary post continues an online conversation already in progress by either another SMMT member or someone else who has engaged with the post of another SMMT member. Primary and secondary touches are both instrumental in engaging and reaching people via social media. The Design Team emphasized not only the importance of original posts by the SMMT members, but also engaging with posts created by others. We expected this to create a more robust conversation surrounding the preaching moment.

The Lay Advisory Committee and the Design Team recognized several key elements to achieving a measurable outcome of this project. First, the SMMT must be properly trained in every aspect of the "before, during, and after" expectations outlined above. Second, each team member must stay focused on achieving the primary goal of creating conversations that promote *engagement* among the Sunday morning worship participants, while keeping in mind the secondary goal to *reach* more people via social media beyond the Sunday morning worship experience. The LAC was particularly interested in how much conversation the SMMT would be generate beyond the walls of the church into the wider culture, especially among those who do not currently attend church and/or are not professing Christians.

The Participation Team

The Lay Advisory Team assembled a second team whose primary responsibility for the project was to maximize the participation levels of the entire

congregation. This team analyzed current participation levels on social media with our

existing congregation as well as opportunities to increase participation among

congregants who had a limited understanding of social media. The overall goal was to

increase online activity for the purposes of creating interactivity and interconnectivity

among the SMMT members and those in the congregation. To achieve this goal, the

Participation Team planned to educate the congregation on the importance of

participating in social media, the meaningful dialog one can share in creating community

via social media, and the impact one may have when engaging in conversations

surrounding the preaching moment. In short, the team would inspire the congregation

with the potential for good through social media. As Stavely argues,

> The best and worst aspects of social media–that it gets people talking
> about themselves, but also to each other–make it such a powerful tool, and
> one that can be used to foster a real sense of community. When just the
> right measures of certain elements are thrown in – a call to action, a cause,
> and a simple mechanism to take part – social media can force a real
> change in the world.[7]

Questions the Participation Team considered when taking on this task included:

How many people in the congregation are actively participating on social media sites?

What is the participation level on Frazer UMC's social media sites? How can we

increase the participation level with our congregation utilizing Frazer UMC's social

media sites among those who are using social media regularly? For those in the

congregation who are not on social media, how can we encourage them to get involved?

The first of several meetings for the Participation Team occurred on February 10,

2014. This team discussed at length the saturation rate of Frazer UMC's social media

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[7] Nel Staveley, "Is social media making us better people or just more selfie obsessed?" *Belfast Telegraph* (March 31, 2014), accessed online March 1, 2015, http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/life/features/is-social-media-making-us-better-people-or-just-more-selfie-obsessed-30139010.html.

pages: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Frazer UMC had 650 followers on Twitter,

3,315 followers on Facebook, and 99 followers on Instagram. Moreover, the

Participation Team reviewed available data that detailed Frazer's page likes, total

platform reach, and number of people engaged on Facebook and Twitter. In addition to

these metrics, the Participation Team also notated the personal social media influence of

the Teaching Pastor in the Contemporary worship services. Rev. Patrick Quinn had 526

Twitter followers, 1,868 friends on Facebook, and 245 followers on Instagram. The

results yielded a significant opportunity to enlarge our social media presence on certain

platforms and to engage more consistently on others. While these numbers provided a

baseline for measurement for participation on social networks directly related to this

project, the more important responsibility of the Participation Team was to increase the

participation on social media networks of all individuals in our worship services. If the

participation level of the average worshipper does not increase on social media networks,

then the intentionality of the SMMT will fall short in achieving meaningful conversations

around the preaching moment as well as an impact beyond the congregation.

The Participation Team made a list of items that needed addressed as this project

moved forward to maximize congregational involvement:

1) The Frazer Website needed immediate attention to its social media links

2) Develop a banner on the main page that says "Connect with Us!" through
   social media outlets. Currently there is not a link for Instagram or Twitter

3) Make the Connect with Us! Banner a link that will take you to a page with
   all of the Frazer Social Media links listed on it (Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram) along with a short description of the outlets and how to
download the apps

4) Staff Trainings: make sure the Frazer staff has "buy in" for this new
ministry; encouraged and equip them to participate with the congregation
on social media

5) Church-wide Trainings: give the congregation a place to learn about social
media; if the congregation uses social media to create community online
by engaging and reaching others, it is imperative they are continuously
encouraged and properly equipped

Thus it was determined that more emphasis would be placed on Frazer's website
with available links to all social media platforms. Frazer had been intentional with other
forms of communications including print media, radio, and television as means to spread
the gospel message through the years, but had not yet fully adapted to the changing
culture of social media among younger generations. Like most churches, Frazer seemed
to be lagging in participation on social media, but our expectation was that by leading the
way through the SMMT, more of the congregation would find ways to assimilate their
faith into their online activities as well. "One glaring area of omission in our ministries
to youth and young adults," writes Kinnaman, "is our failure to teach them how to
integrate their faith into their media use… We must go out of our way to disciple kids
into thinking Christianly and biblically about their media use."[8] Through an increased
emphasis on social media on Frazer's website, the team anticipated that not only more
social media users would connect to Frazer, but also that those not using social media

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[8] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 224.

would begin to do so, thereby providing the church with hundreds if not thousands of additional channels for communication in the future.

The Participation Team organizing a staff training event as the first step in teaching the church how to use social media. They invited the entire staff to participate in a survey that measured a baseline of staff social media usage so that the team would understand what issues were most important to address in the training. The staff returned the surveys and we compiled the information for the staff-training event scheduled for March 11, 2014. At this event, the staff heard from Teaching Pastor Patrick Quinn, Director of Communication Ken Roach, and Director of Digital Ministries Will Adams. During the staff-training three main topics were covered:

Topic 1: "Why Social Media Is Important to You"

Topic 2: "How Social Media Can Impact This World for Jesus"

Topic 3: "A Christian Ethic for Using Social Media"

After the plenary session of the staff training concluded, the Participation Team invited the staff to learn more about one of the more popular social media platforms. The team offered additional training on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to the staff. Individuals from the Participation Team led this effort to create more confidence among the staff in their ability to use social media networks. The team gave the staff a "crash course" in each platform. Several staff people created a profile on one or more of the social media networks for the first time because of this training.

During the training, the team handed out a "Social Media Evangelism Discussion Card" as an icebreaker for conversation. Questions included:

1) What are some ways you currently share your faith using social media? What are some new ways you could try?

2) What are some ways you currently spread the ministry and mission of Frazer using social media? What are some new ways you could try?

3) What are some things you avoid doing on social media because you want to reach as many people as possible for Christ?

4) Overall, do you think people see Christ in you on social media? How is God calling you to be intentional about this?

The Participation Team took a similar approach when offering three church-wide training events for the entire congregation to learn more about social media. The team scheduled training on March 12, 19, and 26 of 2014. The church-wide trainings on social media were advertised in print, video, television, and online. The trainings were promoted with the headline, "Connect through Social Media: with Patrick Quinn." This training was planned as part of an ongoing effort to train, equip, and encourage as many people to participate in social media as possible with the hope of seeing more voices enter the conversation for the upcoming climax of the project.

The LAC saw an increased awareness of social media throughout the trainings of staff and church members in preparation for the upcoming sermon series that was focused on using the SMMT.

Message Team

The third team assembled by the Lay Advisory Committee for the purposes of establishing Frazer's first Social Media Ministry Team was the Message Team. This

team was responsible to shape the message in a manner that was optimized to engage the congregation using social media "before, during, and after" the preaching moment. By adapting the message, the SMMT would be better able to support the message by creating intentional conversations that would give the preacher material from the congregation before the sermon is delivered. It would provide space for social media to have an impact on the message as the team shared it on Sunday mornings. The message would become more social media-sensitive message to enlarge the capacity for the message to be reflected upon long after its been offered on Sunday morning through the SMMT's post-reflection conversation starters shared online.

The Message Team met on February 6, 2014 to discuss the challenge of adapting the preparation of the sermon, the delivery of the sermon, and the critique of the sermon by providing room for social media to interact with the message "before, during, and after" the preaching moment. The Message Team gleaned numerous insights into the preparation of the sermon series that initiated this new model of preaching via the SMMT.

The first insight was that the "before the message" conversations would require that the preacher be prepared to share parts of the message earlier in the week. The "before" moment would gain greater momentum if the preacher shared the theme of the message and the scripture for the week ahead of time. In addition, if the preacher could share a story or an illustration that will not be used in the message, but would still relate to the topic of the message, this opening story would function as a quasi "trailer" for the message to build curiosity and interest in the sermon. The preacher could share an opening quote or opening Scripture to "prime the pump" and then build on what was shared in the message. The Message Team discussed that in today's culture the church

often underutilizes curiosity as a motivator. The preacher could post something on Wednesday-Saturday that would spark interest in the message, but not fully reveal all the information until Sunday. The "before" content offered to the SMMT would not be just promotional material but should be substantial content. For example, the imagined a post such as "Here are 4 tips on...(some practical subject of interest to the congregation)…the 5th one we will go over on Sunday." In that scenario, the more useful the congregation found the first four tips, the more likely they would place value on coming to hear the rest of the story on Sunday. This type of "before" material from the preacher creates curiosity and conversation before the message that the SMMT can share.

The second insight of the team was that the "after" conversations guided by the SMMT would have greater impact if the preacher offered some post-message content that creates an atmosphere to share reflection. For example, he could post a question to consider "after" the sermon is delivered for the SMMT to share as well. Certainly, the preacher could highlight a key point, or a specific quote that would reinforce the message. The preacher could share additional content that was unable to make it into the message due to time constraints.

Most importantly, the team believed that the best thing the preacher could do is encourage people to reflect and be honest as they converse about the sermon content. By "open-sourcing" the message process both "before" and "after" the preacher would show the congregation that he desired dialog and wanted to engage people at a deeper level than merely what happens on Sunday morning. We gave prompts such as, "Here are the questions I'm asking today" or "Here are the Scriptures I'm looking at today," and invited people to offer their own thoughts and opinions. The responses gave the preacher

real-time information about the thinking of the congregation and opened the door to the possibility of new material, questions, or revelations previously undiscovered by the preacher. Most if not all preachers already participate in a conversation before the message, with scholars and lay people alike, by consulting commentaries, researching the thoughts of other pastors, and conversing with friends and family about the sermon topic. The use of social media only widens the circle of conversation and empowers a larger portion of the congregation to have a voice. This is precisely what the LAC was excited about measuring during the project.

However, the primary challenge discovered in the meetings of the Message Team was how to handle the "during the preaching moment" phase of the process. The "before" and "after" would be an adjustment, but the "during" would be a complete overhaul of the preaching experience, for the congregation as well as the preacher. The vision of the preacher perfectly preparing each word of the sermon and completely controlling the process of delivery would not be applicable for this project. This preacher would need to be well prepared, but flexible and willing to implement the conversations from social media in the moment of preaching on an impromptu basis. This approach would have similarities to asking for questions or responses from the congregation, but also different in that it would occur in a virtual world with an audience present physically and digitally at the same time. The preacher would be required to participate in both worlds simultaneously during the delivery of the message. The team planned to invite people to use their mobile devices throughout the services as a part of worship. At the beginning of the worship service, people could post (tweet) about something that would connect from the previous week's sermon, or something pertaining to the Scripture for the morning.

The preacher could refer to some of those posts in the beginning of comments of the message. The preacher could utilize social media with a panel discussion during the message to personify the online conversation that was happening while in worship. The Message Team desired to see full inclusion of social media throughout the sermon, not just answering the social media questions at the end of the message. The preaching moment would also be a social media moment. This acknowledgement from the preacher was necessary to legitimize the social media users when engaging them during the message, because the team expected that if users did not see any impact from their posts, they would lose interest and stop sharing them.

The Message Team recognized the complexities inherent in this departure from the norms of preaching. I list below some of the challenges and opportunities related to adopting a new preaching style utilizing social media that came out of their discussions. These insights will inform the preacher and influence the implementation of worship during the project.

1. Fighting against normative behavior: During worship we have been conditioned not to have our phones out and in use. In addition, the congregation has developed the expectation that the message will be a monologue, and as such, interaction during the course of the message would be abnormal.

2. Developing a systematic approach: Need to desensitize the congregation so as not to take away from the message. Social media can be a distraction. The preacher will need the ability to create a moment in the message where people can interact, while at the same time keeping the congregation focused on the message.

With that in mind, the preacher must ask himself, "How will I control message flow and message presence?"

3. Tension between inside and outside: The preacher must remain aware of the balance between reaching people beyond the worship space and creating experiential worship in the room. There are many questions and challenges about the usage of social media during the message still to discover. The preacher must consider how can virtual communities can support or become physical communities and vice versa.

4. Using social media in worship is a form of 21st liturgy: The act of composing a tweet solidifies learning, helps people to remember and claim the lesson (in much the same way that writing notes in an outline helped a literate culture claim the message, or making an oral response helped in an oral culture).

5. Ease of use: The preacher must make social media usage practical by including "tweet-able" phrases in the outline or perhaps by providing a fill-in-the-blank tweet template.

6. Building from week to week: Utilizing social media can help create the felt need for consistency in attendance when the preacher uses an approach such as:

> a. Create a "cliffhanger" that leaves a story unresolved until the following week
>
> b. Ask questions that build continuity: "How did you respond to the challenges in last week's message? How did the principles taught apply to you? What are your expectations of this week?"

c. Use the summary formula used on sitcoms and other television serials:

Before: "previously on...." After: "next week on..."

7. Create links between your sermon and other media content to maximize

opportunities for social sharing.

a. Easily perpetuates conversation if you link people to other media.

(From example, "where have you seen _____ in other media.")

b. Invite people to share other videos or content related to the topic.

c. Curate content into your hashtag[9].

d. Start with where people are at when using social media; "me into we"

8. Storyboard your sermon

a. Storyboards map the parts of a sermon, like scenes in a movie, rather

than list them as points in an outline

b. Storyboards identify a story arc that runs through the message

c. Storyboarding enables the preacher to create natural breaks for excerpts
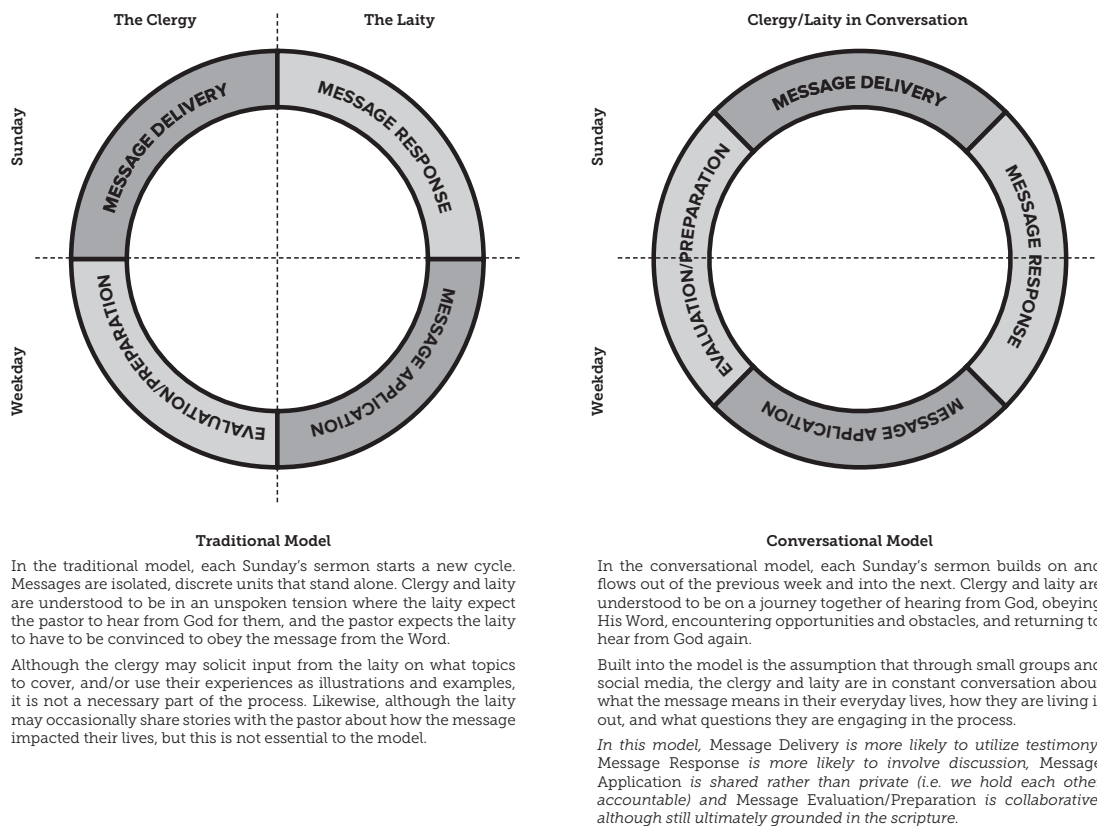
used later on social media[10]

Finally, the Message Team looked at the Design Team's weekly calendar for the

SMMT to discuss the flow of message preparation, delivery, and post-reflection. As

stated before, the traditional method of preaching will not be conducive for implementing

an intentional Social Media Ministry Team. The team needed a more conversational

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[9] A hashtag is a topical tag appended to a social media post that makes it easy to search for and retrieve related posts that bear the same hashtag, named for the hash mark (#) that precedes the tag and makes it easily recognizable by search engines.

[10] Most users on social media will only watch video clips that are 2-7 minutes, rather than the 25 ore more minutes typical of sermons. Breaking the sermon into self-contained segments enhances the possibility that people will view and share those segments online.

approach for this project. Below is a graphic that illustrates the change in preaching style to accommodate a social media into the preaching moment throughout the week.

The Clergy   **The Laity**

Sunday

Weekday

MESSAGE DELIVERY
MESSAGE RESPONSE
EVALUATION/PREPARATION
MESSAGE APPLICATION

Clergy/Laity in Conversation

Sunday

Weekday

MESSAGE DELIVERY
MESSAGE RESPONSE
EVALUATION/PREPARATION
MESSAGE APPLICATION

Traditional Model

In the traditional model, each Sunday's sermon starts a new cycle. Messages are isolated, discrete units that stand alone. Clergy and laity are understood to be in an unspoken tension where the laity expect the pastor to hear from God for them, and the pastor expects the laity to have to be convinced to obey the message from the Word.

Although the clergy may solicit input from the laity on what topics to cover, and/or use their experiences as illustrations and examples, it is not a necessary part of the process. Likewise, although the laity may occasionally share stories with the pastor about how the message impacted their lives, but this is not essential to the model.

Conversational Model

In the conversational model, each Sunday's sermon builds on and flows out of the previous week and into the next. Clergy and laity are understood to be on a journey together of hearing from God, obeying His Word, encountering opportunities and obstacles, and returning to hear from God again.

Built into the model is the assumption that through small groups and social media, the clergy and laity are in constant conversation about what the message means in their everyday lives, how they are living it out, and what questions they are engaging in the process.

In this model, Message Delivery *is more likely to utilize testimony,* Message Response *is more likely to involve discussion,* Message Application *is shared rather than private (i.e. we hold each other accountable) and* Message Evaluation/Preparation *is collaborative, although still ultimately grounded in the scripture.*

Figure 1: Traditional and Conversational Models of the Sermon Cycle[11]

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[11] Ken Roach, Graphic produced for Frazer Social Media Ministry Team, 2014.

# CHAPTER 5

PREACHING UTILIZING THE SOCIAL MEDIA MINISTRY TEAM

The First Social Media Ministry Team

Once the preliminary meetings were over with the Design Team, Participation Team, and the Message Team, the project was ready to begin. The criteria were established (Design Team), the staff and congregation were trained on using social media (Participation Team), and the preaching moment had established guidelines to work alongside the SMMT (Message Team). At this point, the Lay Advisory Committee was ready to establish the first Social Media Ministry Team to participate in the sermon series from March 16- April 27, 2014.

The first Social Media Ministry Team at Frazer UMC included 28 individuals. We established four weekly teams with a captain in charge of each team. The captains helped to disseminate information from the Teaching Pastor and the Director of Digital Ministries. We called, emailed, or contacted on social media the SMMT members and invited them to a training event held on March 16, 2014. At the training, the SMMT received the LAC's expectations of a SMMT member. We introduced everyone to the project and the importance of full participation in this ministry for a minimum of five weeks. The training went over the weekly activities as it related to the "before, during, and after" parts of the preaching moment. The SMMT divided into their weekly teams

and we introduced them to their team captain. The first intentional SMMT was ready to begin their work with the next sermon series.

The Sermon Series
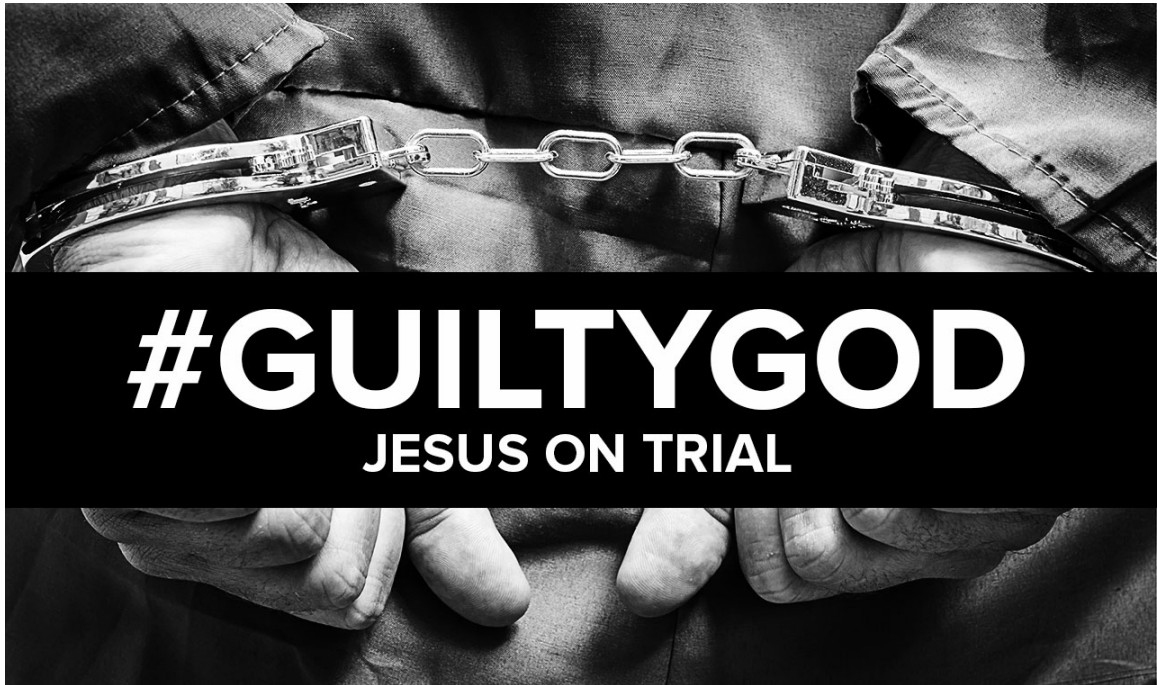
Figure 2: Sermon Series Promotional Graphic

Even with all the preparation that had gone into the formation and training of the team, the LAC was aware that much of the success of the project depended on the quality of the sermon content itself. As Kelly observes, "Social media relies on content to be successful, so for your campaign to work, you need to produce awesome content."[1] The sermon series selected for this project was the Lenten series including Easter Sunday running from March 16-April 27, 2014. The title of the series was #GuiltyGod based upon the view that Jesus was a "guilty God" from the moment he arrived as the Incarnate Deity. This was a seven-week series to prepare the congregation for Easter. I list the

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[1] Nichole Kelly, *How to Measure Social Media: A Step-by-step Guide to Developing and Assessing Social Media ROI* (Indianapolis, IN: Que Pub., 2013), 63.

series sermon titles below and they are available for online viewing at

http://frazerumc.org/media/series/guiltygod.

#GuiltyGod

Week 1: Guilty in the Garden (John 18:1-12)

Week 2: Guilty by Association (John 18:13-28)

Week 3: Guilty of Truth (John 18:29-19:16)

Week 4: Guilty of Love (John 19:17-37)

Week 5: God was Dead (John 19:38-42)

Week 6: Jesus is Alive (John 20:1-18)

Week 7: Not Guilty! (John 20:19-23)

The focus of #GuiltyGod centered on the trial of Jesus and the pronouncement of his guilt by Pilate, the Sanhedrin, and the crowd chanting "Crucify Him!" The content of #GuiltyGod began with reminding the congregation that God is the judge of all humankind, and we are the ones on "trial" before the divine justice. Below is an excerpt of the introduction of this series to the congregation:

> In our fear of facing our own guilt, we put Jesus on trial. Still today, people put Jesus on trial. "Prove yourself," we say. "Explain yourself," we say. We blame God for our wars, our diseases, our sufferings, and our disappointments. And we find God, "guilty." But this isn't the first time God has been on trial. Jesus of Nazareth was arrested, interrogated, tried, and executed, John's gospel tells us, for the crime of claiming to be the Son of God. Maybe he was insane. Maybe he got what was coming to him. Or maybe he was who he said he was. If he was, what does it say about us—that we put God on trial, and found him guilty? And what does it say about God, that He let us do it? That He didn't fight back, that He didn't defend himself, that He accepted our guilt as if it were his own? Then we are living in a completely new world–the world of the Guilty God; the world of God's grace.

Each sermon included social media content generated from the "before" conversations facilitated by the SMMT as well as a tweetable[2] phrase for the congregation to share via social media "during" or "after" the message on Sunday mornings. In addition, we supplied other resources for the SMMT to use at their discretion pertaining specifically to the content delivered from each of the messages from this sermon series.

Listed below are the tweetable phrases that we printed on the sermon outlines during this series. Notice that we shared the hashtag to encourage the congregation to participate in forming community online.

Guilty by Association–What is Jesus' reputation? He is a friend of sinners. Jesus hangs out with sinners. He hangs out with me. Jesus is "Guilty by Association"! #GuiltyGod

Guilty of Truth–What is truth? Truth is not a statement; truth is the Savior. Truth is Jesus! #GuiltyGod

Guilty of Love–The cross is the column that creates community. Without it all community eventually crumbles. With it hope holds and love lasts. #GuiltyGod

God was Dead–God was dead. Jesus died. The disciples didn't get it. We won't get it until we die with Jesus. Then we experience resurrection. #GuiltyGod

Jesus is Alive–Jesus said, "Go!" Go and share the Good News – Jesus is ALIVE! #GuiltyGod

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[2] Since twitter requires posts of no more than 144 characters, a "tweetable" phrase means a memorable idea captured succinctly to fit within that format.

🐦**Not Guilty!**–The verdict is out. Jesus is not guilty. What will be said about you? 1 Peter 1:3 #GuiltyGod

Once again, it is important to note that the sermon series contained the content necessary to share with the wider audience. More than that, we presented the content in a permission-giving format that created an atmosphere of online participation generating conversation among those present for the sermon and those who engaged the sermon through social media. Once the trained and committed SMMT began their work and the congregation was invited to participate, the online experience could only be as good as the content shared "before, during, and after" the preaching moment by the preacher. Therefore, it was imperative that sermon preparations take into account the work of the SMMT as they sought to create conversation to interact and interconnect with the congregation. At the same time, the SMMT's goal is to reach new people simply by the presence of authentic conversation occurring because of solid content from the sermon series.

Creating Conversations

As a way for everyone to share and join in the conversations, the SMMT utilized the hashtag #GuiltyGod for the project as referenced in the previous section. Hashtags are social media's way of organizing posts into related topics such as sporting events, primetime television shows, and even church events. Any post can utilize an existing hashtag or create an original one for a specific event. #GuiltyGod was chosen for this project as a rallying point for all posts generated from the SMMT as well as a qualitative

and quantitative tool for measurement of the primary goal of "engagement" and secondary goal of "reach". The tweetable phrase that the preacher provided each Sunday in the outline was one of several opportunities for the SMMT to engage the congregation with this hashtag. We wanted to maximize participation and conversation using this common hashtag throughout the sermon series. In this we followed the advice of Kelly: "Turn your conversation from 'tweets and status updates' to 'exposure, engagement, and conversion."[3]

Every week during the sermon series the preacher via the Director of Digital Ministries supplied the SMMT with conversation starters to be shared during the "before" period (Wednesday-Saturday). These conversation starters were questions, statements, pictures, or videos related in some way to the material we would present on that Sunday. The conversation starters for the "after" portion of this project centered primarily on the SMMT's post-sermon reflections, but content was made available as well to aid in their reflection process. Here is a sample conversation starter sent out to the SMMT during week three of #GuiltyGod:

<div align="center">******************************</div>

<div align="center">**Conversation Starters for SMMT Week Three**
Sermon: "Guilty of Truth" (John 18:29-19:26)</div>

Here are some discussion prompts that we'd really love if everyone could choose at least one and use the #GuiltyGod hashtag. You might post these yourself or post a thoughtful answer.

Note: Remember, posts around 7 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. get more traffic in the long run. We want discussion, so look for each other's posts and share them, comment on them and like them so that they'll show up in more people's news feeds. Don't be afraid to bring things in from outside of the conversation. Articles, video clips, news sources, even Internet memes can all build the conversation!

I. Before Message

A. Facebook: You may consider answering one of these or asking one or all of these. Or you can use these as themes and make up your own series of questions.

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[3] Kelly, *Measure Social Media*, 77.

1. What is truth? Let's have some conversation around relative truth and absolute truth, Science, philosophy, law, and mathematics all have working definitions of truth...

2. So is truth relative or is there an absolute truth from which all others find their beginning?

3. How do you go about telling truth from lies?

4. So many articles out there about how to loose weight or avoid danger are just made up–how do you recognize which ones are real?

5. If you had to tell nothing but the truth for a whole day (like Jim Carey in *Liar Liar*) would your life change?

B. Twitter:

1. How would you define truth in one sentence?

2. The average person tells at least two lies a day; why do you think that is? What are we all lying about?

C. Instagram:

1. Read the scripture passage for this Sunday, John 18:29-19:26, and find photos that represent a verse or two, post them with the relevant scripture passage. Think about adding your own thoughts.

2. Take a photo of "truth" with the hashtag and something about this Sunday. Share Scheduled posts for Frazer's Facebook and Twitter (all secondary touches, share one or two if you choose and add your own thoughts)

D. Secondary Touches:

1. Every day at 6:30 a.m. the Frazer devotional goes up. If you have a chance, read and share it.

2. Thursday at 2:00 p.m. help with the message: "What do you think of when you hear the word truth?" Answer, share, and like.

3. Friday at 2:00 p.m. describe your family's spring break in six words or less!

II. During Message

A. Primary Touches

1. Please everyone take a moment to share a bit about something from the message or the passage that spoke to you today, using the #guiltyGod hashtag

2. Between 2 and 4 p.m. I hope to post a short sermon clip that I'd encourage everyone to share. It will be on our Youtube channel, Facebook page, and Twitter account.

B. Secondary Touches

6:30 a.m.—devotional posted

8:30 a.m.—Live Stream Posted

9:00 p.m.—the full message and the full worship service posted

III. After Message

Continue to encourage everyone to reflect on the message sometime by Wednesday of this week and to use the #GuiltyGod hashtag. That's the primary thing we want to make sure everyone does.

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The SMMT operated under this general format for six weeks during the course of this project to determine the effectiveness of engaging the congregation with an intentional social media campaign supported by the content of the Sunday morning message. The SMMT used these conversation starters "before, during, and after" the preaching moment as a means to create space on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for authentic conversations using the common hashtag #GuiltyGod. Here is an example of a post from the church staff to Facebook:
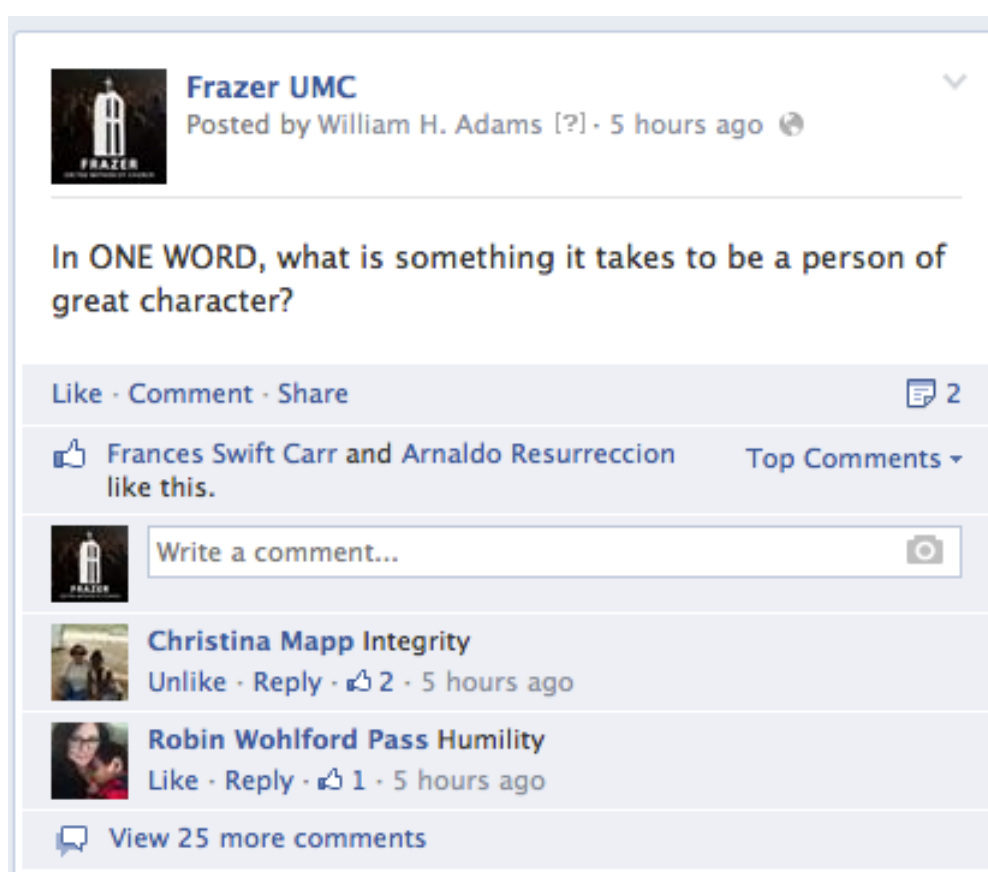
Figure 3: Typical SMMT Facebook Post

The ROI from the SMMT

To reiterate, the goals of this project were to deepen the transformational impact of the preaching moment on the lives of the congregation by fostering greater

engagement, conversation, and community, and secondarily to expand the reach of the message to a wider audience. In order to measure this project quantitatively the LAC decided to track the number of followers on the three primary social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. As Kelly reminds us, "Social media measuring tools are in their infancy."[4] Therefore, any form of measurement for social media will have weaknesses compared to traditional forms of media, which have matured their measurement strategies. Nevertheless, the LAC believed these numbers would provide some basis for evaluating the project.

At the beginning of this project Frazer UMC had 650 Twitter followers, 3,315 page likes on Facebook, and 99 followers on Instagram. Reverend Patrick Quinn had 526 Twitter followers, 1,868 friends on Facebook, and 245 followers on Instagram. Throughout the project, the number of followers on Twitter increased on Frazer's page by 38% to 895. Frazer's Facebook page saw a more moderate increase of 6% to 3,499 page likes. Instagram followers for Frazer grew by 23% to 124. The number of followers for My personal Twitter page increased 27% to 668 while my number of Facebook friends grew by 6% to 1,984. My number of Instagram followers was boosted by 42% to 347 followers. The majority of these numbers represent people from the congregation at Frazer, plus a few non-members that engaged at some level with the content pushed onto these social media platforms during the activity of the SMMT. However, consider that other factors might have contributed to the growth of these platforms in addition to the activity of the SMMT; Frazer's platform on social media has steadily grown over time, although not always to this degree.

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[4] Kelly, *Measure Social Media*, 158.

A second measurement for the effectiveness of the SMMT is the engagement level of individual "conversation starter" posts by the SMMT members, the preacher, and Frazer's digital minister. Several trends became evident through analysis of those posts. The more personal a SMMT member made the "conversation starter" posts given to them by the Director of Digital Ministries, the more conversation it generated. Posts that were more personal in nature generated 3-4 times the amount of traffic as other team members who simply posted the conversation starters exactly as church staff wrote them. Also, the SMMT members who posted during high traffic times on social media received twice as many likes on their post compared to those who posted at less advantageous times during the day. On a few occasions, the conversations on SMMT member's posts received "shares" by several people after engaging the content. This makes tracking the overall engagement of content much more difficult, since the church was not in a position to view engagement with posts on other's pages. The tools available at this point in the history of social media are limited. One is left to measure simply by counting numbers of likes, posts, and shares to the best of one's ability. Russell has observed, "One of the primary takeaways…from an analytical standpoint is that counting is generally the first step to any kind of meaningful quantitative analysis. Although basic frequency analysis is simple, it is a powerful too for you repertoire that shouldn't be overlooked just because it's so obvious."[5]

The interaction the SMMT members received on the "before" posts far outpaced the number of people interacting with the "during" and "after" posts. These results skewed slightly, however, due to the level of commitment on behalf of the SMMT

[5]Matthew A. Russell, *Mining the Social Web: Analyzing Data from Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Other Social Media Sites* (Cambridge, MA: O'Reilly Media, 2011), 43.

members themselves. The "before" posts happened far more regularly and in a timely fashion than "during/after" posts by the SMMT.

While the SMMT members performed well overall in posting content relevant to the preaching moment before, during, and after, when the preacher or the church engaged on their pages, interaction with the content was much higher. Especially when the preacher posted a "before" comment asking for help with the preaching moment for Sunday, people were more than willing to engage in that conversation. On a number of occasions, this produced further ministry opportunities from people contacting the preacher through a private message because of participating in the online conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The church pages also saw a slight increase in the weekly reach to the community when we uploaded the weekly preaching content.

The return on investment (ROI) is still being actualized, and it is difficult to determine an exact number of people that engaged in conversation around the preaching moment and even harder to measure the reach of this effort beyond the congregation. Nevertheless, the fact that the LAC and SMMT witnessed "likes, posts, and shares" totaling in the hundreds provides a convincing case to continue fashioning an intentional approach for social media discipleship and evangelism. Yet, the LAC recognized this project created some "good, bad, and ugly" results.

The "good" the LAC experienced by employing an intentional SMMT for the preaching moment touched several areas. The LAC appreciated the opportunity for people to engage worship beyond being a mere spectator at a worship service. As one LAC member noted, "social media helped the worship service have a greater impact." The project saw people consume and engage in the message, giving the preacher an

opportunity to see and hear feedback. Those who normally come and sit had an opportunity to really participate in the message "before" it was preached and reflect on it "after." This process allowed the church to have a meaningful study along with some realized results that we hope we can duplicate in other areas of the church in the future.

The "bad" the LAC learned from included missed opportunities and disappointments. In retrospect, the SMMT needed more training in order to be truly effective in creating conversations and reaching more people for Christ. It was difficult to communicate the strategy within the limited training timeline we provided for ourselves. Therefore, although the LAC would have hoped for more effort out of the SMMT, we recognized that this would not happen without additional training time. Moving forward, the church must spend more time discipling the SMMT members prior to engaging the preaching moment or other areas of ministry for social media engagement. In other words, in hindsight the project was too large. The first project focus should have been to establish the first intentional Social Media Ministry Team. The project could have spent time developing a well-trained channel apart from the content.

In terms of timing, the decision to do this project during Lent had pros and cons. The church had higher attendance during this season, but the topics were not easy to discuss on social media. A more practical, topical series, such as one on marriage or parenting, might have been more clearly relevant to the types of things the congregation would normally post to social media. The content we used was not as conversational as we would have liked.

Another trend that became evident was that social media platforms are divided

generationally. Older adults are the fastest growing population on Facebook, while younger adults have been flocking to Twitter, and the youth are more likely to use Instagram. Each platform has its own conversational norms governing the types of posts typically made and responses given. We needed to give more thought to understanding dynamic to adapt our strategy appropriately.

Finally, the LAC noted that the baseline numbers on the social media sites increased during the project, but we were unable form clear answers as to why they joined. We might modify the design of future projects to better isolate the variables and include control groups to help determine the level of correlation between the project and the outcomes.

The "ugly" is easy to articulate after completing this project. The measurement of interaction and interconnectivity with the congregation was a challenge from the very beginning. The question of how the church might gauge this project for use in the future was unclear outside the obvious effort to count "likes, posts, and shares" during the project. It was hard to know if we were meeting out goals due to the lack of solid measuring tools. As Kelly laments, "The industry has not adopted a standard for social media measurement. Every company has its own measure of success, and sometimes even that changes from one social media campaign to the next."[6] The church utilized Google Analytics to measure reach, but found this form of measurement too broad, supplying no concrete information in individual posts and their impact on the wider social media community. Even Klout.com, a tool specifically marketed to measure one's influence on social media focuses on the overall influence of an individual, not the

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[6] Kelly, *Measure Social Media*, 157.

granular level of individual posts. What this project needed was a quality tool to track

individual posts and provide frequency data on that post only. This left the LAC with the

only real option available: good old-fashioned counting. "One of the primary

takeaways…from an analytical standpoint is that counting is generally the first step to

any kind of meaningful quantitative analysis," states Russell. "Although basic frequency

analysis is simple, it is a powerful too for your repertoire that shouldn't be overlooked

just because it's so obvious."[7] Undoubtedly, as social media becomes mainstream with

marketing and advertising companies, more qualitative and quantitative tools will be

developed. We simply did not have satisfactory methods available for in-depth analytics

at the time of this project.

The "good, the bad, and the ugly" of developing an intentional Social Media

Ministry Team at Frazer UMC has created another conversation that is still in progress.

This conversation is making its way beyond the preaching moment into next steps.

Where do go from here? What did this project accomplish? Can an intentional SMMT

make a difference in the whole of the community at Frazer UMC? How does the church

use what has been learned through this experience? The conversation is still ongoing.

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[7] Russell, *Mining*, 43.

CHAPTER 6

DID THE "ME" BECOME "WE"?

Sowing Seeds

The genesis of this project began with the question, "How can social media play a part in creating Christian community?" The preaching moment became the logical starting point to discern the effectiveness of connecting people to community through the study and application of God's word. Would social media allow for more interconnectivity and interactivity among the congregation during the preaching moment as well as an opportunity to reach beyond the congregation to the digital natives inhabiting this new frontier? The Social Media Ministry Team (SMMT) was established by the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) to envision ways to use social media platforms for more than the "me" world of posting the latest status updates about what one ate for breakfast or the latest picture taken on vacation. The project became a way to sow seeds for a future harvest as depicted in Isaiah 55:11, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Could the "me" become the "we," spawning a movement within the congregation to realize the potential impact of social media when used to connect people to Christ?

I experienced some clear failures during the course of this endeavor. In hindsight, I should have divided this project into two initiatives: first the development of a Social

Media Ministry Team, and then later the adaptation of the preaching moment. We needed more time to fully realize the enormous task of instituting an effective, functional SMMT for the preaching moment. For me to forego building community among the SMMT members before trying to build community in the congregation through their work was a gross oversight—particularly given the theological commitment to building social communities that underlay the project. The SMMT operated from a place of weakness due to the lack of time spent laying the foundation for them to build upon with the congregation. As the SMMT moves forward, a solid process concentrating on developing the SMMT as individuals and as a team together will be necessary for the SMMT to be effective.

Second, I fell short of my goals in part because I underestimated how difficult it would be to change my own preaching habits. I must spend more time contemplating the evolution of the preaching moment with respect to utilizing a SMMT. I made some general concessions toward implementation but fell short in the overall delivery of content necessary to experience the full impact of a SMMT employed "before, during, and after" the preaching moment. I often did not provide enough helpful content early in the week for the SMMT to use "before" the preaching moment. Some content was always provided, but more needed to be done. Likewise in the "during" aspect of the preaching moment I did not adapt far enough from simply treating social media as an add-on to the message, toward instead creating space for social media to have a significant role. In short, I underestimated how ingrained my own habitual patterns of sermon preparation and delivery were.

The most significant failure, much to my surprise, was the "after" portion of the project. While I had some incredible testimonies of effective "after the sermon" posts, most of the SMMT members either did not understand this part of the project or simply forgot to post reflections/questions that would generate conversation after the sermon. Those SMMT members who did supply a post-sermon reflection often did so in a way that was not suitable to draw others into community. This shortfall was primarily due to a lack of training for members on the part of the preacher and the LAC. However, it was surprising that this was the weakest part of the project given how many people in the congregation usually have something to say (good or bad) about the sermon every Sunday. Here again, I underestimated how ingrained a habit was—in this case, the congregational habit of treating the sermon as over and done with once the final "amen" is spoken, rather then as a continuing conversation into the week ahead.

Overall, the project tried to accomplish too much, too soon, but certainly there were key victories worth mentioning. Perhaps the most important victory was simply that we began to question our existing habits, allowing what had become invisible to be present to us once again. C. Otto Scharmer in *Theory U: The Social Technology of Presencing,* articulates a vision of leadership that takes full advantage of emerging opportunities available to us through our preferred future rather than the outmoded institutions of the past. "We need to let go of the old body of institutionalized collective behavior in order to meet and connect with the presence of our highest future possibility."[1] The LAC and the SMMT were aware that this project was groundbreaking for the church. Attempting to leave the old models of preaching, worship, and

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[1] Claus Otto Scharmer and Peter M. Senge, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges : The Social Technology of Presencing* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 5.

congregational participation required us to change not just our behavior but also our ingrained perspectives on how people experience the church. Even though we did not fully accomplish our goals in creating a new environment, the mere fact that we began to question the old environment is a step forward in Scharmer's paradigm.

Scharmer provides an illustration that is helpful in understanding the enormity of such a change. He describes how we look at the work of an artist in at least three different perspectives. "[W]e can look at the work of art *after* it has been created (the thing), *during* its creation (the process), or *before* creation begins (the blank canvas or source dimension).[2] This project's premise gave permission to the congregation to participate in all three perspectives of the preaching moment. Scharmer goes on to explain that this "theory of presencing" moves the culture from merely downloading information to seeing information and from seeing information to truly sensing information. In a field test of this theory Scharmer reports, "Everyone who participated in the conversation that morning felt the presence of a deeper connection. It was no longer like most other conversations. Instead of expressing opinions and making statements, people started to ask genuine questions. People were not just talking together–they were thinking together."[3]

This movement from "downloading information" to "talking together" is precisely what has begun in the congregation due to the presence of a SMMT before, during, and after the preaching moment. For those who have been a part of this process, it is no longer individualistic church as usual, but rather it is church communal. This is

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[2] Scharmer, *Theory U*, 6.

[3] Ibid, 146.

where the virtual community and the physical community become one. The awareness of

the other's thoughts, feelings, and questions only grows deeper with a place to share and

care for one another beyond the physical gathering. This is the emerging benefit of social

media for the church: sowing seeds today for the harvest tomorrow.

Looking for the Hashtag

As mentioned, the engagement of the digital culture was the primary victory of

this project. To measure the impact of the SMMT, all one has to do is begin looking for

the hashtag. "Hashtags allow Twitterers to discuss issues and events on Twitter in real

time. They also function as a means to organize tweets, spread information, and find new

followers."[4] By using the #GuiltyGod hashtag the congregation became more aware of

the power of social media to engage the message, one another, and those beyond the

church walls. The preacher, the LAC, and the SMMT experienced firsthand the

conversations created using the hashtag. While we would have liked greater overall

participation, the groundwork has been laid for every sermon series following
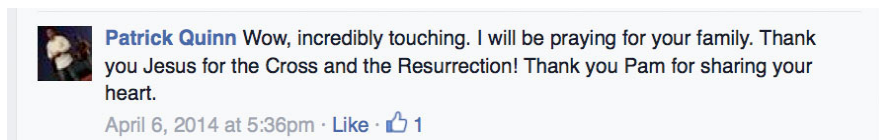
#GuiltyGod.

As one example, consider this Facebook post from a Frazer member:

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[4] Heather Mansfield, *Social Media for Social Good: A How-to Guide for Nonprofits* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 101.
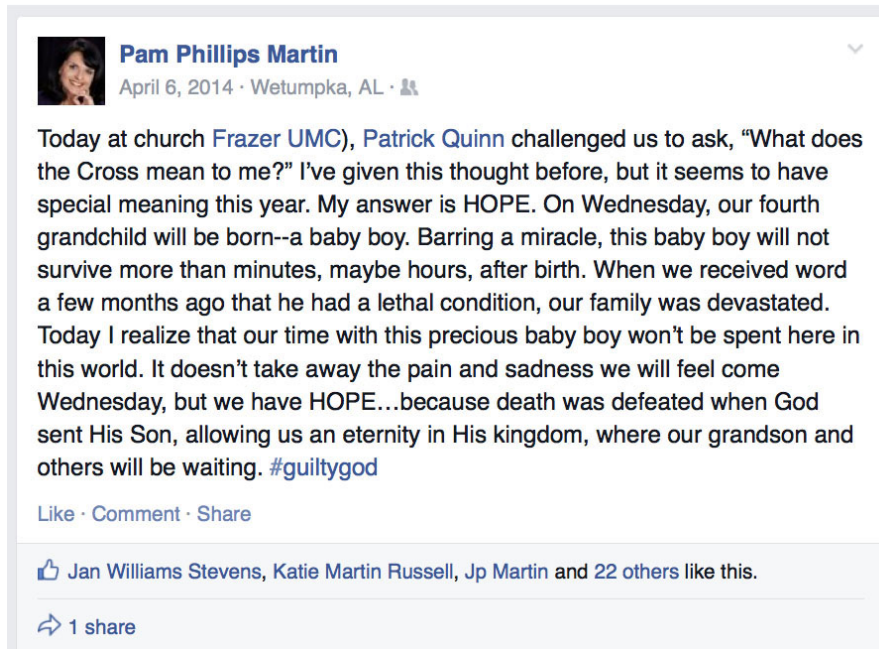
As can be seen, in reflecting on the sermon I preached, Pam has not responded by effectively preaching her own sermon on social media. Here is my response:

Already, the preaching moment has changed. Instead of a monologue, Pam and I are now instantly in dialog together. However, this was only the beginning. In addition to the 23 people who interacted with Pam's post by "liking" it, other users made the following comments:

Woollard Ozell Rosamond Pam, I am so sorry. Praying that God's love will surround you and your family and wrap you in His Loving Arms.
April 6, 2014 at 5:50pm · Like · 👍 1

Bonita Smith Heartsill Praying for you and your family.
April 6, 2014 at 6:21pm · Like · 👍 1

Deise Maya Salm Im so sorry, Pam!
April 6, 2014 at 6:37pm · Like · 👍 1

Robin Butts Boyd Praying for you all and a special prayer for Jason and Meredith to be comforted. Love to you all
April 6, 2014 at 6:50pm · Like · 👍 1

Robin Cheri Wohlford Pass I'm going to be praying for that miracle.
April 6, 2014 at 7:03pm · Like · 👍 2

Pamela B Mills Prayers for you all.....as you may remember, we lost our first grandchild after only 14 days. We rejoice in the assurance that we will see precious Lydia again one day. God bless your family as you navigate through these sad times together.
April 6, 2014 at 7:04pm · Like · 👍 1

Donna Gobble Horne Thanking you for sharing your heart Pam. I will remember you all in prayer in the days to come. I know you all will have precious moments together to have memories until the time we are all reunited with our children. If it's a minute, an hour any time we get with God's creation is a gift. We pray for a miracle for this sweet thing and your family.
April 6, 2014 at 7:20pm · Like · 👍 1

Brandon Esco Praying for you and the family **Pam Phillips Martin**. God is good and will have his arms around your family during this time. I will be saying a special prayer your family on Wednesday.
April 6, 2014 at 7:27pm · Like · 👍 1

RonandSidonna Bell Pam we are so very sorry to hear this. You and your family are in our prayers. God is everlasting!
April 7, 2014 at 8:48pm · Like · 👍 1

Kathy Kelley Pam our hearts are heavy for you and your family today. We will keep you in our prayers. Don't understand why...but keep the faith.
April 8, 2014 at 8:28am · Like · 👍 1

Vicki Harris Lawrence Praying for you and your family!!!!!
April 8, 2014 at 11:13pm · Like · 👍 1

Peggy Schofield Stansell My heart is aching but the comfort you find in his return to heaven is only from God.
April 10, 2014 at 11:17am · Like · 👍 1

Maria Brassell Ashmore Hugs and prayers!
April 6, 2014 at 8:06pm · Like · 👍 1

Lisa Conn We are praying for you all.
April 6, 2014 at 8:07pm · Like · 👍 1

Chuck Enfinger Praying for comfort and grace for you and your family.
April 6, 2014 at 8:23pm · Like · 👍 1

Jean Watson Pam, please know I am praying for you and your family.
April 6, 2014 at 8:34pm · Like · 👍 1

Terry Drisko May our Lord surround his angles to give comfort and Peace!
April 6, 2014 at 8:39pm · Like · 👍 1

Danette Tatum Mills Praying for a miracle and for peace and comfort for you all. Always have hope.
April 6, 2014 at 9:00pm · Like · 👍 2

Gary Cochran Praying.
April 6, 2014 at 9:43pm · Like · 👍 1

Dianne Elizabeth Davis Corwin Praying for all of you.
April 6, 2014 at 10:04pm · Like · 👍 1

Stefania Dodd My heart is aching for your family. We are thinking of y'all this week and saying extra prayers for peace and comfort for your entire family and baby Jack. Praying for a miracle for the Martin family.
April 7, 2014 at 7:47am · Like · 👍 1

Cindy Herndon Cochran You and your family are in my prayers.
April 7, 2014 at 4:14pm · Like · 👍 1

Pam Phillips Martin Thank you all for your sweet words of encouragement and prayers! They mean SO much to us!
April 7, 2014 at 8:04pm · Like

So, what is the sermon? Is it what I spoke on Sunday morning? Is it Pam's reflection in response? Or, is it the comments of all the other members of the congregation? I submit that it is all of the above. The preaching moment has become a community, bound together under the heading of a hashtag but clearly unified by the Holy Spirit. The "me" has become "we" in social media.

More people are stepping up like Pam to share the story of God because they feel that they are a part of crafting that story through their participation on social media. They indeed are participating in preaching the story to their friends and followers. Mary Clark Moschella offers an academic approach to understanding processes like the development of the SMMT. In her book, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, she expresses the benefits of the pastor, in a listening posture, learning from the congregation. "Ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening your eyes and ears to understanding the ways in which people practice their faith."[5] She goes on to explain, "The pastoral practice of ethnography can bring a congregation into an analogous co-authoring process. This works by allowing the people to articulate their stories and reflect on the composite themes and subplots that come to light."[6]

This is exactly what the congregation can and has experienced through an intentional use of social media during the preaching moment. When the preacher immerses the message in the community via social media, a co-authoring process is initiated and the result is a message preached by the entire community of faith.

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[5] Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4.

[6] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 6.

Moschella adds, "The congregation can then begin to reevaluate and intentionally revise its corporate story, entertaining new ideas and engaging in new religious practices."[7]

The qualitative data provided through the lens of ethnography is more helpful at this stage with a SMMT than purely quantitative data. The quantity of people engaged will continue to grow as people experience a distinctly different kind of Christian community discerned by those in leadership. Savage and Presnell note of any project intended to produce transformational change:

> "We need to remind ourselves again that the process we are engaged in utilizes discernment in lieu of measurement. We do not propose that we can measure transformation on an absolute scale, although we may perhaps be able to employ some objective tools to measure changes in some aspects of behavior, attitude, or condition."[8]

When the preacher utilizes a forum such as social media, the listening process can swell with hundreds or even thousands of people participating and reflecting on biblical content in meaningful dialogue. "What can an extra billion connected minds accomplish alongside the rest of mankind?" ask Brogan and Smith. "Their potential cannot be calculated, but their ability to transform the world is unheard of, their impact enormous."[9] The hashtag is a semiotic device that is transforming the preaching moment to include a focus on the people, their actions, their interactions, and their cultural context in real time. Never before has the preaching moment had this amount of information accessible before the delivery of the sermon, not too mention during or after it has been shared. The #GuiltyGod sermon series saw just enough of the light to push forward into a preferred

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[7] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 6

[8] Carl E. Savage, et al., *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 125

[9] Chris Brogan and Julien Smith, *The Impact Equation: Are You Making Things Happen or Just Making Noise?* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2012), 257

future whereby the church continues to embrace technology for the purposes of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

(Re)signing the Rules of Engagement

The rules of engagement are changing for the 21st Century church in America. Every church leader in the U.S. has surely noticed the ground shifting beneath the foundation of the church's sanctuary. Regular worship attendance is in decline and the sermon is not nearly as important to hear in the opinion of the average attender. Sunday is just another day of the week. What once was commonplace for much of America is quickly becoming unconventional in a culture that continues to see a rise in the unchurched percentage of the population. "Today's widespread institutional distrust may also be seen in the fact that while three-quarters of all adults are looking for ways to live a more meaningful life, 40% of unchurched adults say they do not attend because they "find God elsewhere."[10] Not only the unchurched, but the de-churched and the marginally churched are equally absent from the sanctuary on Sundays. In fact, regular worship attendance among even the churched population is becoming less frequent. So the church must (re)sign the rules of engagement with the 21st Century culture inside and outside the congregation.

An important aspect of the new rules of engagement is recognizing the two possible types of communication. Social media is a "push" method of communication not a "pull" method of communication. The distinction is critical in understanding the importance of creating content people want to consume. In a "pull" information system

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[10] Barna Group, "Vocational Trends for 2014," accessed March 2, 2015, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/652-3-vocational-trends-for-2014#.VQC7fcYh6gE.

the content has to be sought after. The newspaper has to be opened. The nightly news has to be turned on. The email has to be read. The website has to be logged onto. If the user does not seek it out, it will not come to him or her. However, today people are accustomed to choosing their sources for content and then having them "push" the information right to their smart phone, tablet device, laptop, or television. A person can choose what apps to download and what alerts to receive.

In the old model, channels were king. Once a particular channel established a brand loyalty, people would "pull" from it, even when the content was not good. Now, content is king. People only "push" information to their devices that they want to consume. People are replacing the "pull" system with the "push" system. For example, on-demand content providers such as Netflix, Hulu, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire, and others now dominate our television screens instead of traditional broadcast channels. Understanding this phenomenon is key to producing new rules of engagement for the church in a culture that is rapidly adjusting to a "push" system of receiving content.

Leonard Sweet urges the church to think about this changing world. "Unless churches can transition their cultures into more EPIC directions–Experiential, Participatory, Image-based, and Connected–they stand the real risk of becoming museum churches, nostalgic testimonies to a culture that is no more."[11] The church must begin to think strategically about engaging the postmodern and even the post-postmodern generations with a church that is fluent in their digital language. This involves creating "push"-worthy content and social networks of distribution rather than depend on "pull"

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[11]Leonard I. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 30.

communication that relies on brand loyalty to a particular channel (i.e. traditional, regular worship attendance at a given worship service).

The shift to "push" communication can be a new day for churches as well as preachers. Frazer UMC is attempting to make this shift with an increased emphasis on technology and social media. This project was part of a larger vision by church leadership to restructure the once vibrant television ministry, boasting a 24/7 local channel, into a full-fledged Media Ministry utilizing every tool available using technology. The church is investing in exclusive online content such as Bible studies and talk shows aimed at reaching people with the word of God. The church uploads weekly worship services and other programming through its website, social media, mobile app, and smart TV apps. Social media is beginning to play a major role, as providers make more content available. Frazer has now dedicated a staff person to function as a Sunday morning "Online Pastor" to engage people with social media while our worship services are streaming live on the website. Also, Frazer has created a new position, Director of Content Development, to provide leadership in the area of content creation for every area in the church, most of which will find its way online in some format or another. The rules of engagement are indeed changing and churches like Frazer are adapting to the new language of social media in order to communicate in the digital culture.

The church in the future will add more staff and/or engage more lay volunteers in the area of technology and social media. Social media pastors/evangelists will become more of the norm. Social media communities of faith will thrive with future generations that see very little difference between the virtual and the physical world. Encouraging churches to develop intentional Social Media Ministry Teams is a good place to start.

Social media ministry may (and hopefully will) occur more organically in the future, but an intentional and structured approach is needed to bridge the gap between the generation that knew a world without social media with the generation that will never know a world without social media. This is an important contribution right now to adapt to the changing times, but it is possible that a day will come when the church of the future will find it hard to believe that congregations once had to employ such specific tactics to engage with social media.

Nevertheless, this project has made clear the significant changes that can occur by instituting a SMMT in the church. The congregation at Frazer is finding new ways to share the story of Christ. They are discovering the "we" in the "me" world of social media. By posting comments, videos, photos, and sharing content related to the preaching moment, Frazer is becoming more unified as a congregation sharing Christ's story as their story.

Last year we rarely saw church-related hashtags at Frazer. Today, hashtags are much more common as the church collectively share their experiences with one another via social media. Savage and Presnell point to the importance of sharing stories in this way. "The way in which faith communities realize and share what they hold dear and meaningful to them is through the generation of stories…When sampled at a moment in time they are like snapshots of a faith community's compiled identity, historical expressions, faithful praxis, and imagined futures."[12]

More people at Frazer are hitting the "share" button on social media. They are inviting people to church. They are caring for another with online prayers and encouragement. For example, during the project, a college student saw the posts of a

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[12] Savage and Presnell, *Narrative Research*, 67-68.

professor who attends Frazer and as a result, the student visited the church. The same college student brought several more friends, including one who had recently lost his mother. Still another church member was asked about their twitter feed because of a post related to the preaching moment and more conversation ensued, leading to another new visitor on a Sunday morning.

We may be witnessing the P.O.S.T. (Preach Our Story Together) generation coming of age. We can repurpose the preaching moment as liturgy (the work of the people) beyond the delivery from the preacher. When the preaching moment becomes the entire community's responsibility to help create and share, the P.O.S.T. generation will experience something only the first century Church could have dreamed about in the book of Acts. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) This moment in human history is unfathomable. With the touch of a button every Christian in a local church can "Preach Our Story Together." Through a SMMT the church can invite the average churchgoer to participate not only in a deeper engagement with the Bible, but to be part of the "push" system of delivering good news to their friends and followers. As Kierkegaard said, "People have an idea that the preacher is an actor on a stage and they are the critics, blaming or praising him. What they don't know is that they are the actors on the stage; he (the preacher) is merely the prompter standing in the wings, reminding them of their lost lines."[13]

Personal Reflection on Preaching with Social Media

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[13] Quoted in John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 173

A well thought out social media post has immeasurable worth when coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit. In nearly every person's hand are devices that contain the power to transform lives by the words and images shared from their hearts and lives through social media. The capacity to do good using social media is astounding—as is the temptation for ill will. Too many times, I have read posts on social media that spew hatred, jealousy, envy, or greed toward someone else. Many times the same person posts a Bible reference right before or after this maddening display of immaturity. The rant ruins the witness and taints the gospel presentation. The choice to embrace the "we" in the "me" world of social media is a matter of great responsibility. Social media is a tool that we can employ at any moment for good or evil. Jesus taught us to "pick up our cross daily and follow Him." (Luke 9:23) His command is no less valid in the virtual realm of social media. C.S Lewis wrote, "The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life."[14] Social media grants each of us the opportunity to put to death our own voice, but in the process discover that we can amplify the voice of Christ. The choice is ours to make, daily.

Nearly 13 years ago I first experienced the calling of God on my life to become a preacher. I found myself face to face with the hardest decision of my life. I had been married for a few years and my wife and I were raising our first child. I thought of excuse after excuse why God could not possibly be serious about me becoming a preacher. I was not the "preacher type." I would not have been on the top of anyone's

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[14] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 227).

list of "most likely to become a preacher." After all my excuses, I turned to the Bible for

answers and came across Moses' eerily familiar story:

> "But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in
> the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech
> and of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth?
> Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?
> Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you
> shall speak." (Exodus 4:10-12)

That reading turned my life upside down. I never thought God could do so much

with so little, as what God has done through my life. I have participated in amazing

ministry opportunities over the past thirteen years. I have led several new ministries as

well as revived old ones. Five years ago, our bishop asked me to serve as a pastor at

Frazer in the midst of a major crisis. Today, the church is no longer looking back to

"Egypt" to solve her problems, but moving forward to a preferred future in the "Promised

Land." To be part of that journey with so many other faithful servants of Christ has been

humbling.

My point is not to rehearse my accomplishments, as though I had done anything

apart from Christ: rather, I offer the example of my life to say that God is indeed able to

use anyone to preach the Word and see the lives of others transformed as a result. God

has used my one life incredibly over the last thirteen years and shared it with thousands

of people: I am God's "Facebook post," God's "tweet," God's "Instagram photo." So I

know that God can use one life to transform the world.

In *The Dragonfly Effect,* Aaker and Smith remind the reader by painting this

picture:

> [T]he dragonfly is the only insect able to propel itself in any direction –
> with tremendous speed and force – when its four wings are working in
> concert. This ancient, exotic, and benign creature illuminates the

importance of integrated effort. It also demonstrates that small actions can create big movements."[15]

Like the four wings of a dragonfly, one social media post coupled with the Three in One of the Trinity can make one small action into a big movement. Aaker and Smith elaborate further:

> Although we've all witnessed the power of the Internet and such Web 2.0 tools as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to connect us to others, it is only now becoming clear that we can harness these tools strategically and thoughtfully to bring about massive change and drive social good… A revolutionary idea to bring about change doesn't need to come from a multimillion-dollar company or well-designed nonprofit: it can come from you or someone like you armed with a detailed plan of action.[16]

Social media was tailor made for the next Moses, the next person who may think they cannot make a difference. The development of the intentional Social Media Ministry Team at Frazer has created opportunities for people just like Moses—just like me—to have an enormous impact for the kingdom of God.

Preaching utilizing a Social Media Ministry Team has (re)signed my understanding of the preaching moment. While I have much more work to do to incorporate the full benefits of social media into the preaching moment, this experience is reshaping my preparation, delivery, and reflections every week. I understand more clearly the challenges and opportunities that preachers have with social media. The preaching moment will undoubtedly continue to change because the style and language of the culture is ever evolving. Even at 37 years of age, I find myself wondering if I will be able to keep up with the technological and cultural shifts. Already my preaching style is

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[15]Jennifer Lynn Aaker, Andy Smith, and Carlye Adler, *The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), xiii.

[16] Ibid., 144.

deeply ingrained. This project has given me the desire to remain open to developing forms of communication and their use in the preaching moment.

I am eagerly anticipating what God will do in and through my life and my ministry as I move from the "me" to the "we" in preaching and in social media. I call on others to do the same, in the words of Psalm 34:3, "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together."

Let us now praise the LORD with social media!

APPENDIX I

Ethics Guide for Social Media Volunteers:

The mission of Frazer's social media team is to spread the word of Christ and

proclaim the exciting things that are happening in Frazer family to the glory of God.

Before Posting ask:

1. Is this worded in the most respectful, kind way possible?
2. Is there a way that this might be misconstrued?
3. Is this all true?
4. In light of current events, past circumstances and future goals, is this wise?
5. Is this going to further the cause of Christ?

General tips on posting:

o Avoid comparative statements about Frazer
o Don't belittle non-church goers
o Excitement is key, people are drawn to positive excitement
o Don't say something you don't feel – be genuine
o Avoid saying the same thing every week, try to be creative in your posts

Online debates:

o Learn to recognize the trolls from the people who are really asking questions
o Never make it personal. Disengage if they start to make it personal
o Stay on the original subject, don't let the argument splinter
o Agree to disagree, most people will be shocked if you can be a Christian and respectful at the same time.

- Non Frazer posts:

o Keep in mind that all your posts represent your church

- o Count the cost; if you post something offensive (even if you believe it to be true) you will lose an audience with someone that may need to hear the message of Christ.
- o The message of Christ is the most important message you can communicate, please do all you can to preserve your platform and not muddy that message with competing thoughts.
- o If you support something controversial do it respectfully.
- o It's a good idea to ask the "before posting" questions before posting anything on a controversial subject.

APPENDIX II

Social Media Ministry Team Members

Director of Digital Ministries – Will Adams

Week 1: Captain - Anthony Leigh
Lauren Matson
Beth Kingry
Flynn "Buddy" Murphy
Becky VanGilder
Ed Harrell
Cayla Hamilton

Week 2: Captain - Lori Mercer
John Weissend
Betty Cannon
Jimmy Barnes
Jan Stevens
Abbie Emfinger
April Evans

Week 3: Captain - Bryan Carter
John Matson
Lori Moneyham
Robin Pass
Courtnie Johnson
Ryan Emfinger
Beth Crittenden
Sofi Gelabert

Week 4: Captain - Katie Russell
Steve Brown
Linda Locklar
Joy Ohme
Bill Holliday
Jojo Terry

APPENDIX III

Participation Team: Social Media Survey

Name _____   Email _____

1. Please check ALL of the Social Media Apps that you have on your Smart Phone/ Tablet, ETC.

1. ☐ Face Book
2. ☐ Instagram
3. ☐ Twitter
4. ☐ You Tube
5. ☐ Vine
6. ☐ Tumblr
7. ☐ Snap Chat

2. Out of all of the Social Media Apps that you have - Please list the top 4 that you use on a continuous basis.

1. ☐ Face Book
2. ☐ Instagram
3. ☐ Twitter
4. ☐ You Tube
5. ☐ Vine
6. ☐ Tumblr
7. ☐ Snap Chat

3. Do you follow Frazer UMC on <u>Face Book</u>? ○ Yes ● No

  <u>Instagram</u>? ○ Yes ○ No

Twitter? ○ Yes ○ No

You Tube? ○ Yes ○ No

4. How often do you visit the Frazer Website?

1. ○ Daily
2. ○ Weekly
3. ○ Bi-Weekly
4. ○ Once a month
5. ○ Never

5. If you post on Social Media - Please tell us how often you post.

1. ○ Multiple times a day
2. ○ Once a day
3. ○ A few times a week
4. ○ Once a week
5. ○ Once a month
6. ○ Never - I just enjoy looking at what others post

6. Would you be willing to invest an hour in Social Media Training? ○ Yes ○ No

7. Which of these have you used to share your faith online?

1. ☐ Post a Bible verse
2. ☐ Share an inspirational quote
3. ☐ Share a sermon or other teaching video
4. ☐ Share a song or music video
5. ☐ Tell about an answered prayer
6. ☐ Ask for prayer
7. ☐ Other (please list)

APPENDIX IV

#Guilty God Outline
March 16, 2014

Guilty in the Garden
After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. [2]Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. [3]So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. [4]Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' [5]They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. [6]When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. [7]Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' [8]Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' [9]This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' [10]Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. [11]Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?' [12] So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. **John 18:1-12(*NRSV*)**

Discovering the Story

　　Is Jesus a "Guilty God"?

Applying the Story

　In the Garden

　　...it was just _____(an apple)

　　...it was just _____(a kiss)

　　...it was just _____(an ear)

　　...it was just _____(love)

Responding to the Story

　Who is the "Guilty in the Garden"?

Sharing the Story

Who are you in the story? Are you more like Adam? Judas? Peter?

How can you become more like Jesus this Easter?

APPENDIX V

#GuiltyGod Outline
March 23, 2014

Guilty by Association

[13]First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. [14]Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. 15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, [16]but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. [17]The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' [18]Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. 19 Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. [20]Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. [21]Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' [22]When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' [23]Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' [24]Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. 25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' [26]One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' [27]Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. 28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. **John 18:13-28 (NRSV)**

Discovering the Story

Is Jesus a "Guilty God"?

Applying the Story

What is your reputation?

What is Jesus' reputation?

Responding to the Story

Are you "Guilty by Association"?

Sharing the Story

Name a time when you literally or symbolically denied Jesus. Share this experience with someone this week.

Tweet: What is Jesus' reputation? He is a friend of sinners. Jesus hangs out with sinners. He hangs out with me. Jesus is "Guilty by Association"! #GuiltyGod

APPENDIX VI

#GuiltyGod Outline
March 30, 2014

Guilty of Truth

So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' [30]They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' [31]Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' [32](This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) [33]Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' [34]Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' [35]Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' [36]Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' [37]Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' [38]Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. [39]But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' [40]They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.19Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. [2]And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. [3]They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. [4]Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' [5]So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' [6]When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' [7]The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.' [8]Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. [9]He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. [10]Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' [11]Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' [12]From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.' [13]When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. [14]Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' [15]They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!'

Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' [16]Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. **John 18:29-19:16(*NRSV*)**

Discovering the Story

Is Jesus a "Guilty God"?

Applying the Story

What is Truth?

Responding to the Story

Does absolute truth exist?
Where does Jesus fit into the notion of absolute truth?

Sharing the Story

Tweet: What is Truth? Truth is not a statement; truth is the Savior. Truth is Jesus! #GuiltyGod

APPENDIX VII

#GuiltyGod Outline
April 6, 2014

Guilty of Love

[17]and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. [18]There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. [19]Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' [20]Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. [21]Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews." ' [22]Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' [23]When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. [24]So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' [25]And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [26]When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' [27]Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. [28] After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' [29]A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. [30]When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. [31] Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. [32]Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. [33]But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. [34]Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. [35](He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) [36]These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' [37]And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.' John 19:17-37 (NRSV)

Discovering the Story

      Is Jesus a "Guilty God"?

Applying the Story

5 Love Lessons from the Cross:

1. Love _____(bears all things)
     v.17
2. Love _____(believes all things)
     v.18
3. Love _____(hopes all things)
     v.26-27
4. Love_____ (endures all things)
     v.30
5. Love _____(never ends)
     v.37

Responding to the Story

Reflect on the crucifixion in preparation for Easter. Share with someone the story of Jesus' death on the cross. What does it mean to you?

The cross is a lesson of love that changed the world. The cross changes what it means to be in community. It changes our families. It changes our lives. Imagine a world without the cross. Discuss.

Sharing the Story

Tweet: The cross is the column that creates community. Without it all community eventually crumbles. With it hope holds and love lasts. #GuiltyGod

APPENDIX VIII

#GuiltyGod Outline
April 13, 2014

God was Dead

[38] After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. [39]Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. [40]They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. [41]Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. [42]And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. **John 19:38-42 (NRSV)**

Discovering the Story

Did God really die?

If Jesus was God and Jesus died on the cross, does that mean God died?

Applying the Story

Death was _____(final)

Luke 24:10-11 and 17-21

Death is _____(finite)

Colossians 1:18

God is _____(infinite)

Romans 8:11

Responding to the Story

No one wants to die, but if death is finite and not final, then death has lost its sting. Think about Jesus' obituary. Now, write your own obituary.

Sharing the Story

Tweet: God was dead. Jesus died. The disciples didn't get it. We won't get it until we die with Jesus. Then we experience resurrection. #GuiltyGod

APPENDIX IX

#GuiltyGod Outline
April 20, 2014

Jesus is ALIVE!

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ^{2}So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ^{3}Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ^{4}The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ^{5}He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ^{6}Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ^{7}and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ^{8}Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ^{9}for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ^{10}Then the disciples returned to their homes. ^{11} But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ^{12}and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ^{13}They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ^{14}When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ^{15}Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ^{16}Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ^{17}Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' ^{18}Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her. **John 20:1-18 (NRSV)**

Discovering the Story

      Do you believe in the Resurrection of Jesus?

Applying the Story

      What do you see in the tomb?

      _____(Dirty Laundry) OR _____(Good News)?

Responding to the Story

"Do you see Jesus or just some dirty laundry?" – Leonard Sweet

Sharing the Story

Tweet: Jesus said, "Go!" Go and share the Good News – Jesus is ALIVE!

APPENDIX X

#GuiltyGod Outline
April 27, 2014

Not Guilty!

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' **John 20:19-23 (NRSV)**

Discovering the Story

Is Jesus a "Guilty God"?

Applying the Story

The Final Verdict

Jesus:_____ (not guilty)!
Luke 3:22

Jesus' disciples:_____ (not guilty)!
2 Cor 6:18

Responding to the Story

Learning to live "Not Guilty":

1._____ (Peace be with you) v.21
   John 14:27
2. _____(So I send you) v. 21
   John 3:17

3. _____(Receive the Holy Spirit) v.22
Romans 8:14

4. _____(Forgive sins) v.23
2 Cor 5:17

Sharing the Story
Tweet: The verdict is out. Jesus is not guilty. What will be said about you?
1 Peter 1:3 #GuiltyGod

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