

**PRACTICES IN FAITH FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP TOWARDS
THE NEXT GENERATION CHURCH AT
REFUGE TEMPLE CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST,
ENGLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY**

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
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ABSTRACT

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Practices in Faith Formation and Discipleship Towards the Next Generation Church at Refuge Temple focuses on enhancing the vitality of congregational life at the Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ in Englewood, New Jersey. This dissertation project addresses the historical disposition, current opportunities, strategy and actions of the Refuge Temple Church in attracting and integrating young adults between the ages of 20-40 to become Christian disciples as part of the Refuge Temple Church family. This project seeks to work through the group formation dynamics in equipping congregational laity for the ministry by forming and facilitating small community groups in relationship building. The objective of this project is to influence the practices and behaviors of the congregation through the impact of transforming lay leaders to becoming highly relational members who can become effective at forming and leading others into a life of Christian discipleship.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit"" says the LORD of hosts. Zechariah 4: 5-6

Grace and peace to all of those who contributed to defining the practices of faith in formation and the practices of discipleship in becoming the next generation of Refuge Temple. My thanks to the entire congregation of Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ and especially to the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC), whose tireless efforts in screening, surveying, charting, planning and executing the work was simply the wind beneath the projects. Your efforts gave the project its lift from being an idea to becoming faith in action. Missionary Lynn Kitchings and Sister Beverly Kitchings White, the sister's sister who just kept it real in their consistent presence and ready hands to work. Your voices helped shape the strategic focus for the future of Refuge Temple's ministry. My thanks to the men who consistently availed themselves to make it all happen, Deacons Matthew Yarrell and Michael D. Walden.

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CHAPTER 1

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: RECOVERING THAT WHICH WAS LOST

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.¹ Acts 2: 1-4, 6 (NIV)

Reading from the Old Testament text, the commonality of language is one of the major contributing factors that enabled the cultural unification of the antediluvian period. “The Lord said,” according to Genesis 11: 6, “Behold, the people is one, and they all have one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do² (KJV). I consider it a compliment to the intellect and abilities of humanity when, once unified, nothing will be impossible to accomplish. Since it is the language that bounds humanity, it is undoubtedly language

1. Acts 2:1-4, 6 *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (New York, NY: The Zondervan Corporation), accessed September 5, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2%3A+1-4&version=NIV>.

2. Gen. 11:6 Robert A. Couric, ed., *The Kings James Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO, The Bible Hub by Biblica Inc.), September 5, 2015, <http://biblehub.com/kjv/genesis/11.html>.

that separates. Perhaps today it is the language of humanity that licenses the separation found between faith traditions and between the unchurched world and the church world. Geography, traditions, religion and culture infer that people live in a divided world. However, I want to suggest that it is not a matter of the ways people are different that creates division; rather it is the way differences are communicated that divides and separates.

I have no illusions about the level of difficulty in assimilating different cultures and traditions into a homogenous setting that brings together songs, rituals, and ways of praying and worshipping. Defining a church vision that consists of a high degree of inclusivity and diversity begins to open new possibilities of creating spaces of fellowship beyond traditional boundaries. Understanding what it means to be a part of the body of Christ means to live in reconciliation with others who seemingly, heretofore, have lived outside of the fellowship of the gospel. Not being able to bridge the gap between who is inside the fellowship and who is outside the fellowship of the gospel almost makes the proclamation of the gospel seem shallow when its proclamation cannot be heard or cannot be felt by those nearest to the point of proclamation.

It is at the table of communion where participating in sharing of the body of Christ makes the church one body. It is also at the same table where we participate in reconciling deeply-rooted convictions in a movement towards a common vision that is shared in a larger community. When the church can begin to practice communion in its truest sense, then perhaps the Holy Spirit can answer the prayers to migrate a disparate group of persons into a people of one community. The table then is the center piece and structure of meaning that represents a truth of fellowship both inside and outside the

church. The church historically makes use of the table for communion and for conversation. It is at the table where the breaking of bread also symbolizes the breaking of attitudes of the heart and it is at the table where the coming together of those to dine also may symbolize the coming together of those who have never been invited.

Doran and Troeger write that spirituality grows out of the search for a renewal of the community's worship through the reconciliation of the church's many tribes³. In Refuge Temple struggle for renewal perhaps it can find opportunities for changing attitudes, behaviors and worship traditions towards that which can openly embrace those from other "tribes" and welcome the experience of diversity. Perhaps it is at the table where Refuge Temple can find the application of the deeper principles of community and worship in a common practice. The table then can become the place of true worship where worship of God will be in spirit and in truth (John 4: 23-24).

Refuge Temple's ability to recapture the practices and disciplines that Christianity has lost (due to ministry being presented much like a television program for entertainment to satisfy the religious consumers causing some people to walk away from the faith) may have less to do with form, liturgy or doctrine and more to do with the relationship between who is inside and who is outside the church. The religious socialization of current members is impacted by how they learned the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the Refuge Temple historical family. If regular spiritual practices include others from outside the church, then the bond between the church and the community might have an opportunity for a unique relationship that facilitates elimination of the walls of separation.

3. Carol Doran, Thomas H. Troeger, *Trouble at the Table: Gathering the Tribes for Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 149.

Gerhard Lenski researched the strength of commitment to a socio-religious group in two ways: (1) commitment to the religious group as association, and (2) commitment to the group as community. Lenski called the network of informal relationships within a socio-religious group the religious sub-community. His research findings are that the existence of sub-communities “greatly facilitates the training of the younger members” in the norms and standards of the group⁴. Catterton and Ross further report on the research of Maria Cornwall in creating a model of predictors of religious behaviors. They report that Cornwall and Lenski offer growing evidence to support the finding that religious belief and commitment are highly dependent upon the extent to which an individual is integrated into a religious community⁵. Through the lens of Lenski’s and Cornwall’s work, Refuge Temple’s current adult membership can be seen to have adopted an understanding and behavior from an earlier norm of exclusion rather than inclusion.

The 67-year history of the congregation’s existence has remained in a familiar homeostatic balance for the past 8-10 years while the fabric and composition of the surrounding community has evolved. Historical investigation reveals that the founding church was born in a different community more than 15 miles away. Essentially, the church community, both then and now, traveled from the city of Paterson, NJ, to the city of Englewood, NJ. The church members were transported via a network of church vans

4. Holly Catterton, Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2012), 124.

5. *Ibid.*, 126.

and privately owned vehicles. The church van was an integral part of the life of the church as people depended upon it for transportation to and from church.

It may be that the church ancestors never formed a religious sub-community that would have been transmitted an attitude of inclusivity to those who are now the adult membership. There are instances in which current second generation members have assumed distinguished leadership roles within church-life as pastor, missionary, evangelist, and department director. However, if the commitment for the inclusion of a sub-community has not been a part of the sacred identity, then it is unlikely that an affinity for the external sub-community can now be paramount to Refuge Temple's future identity. Throughout the church's 67-year history that spans the leadership of three pastors, it appears that each pastor may have modeled the behavior of their predecessor in maintaining homeostatic balance and not uncovering the potential that lies hidden in the identity of a dynamically evolving and culturally diverse sub-community.

Ancient Israel was a diverse nation of 12 tribes who became a people consequent only to the covenant of God. The alliance of the twelve tribes is believed to have grown from the organization of independent tribes forged together through their identity and awareness of a national unity flowing from ethnic kinship with a common history, a common faith, and common sacral practices. The confederation of the twelve tribes was primarily religious, based upon their belief in the one "God of Israel" with whom the tribes had made a covenant and to whom they worshiped at a common sacral center as "one people of the Lord."⁶ Hence, they were not a people outside their covenant and

6. Mitchell G. Bard, "Ancient Jewish History: The Twelve Tribes of Israel," Jewish Virtual Library, American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 1998, accessed September 5, 2015,

outside the common place of worship. Using this insight, I will explore the question of whether Refuge Temple can recover the lost place of common worship that could enable disparate people to find covenantal relationship with God within the same community.

The table is a place of community, conversation and communication. Our family table and our story is not unlike that which the Lord shared with the disciples first and then the family of God now in the Eucharist. In an instant, the table transforms from the past to the present and into the future. The threads of continuity are the stories that are shared that make the community a living one. As the listening audience becomes part of the story through listening then the bond of community is created and connectivity is enhanced.

Michael Cook cites Thomas Aquinas's thrust to "give the most exacting account of Christian faith as it relate to realities...facilitating the birth of an environment for academic professional theology which seeks for logical and grammatical consistency in telling the story of Jesus."⁷ It is my contention that textual consistency is not necessarily the carrier wave that allows for the transmission of the Jesus story from the past to the future; rather, it is the human-experience connection between different social/cultural contexts. When the table no longer functions as a place where differences can be obscured by the commonality of the experience, then it has lost its power to reconcile. The table must function as a place of communication within the community where the honored guests come with their stories and their experiences.

According to the book of Acts chapter 2, the birth of the New Testament church

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/tribes.html>.

7. Michael L. Cook, *Christology as Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 81.

was when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. The birth of the New Testament church was characterized by the manifestation of known languages from different regions being heard by a crowd of disparate people. The Babylonian Empire collapsed in 539 BC and the Day of Pentecost occurred about 33 AD, a span of approximately 570 years, during which time languages, cultures and people may have ceased to exist. Listed below is a summary of the people and languages enumerated in Luke's account of Acts chapter 2:

- a. Parthia. This country was a part of Persia and was situated between the Persian Gulf and the Tigris River on the west, and the Indus River in the east. To the south, it was bounded by the Caramania Desert and it had Media on the north. Their empire lasted about four hundred years and they were a part of the vast Scythian flock from Asia.
- b. Medes. These were the inhabitants of Media. This country was situated north of Parthia and south of the Caspian Sea. In Genesis 10: 2 it is called Madai. The language spoken was also that of Persia. In this whole region, many Jews who chose not to return remained after the Babylonian captivity. The Medes are mentioned frequently in connection with the Persians, with whom they were often connected under the same government (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11; Jeremiah 25:25; Daniel 5:28; 6:8).
- c. Elamites. Elam is often mentioned in the Old Testament and was descended from Elam, the son of Shem (Genesis 10:22). It is also part of the Persian Empire and Daniel is said to have resided "at Shushan, which is in the province of Elam," (Daniel 8:2). The Greeks and Romans gave this country the name, Elymais but it is now called Kusistan. It was bounded by Persia on the east, by Media on the north, by Babylonia on the west, and by the Persian Gulf on the south. The language of its people was Persian. It

is said to have been fifteen miles in circumference and the inhabitants still claim to possess the tomb of the prophet Daniel.

d. Mesopotamia. This name, which is Greek, signifies between the rivers; that is, the region lying between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. In Hebrew, it was called Aram-Naharaim; that is, Aram, or Syria of the two rivers. This region extended between the two rivers from their sources to Babylon on the south and to Armenia on the north. It is bounded on the west by Syria; on the east by Persia; and on the south by Babylonia. It was an extensive, level, and fertile country. The language spoken was believed to be Syriac, with perhaps a mixture of the Chaldean.

e. Judea. This expression has greatly perplexed commentators. It has been thought difficult to see why Judaea should be mentioned, as if it were a matter of surprise that they could speak in this language. Some have supposed an error in the manuscripts, and have proposed to read Armenia, or India, or Lydia, or Idumea, etc. But all this has been without any authority. Others have supposed that the language of Galilee was so different from that of the other parts of Judea, as to render it remarkable that they could speak that dialect. Luke recorded this as any other historian would have done. In running over the languages which they spoke, he may have enumerated this as a matter of course; not that it was remarkable simply that they should speak the language of Judea, but that they should speak so many, meaning about the same by it as if he had said they spoke every language in the world.

f. Cappadocia. This was a region of Asia Minor, and was bounded on the east by Armenia, on the north by Pontus and the Euxine Sea, on the west by Lycaonia, and the south by Cilicia. The language which was spoken is not certain. It was probably,

however, a mixed dialect made up of Greek and Syriac, perhaps the same as their neighbors, the Lycaonians, (Acts 14:11).

g. Crete and Cilicia. Crete is the largest island in Greece and the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It is located in the southern part of the Aegean Sea separating the Aegean from the Libyan Sea. After its conversion to the Christian religion, it produced many eminent men, among whom were Gregory Nyssen, and Basil the Great. It was one of the places to which Peter directed an epistle, (1 Peter 1:1). Cilicia extended along the Mediterranean coast east from Pamphylia, to the Amanus Mountains, which separated it from Syria. North and east of Cilicia lay the rugged Taurus Mountains that separate it from the high central plateau of Anatolia, which are pierced by a narrow gorge, called in antiquity the Cilician Gates.

h. Pontus. This was another province of Asia Minor, and was situated north of Cappadocia, and was bounded west by Paphlagonia. Pontus and Cappadocia, under the Romans, constituted one province⁸.

Why these 15 locations and languages in particular, and why the order Luke listed them, is uncertain to me. But some things about the list scholars infer are: (a) the list begins with three countries east of the Roman Empire — Parthia, Media and Elam, in the area of modern Iran; (b) the list moves westward to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and

8. Albert Barnes, "The Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2- Verses 8-9," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1950, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/barnes/ntnotes.html>.

Judea, provinces in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) — Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia; and (3) the list covers North Africa — to Egypt, Libya and Cyrene⁹.

Babylon was considered the first world-dominating power that subverted the ancient pictorial model of God's kingdom.¹⁰ It was the Tower of Babel where languages were confounded and the people became divided by their language. The Parthians, Medes, Elamites are considered the descendants of those of the ten tribes who were deported by the Assyrians; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya; Cretans and Arabs.¹¹ It is evident that there were a number of Jewish settlements in Babylonia at the opening of the Christian era. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., these Babylonian settlements became influential among the Diaspora—the dispersed Jews outside of Palestine. It may well be that it was the dispersed Jews who were the targeted audience of the various tongues producing a language of reunification.

At Pentecost Galileans appeared to have suddenly become fluent in the languages spoken in that region of the world. The supernatural aspect of this was not lost on the hearers, who were “utterly amazed” (Acts 2:7). More than this, each person in the crowd apparently heard the people speaking in his own *native* language (Acts 2:8). The Greek translation literally means, “We are hearing in our own language in which we were born.”

9. Paul Kroll, “Exploring the Book of Acts Chapter 2,” *Christian Odyssey Magazine*, June 25, 2012 (Glendora, CA: Grace Communion International Publication, 2), accessed February 10, 2016, <https://www.gci.org/bible/acts2>.

10. Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 254.

11. Acts 2: 9-11, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (New York, NY, The Zondervan Corporation), accessed September 5, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2%3A+8-11&version=NIV>.

The various local languages of these Jews' original homelands were being spoken. What the listeners needed was an explanation of why various languages were being spoken by ordinary Galileans.

The basic purpose of the miracle of languages may not have been simply to communicate. Greek would have been sufficient for that purpose. The miracles, I propose, were meant to get the attention of the crowd and I believe also to rekindle what had been lost at the Tower of Babel. The text goes on to say that, "All the believers were together and had everything in common" (NIV).¹² Language functioned as a bonding agent that enabled the community to have everything in common, and especially among the new believers. In spite of the cultural and language differences, the early church determined how to mitigate their differences and live in the commonality they all shared. It is a marvelous example of making meaning of the commonality in communication rather than remaining in the difference.

Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ is a small, family-church nestled inside a diversified community of Hispanic, Jamaican, Haitian and African Americans residents. Although English may be spoken as a language among the American subcultures, it is far from being a common language. Compounded with the challenge of understanding English as a second language, immigrants have the additional challenge of understanding American church language. It may be that religious vernacular is a language of its own with a meaning that is other worldly. Although Refuge Temple experiences a profound loss of communication in the English-Spanish language barrier, the loss of

12. Acts 2: 44 *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (New York, NY, The Zondervan Corporation, 2011), accessed September 5, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2%3A+8-11&version=NIV>.

communications also exists on another level where the church language may convey a meaning that church members are somehow different or better than the unchurched community. We are now challenged to uncover what spiritual beliefs and understandings might exist that could hamper mutual acceptance and accommodations leading towards commonality.

At the core of this project lie questions of what is lost and how might the Refuge Temple congregation regain that which is lost. Some of the issues examined are:

(1) How the language of the church community distances itself from others (church babel); (2) How to examine the difference between what the church means and what the unchurched community hears; (3) How can Refuge Temple invite others to its table when it has lost its language that communicates that there is room at the table; and (4) How can the church offer the world a new wine (Acts 2: 13)?

Blount and Tisdale edited a collection of essays, *Making Room at the Table* that examines culture and worship in light of a biblical and theological framework. Blount and Tisdale use *culture* to mean “the social, linguistic, national, ethnic, and theological realities that locate and identify who we are and what we believe and value; and as the shared patterns of meanings that emerge from a particular location.”¹³ The hope of their project was to create new ways of connecting with people of diverse cultures to gather and celebrate as one community in Christ. Its focus is addressing ways that distinct ethnic identity can be maintained while enjoying the richness that each person or group adds towards truly becoming a multicultural community.

13. Brian K. Blount; Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Making Room at the Table* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), ix.

At the core of their research lies some of the same challenges faced by both the early first century church and Refuge Temple today. Mainly, how does a traditional Pentecostal denomination maintain its liturgical history while reaching out to other culturally distinctive groups while seeking to transform itself into a future culturally-relevant church?

Invitation Lost

The sacrament of Christ's table is without question one of the central pillars upon which Christianity is elevated and made visible to the world. For Christianity, the table is the point of intersection between that which is the community of the body and that which is being offered. Without the table or the offering, then the community has no form and is void of purpose and power to reach a potentially new audience. Without the table or bread, then the community is nothing more than fragments of humanness occupying the same proximity; without an element of commonality that binds its likenesses together. The table functions as a gathering mechanism that transforms singular individuals into organs of the same body. The table is both a distinct location that is a point of demarcation between the faithful and the faithless; and it is a point of convergence where the comingling of that which is holy actively attracts and engages with that which is not. Christ's table does not become Christ's until it is arranged in concert with humanity in such a way that Christ is made visible extending the invitation to come and dine. In an instant, the table is positioned in the past, present, and future. The single thread of continuity is the narrative that makes the story a living one.

My story gives rise to me being able to hear the New Testament story and enables the text to be transformative in a way that allows the text to be projected from the past, not only into my experience now in the present, but also into my future. When the listening audience becomes part of the story through hearing it from preaching then the narrative has traversed time and space and has become a part of a new narrative. It recreates itself like seed. Seed will reproduce itself when planted properly.

Stories are the fundamental building blocks used to invite others into what is a hidden mystery about a concretely lived life realized through ordinary symbols, practices and stories. The God in Jesus is alive and lives in the actions of relationships of everyday activity, not just in celebratory events like Holy Communion. God is discernible through the eyes and ears that can see and can hear in the narratives of experiences. Perhaps the invitation that Jesus extends to come and dine makes contextual sense because of the natural experiences of coming together to dine at the table as with what families customarily do. The *table* is language from ordinary narrative that reveals what has been concealed in the realm of God. The narrative that Jesus uses in parables is ordinary language that reveals that which is concealed before the eyes of the disciples. Jesus demonstrates this in the narrative recorded in John 3:1-21 when he teaches Nicodemus that "... no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." Here Jesus uses language that Nicodemus is familiar with to reveal a meaning that he cannot yet see. Jesus uses the narrative of birth, wind, and light to illuminate properties of the Kingdom of God so that Nicodemus might perceive. It is in the same manner that the unchurched come into contact with the things of the Kingdom of God. The evidence surrounds us all and we are enveloped by it and, like the disciples, cannot see it. What is it that prevents

the hearing, seeing, and knowing about God from becoming that which is heard, seen, and known of God?

Today the church still practices the sacrament of the last supper, an event that has continued from the Old Testament Passover to the New Testament communion. What makes the survival of practicing the sacrament possible is not in the precision of religious rite or words but, perhaps, in the kinship of human experience shared over bread. In some traditions, Holy Communion is celebrated each month as the sacred meal of the Eucharist. For other Christians the Last Supper, the Eucharist, and the Mass are so important that they are celebrated every day. The practices clearly vary among Christian denominations, but the single thread that permeates through the various cultural contexts is the story. They ate the broken bread and drank the cup of wine, not as ordinary food and drink, but as the body and blood of Christ: the names which Jesus himself had given to them on the night before he died. Christians have gone on eating the bread, the body of Christ, and drinking the wine, his blood, as the central act of Christian worship because sharing bread and cup is a central act of our survival as a people.

Perhaps the challenges of Refuge Temple, and other churches as well, is reflected in its inability to extend an invitation to the community that conveys its desire to share both in communion and in a meal of companionship. Churches and communities do not want to eat with outsiders. Perhaps this is no different than the objection Jesus received from the Pharisees (Matthew 9: 10-12):

“Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples,

‘Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?’ But when Jesus heard this, He said, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick...’¹⁴

This research attempts to articulate the lost value of church celebrations, in that they are so inwardly focused that the outside community is unable to recognize the significance of the celebrations and that they are expressly built around the presence of the outside honored guests (the unchurched community). It's easy to become complacent, callused, and careless towards the outsiders. In a strange way, the parable Jesus told at a Pharisee's table has a way of stirring and infusing God's heart and perspective into the ordinary. Luke 14:16 depicts a parable:

A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.” The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame”.¹⁵

In his parable Jesus declares that “there is still room at the table.” Hence, if the unchurched community does not come to know and experience communion, then its invitation remains open. If when the unchurched community does not experience communion, then it perhaps is not communion at all.

14. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011 (New York, NY, The Zondervan Corporation), accessed September 6, 2015; <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+9%3A+10-12&version=NIV>; Internet.

Although there is little harmony among different Christian communities on the precise elements of the sacrament or what actually happens in the moment of celebration or even what the celebration is to be properly called. There is, however, one factor that remains constant across the spectrum of faith traditions. It is the experience of fellowship with Christ. It is not uncommon to hear reports of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Although each faith community may have its own narrative to describe the experience, it appears unquestionable that there is an experience. There is plenty of disagreement about the theological mechanics of how it happens, but it is surmised that the celebration does happen and that worshippers experience Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Mary Oliver wrote a poem pointing to what happens outside the church. She wrote:

The Vast Ocean Begins Just Outside Our Church: The Eucharist

*Something has happened to the bread and the wine.
They have been blessed.
What now?*

*The body leans forward to receive the gift from the priest's hand, then the
chalice.
They are something else now from what they were before this began.*

*I want to see Jesus, maybe in the clouds
or on the shore, just walking, beautiful man
and clearly someone else besides.*

*On the hard days I ask myself if I ever will.
Also there are times my body whispers to me that I have.¹⁵*

If today, Christ can be experienced in the Eucharist then perhaps it is the same experience of future believers. Just as Christ has been present in the past, he can also be present in the present and future. The key to being able to preserve the experience is

15. Mary Oliver, "The Eucharist: At the Center of Catholic Life" (Boston: The Church in the 21st Century at Boston College, Fall 2011, 5), accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.bc.edu/church21>.

embedded in the ability to rehearse it frequently with others besides those already at the table. It is important that we move purposefully during the liturgy but if there are so many rules about what should be done until the awe of participating in the sacraments is lost to others, then the value of what Jesus intended when he gave us the Eucharist becomes obviated. Making that which is sacred understood by those who are secular may be the burden of all believers, including believers at Refuge Temple. The invitation should always be accompanied by an explanation. In other words, the church must translate its language into one that the world's community can embrace or appropriately interpret as its own language. It is the language divide that creates separation between the sacred and the secular.

In Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Kory Kantenga suggests that perhaps part of what is being seen in the new age churches is a translation movement that attempts to translate one language into another language that is more easily heard and discerned. Kantenga writes that perceptions suggest that church members believe they are somehow better than the non-believer who is not in church on a Sunday morning. Another explanation Kantenga offers for the divide between the church and unchurched is that some people perceive churches represent an intolerant Christian fundamentalism¹⁶. If Kantenga's theory holds true, then the unchurched could feel reasonable comfortable and socially secure while remaining outside. They may want to be understood on their own terms without joining the church.

16. Kory Kantenga, "Lost in Translation: New Religious Language and Secular Society" (Washington DC: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, December 6, 2008), accessed September 14, 2014, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/letters/korykantenga-on-lost-in-translation-new-religious-language-and-secular-society>.

An illustration of an inappropriate level of care for the outside community can be seen in the New Testament story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). The parable highlights two men from very different lives; one rich who enjoys a wealthy lifestyle and the other a poor beggar who sits daily just outside the rich man's gate. The poor man is described as one who merely wanted to be fed with the pieces of food which fell from the rich man's table. From the story, one would think that a reasonable response of the rich man would be to feed the poor man from his apparent abundance. It is an inferred likelihood that the rich man was aware of the poor man's plight but made no motion towards him and took no action to help his need. When the rich man died, he was tormented from Hades and saw the beggar with Abraham in heaven. An interpretation of this text can be today's church characterized as the rich man and the beggar characterized as the outside, unchurched community. Where established churches may be rich in resources, talents, and skills but remain poor in character to respond to a world just outside its gate. The rich man's lack of compassion may well have earned him his place in Hades. Can it be similarly said that spiritually-dead churches, likewise, earn their place in Hades as a consequence to the intentional disregard and callous neglect for the stranger just outside the door of its worship centers. The rich man is one who is portrayed as one who assumes no personal responsibility for another person right outside his door. Is the meaning of this text so steeped in tradition where it cannot be heard by the modern church? Are the church goer's practices of dressing up, driving expensive automobiles, living in elaborate homes commensurate to the behavior of the rich man who was blind to the beggar's presence and plight? I wonder whether the preponderance of churchgoers may be living on their way to hell as a consequence to

embracing a meaning of the gospel for personal wealth and individual benefit as opposed to using the gospel to empower people within their sphere of influence. In his book, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Perspective*, James Harris describes the danger of being a congregation that remains focused solely on its internal life and only on the needs of its members. He identifies churches like that as “introverted churches.”¹⁷

Creating community around new believers or the un-churched community is the critical step in bridging the gap between who Refuge Temple is now and who Refuge Temple can become. New believers or the un-churched do not know what to expect in their faith walk and may be eager to have the benefit of someone else who has traveled the same road that they are now on to befriend them and to journey alongside. Easum and Atkinson say that trust is built by loving and accepting others just where they are and then life changes through biblical principles. They stress welcoming persons who are the farthest from God, not the closest.¹⁸

One of the deepest cries of our culture is the desire to fit in and belong. Refuge Temple’s heartbeat has to be connected to the community it serves with an aim to be the place where people feel as if they are included. The Christian community develops relationships and promotes unity by creating a sense of belonging for its entire people and, as a by-product, creates a community of accountability for people who are determining to achieve a higher spiritual plain of living as Christian disciples. People long for a place where we are accepted, loved, respected, known, and cared for. An

17. James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 34-38.

18. Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *Go Big with Small Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 16.

outcome of the application of a few biblical principles has been that Refuge Temple can learn from each other and ultimately lean upon each other in celebrating the many joys and challenges of life. It is potentially the genesis of a new culture within the church that seeks to disciple new believers while continually giving birth to new members in new ways in the community.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF REFUGE TEMPLE

The desired outcome of this project is to enable the delivery of ministry that meets current needs and anticipates future needs while charting a path towards a future identity. In order to meet the current and future needs of the Refuge Temple community, the first requirement is to understand the story from which the needs are derived. An examination of the spiritual formation and congregational vitality aims to clarify the process in making meaning of the content and context of ministry within its current setting. This chapter seeks to examine the context of the Refuge Temple historical identity while looking to outline the processes for creating a forum where dynamic small groups can grow in exploring new possibilities for future existence. This chapter frames the theological lens for interpreting the intersection between social and cultural context and between our biblical history and the practices of today's congregation. The goal seeks to depict a structure from which both the researcher and the church community can understand how the church's history has influenced the practices of outreach and adoption and how the church can use small group relationships as a model for future engagement strategies. It will portray the dynamic collection of agents that have contributed to this community of faith, its genesis, its ministry and perhaps its future.

More importantly, this chapter offers an opportunity for the Refuge Temple faith community to narrate its own path towards a future of its own choosing.

Apostolic Heritage

The earliest Christian writings, specifically that of the New Testament canon, appear to be addressing other Christians. Believers were writing to other believers on how to carve out an existence while being a minority within a majority context. Mostly all of the New Testament epistles were written to other believers as part of a young, scattered group of persecuted believers. They were struggling to find their own identity in a politically volatile region. This region was filled with both Roman and Jewish persecutors who neither understood nor respected the persecuted believers' new belief system. Compounded with this dynamic was the fact that there was considerable disagreement among and between believers on the specifics of how to live out their faith practices in a community enclosed by political oppression, religious tradition, and paganism.

“The Apostolic Fathers” was a name designated to a set of second-generation Christian fathers who were thought to have personally known the twelve apostles. Although there is little evidence to support that notion there is, nevertheless, written evidence of Christian thought that appeared to have guided the thought, theology, and practices of early Christianity. The Apostolic Fathers include: St. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, the Didache, Barnabas of Alexandria, The Shepherd of Hermas, and Diognetus. This collection of writings, preserved in the

original Greek text, reveals the practices and theology of early Pauline Christianity as it developed in churches across different cultures.¹ Reading the Apostolic Fathers, one may catch a glimpse of the problems posed by inner divisions, persecution, and the conflict with both Judaism and paganism. Each of the Apostolic Fathers has authored a perspective on the different challenges facing the new church. Professor Roger Olson at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University provides some insight on the contribution of each of the Apostolic Fathers and some ideas of the life and thought of the young church. Professor Olson's research offers the following:

- Clement of Rome, the third successor to Peter as Bishop of Rome, "had seen the blessed Apostles (Peter and Paul) and had been conversant with them," (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, iii, 3).
- Ignatius of Antioch was the second successor of Peter in the Sea of Antioch (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, III, 36) and during his life in the center of Christian activity; he may have met with others of the apostolic band. An accepted tradition, substantiated by the similarity of Ignatius's thought with the ideas of the Johannine writings, declares that he was a disciple of the Apostle John. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch was threatened from outside by persecution which made him one of its victims, and from the inside by false teachers who twisted what he thought was the essential truth of Christianity. Ignatius saw Christian doctrine most threatened.
- Polycarp was "instructed by Apostles" (Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, III, iii, 4) and had been a disciple of John (Eusebius, *op. cit.*, III, 36; V, 20), whose contemporary he was for nearly twenty years. He later trained Irenaeus as a disciple, thus giving Irenaeus' teachings great

1. Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), ii.

reliability and authority. He underscored the reality of the humanity of Christ, whom he places in the center of his doctrine of salvation.

- The Didache, also known as The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles, or The Teaching of the (Twelve) Apostles is basically a handbook or manual of Christian ethical instruction and church order (Holmes, Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments, 301).
- The Epistle of Barnabas is an early-century document concerned with showing that Christians are the true heirs of God's covenant. Its author remains anonymous.
- The Shepherd of Hermas was a popular document in the second and third centuries. Its significance rests in that it sheds light on the Christian situation at Rome in the mid-second century. Its author(s) is unknown.²

As early as the second century, Professor Roger Olson reports, there were conflicting visions within the church. Specifically, from about 300-500 AD, the majority of the writing about Christianity was concerned about guarding and protecting the gospel of salvation. The division that took place between Christendom and its theology during the reformation of the 16th century was largely due to the difference in interpretations of the gospel³.

I imagine that Martin Luther did not set out to start a denomination; he was merely critiquing the church practices of his day. Then, like now, the issues of salvation, have faded into the background over time as scholars, theologians, and lay ministers

2. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downer Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press; First Edition, 1999), 41.

3. *Ibid.*, 13.

argue over other matters trying to find answers to other questions. However, the salvation question appears to rise and fall with the times. Today, it competes with prosperity, choice in sexuality and personal empowerment.

More than two years before the Azusa Street Revival there was a revival in Wales. By the time Azusa Street began, the expectation was for something similar to happen in Los Angeles as it had in Wales. Azusa was not the only revival of history. The Second Great Awakening took place during 1790 to early 1800. It coincided with the western expansion that was taking place primarily in the Methodist and Baptist churches. It may be more closely recognized as an awakening of piety.

Jonathan Edwards's revival happened when there were British colonies forming a new nation. After the American Revolution, the British church was thoroughly discredited, and the Church of England in America renamed itself as Episcopalian. Religion in America virtually stepped into the vacuum created by the erosion and absence of the Church of England. By early 1900, America had become a place of religious pluralism where everything goes. People were more mobile; therefore, the church had more difficulty controlling the people. The Lutherans and Presbyterians were behind the times, because it took so long to prepare a minister but the Baptist and Methodists had no such concern. Unconstrained boundaries allowed the Methodist circuit riders to become more mobile and prevalent. This meant that new churches popped up in communities and were less regulated and far less traditional. Being a pastor may not have been all that hard when there were fewer standards to control, and people were less concerned about religious rigidity, tradition, and doctrine. At the same time, women became much more prominent than in previous times. A lack of clergy supervision, coupled with a lack of

doctrinal church standards fueled the opportunities for leadership by women. By early 1900 and certainly by 1936, women were being ordained as ministers.

Revivals accompanied church expansion across the country. One such revival is the Wesleyan Holiness Revival. Wesley was a proponent of perfection and sanctification. Holiness people used sanctification as a second work of grace after conversion.⁴ Holiness emphasized a believer's baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as the core to the Christian experience. Its scriptural basis is found in Acts, chapter 2, as it recounts how Jesus' disciples were "baptized in the Holy Spirit" while meeting for the Jewish observance of Shabuoth (Pentecost in Greek). Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, was the initial sign of spiritual baptism. The modern focus on Spirit-baptism has its origins in the Holiness Movement but a secondary strain grew in the African American Pentecostal church. The second strain that gave rise to Pentecostalism was the nature of Christianity practiced by Africans enslaved in the Americas merging the teachings of the Bible with styles of worship that had antecedents in traditional African religions. This synthesis was immediately recognizable in the Azusa Street Revival. Features included holy dancing and singing in a trancelike Spirit possession, a focus on testimony and testifying, and the immediate experience of the Divine presence in the worship service.

Communities of black people produced a new version of Christianity that was born interracial but soon divided under segregation.⁵ By the end of the 19th Century, African American churches had become a major part of the mainline American Christian

4. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995), 90-91.

5. Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 44.

tradition and continued to expand their presence throughout the twentieth century. As a result of demographic changes in the African-American population, its church became part of the geographical landscape throughout the United States. Challenged by integrating the rise of new theological and social issues, African American churches and their leadership became major forces in the political, religious, and social agenda of the country.⁶

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the African-American church appears to have been affected by two external forces. The first was the impact of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements upon African Americans. The founder and earliest exponent of Holiness thought was a Methodist woman, Phoebe Worrell Palmer, who lived in New York City. In 1835 she began holding a weekly “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” She focused on the Holy Spirit as the font of enlightenment and power. Her efforts resulted initially in the Church of the Nazarene and later in the development of a similar school of thought called Pentecostalism. Palmer's thoughts were rooted as institutional form in the 1880s when members of the Methodist church established the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness.⁷ Other Holiness groups developed within the Methodist and Baptist churches. By the 1890s, however, many blacks and whites within the Holiness movement withdrew from the Methodist and Baptist churches. In 1906, many adherents of Holiness thought were attracted to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California. William J. Seymour, a black Holiness

6. Thomas E. Carney, "Black Church," *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0001>.

7. Ibid.

preacher, established the revival, formally known as the Apostolic Faith Gospel Movement.

William Joseph Seymour, born in Centerville, Louisiana, to Simon Seymour and Phyllis Salabarr, was the son of former slaves. In search of work, Seymour migrated to Indiana around 1890, where he joined the Simpson Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church and experienced a life-altering conversion. He shifted his priorities from looking for gainful employment to looking for a deeper relationship with God. He ceased looking for work as a bartender and developed a deeper desire for Holiness.⁸ The Holiness believers were known for their drab clothing and abstinence from certain foods and entertainment, which were believed to be sinful. In 1901, while in Cincinnati, Seymour experienced his sanctification, an experience characteristic of the Holiness movement, in which a believer claims to have been “sanctified” when he or she senses that their proximity to Christ has grown closer. Seymour's sanctification occurred while he was attending a service at the Church of God. During this process, he embraced the premillennial theology of the Holiness movement, which stipulates that before the second coming of Jesus Christ the Christian church will experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, similar to that experienced by the Apostles in the book of Acts and prophesized in the book of Joel, chapter 2.

It was with William Joseph Seymour, at 312 Azusa Street, where the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement was born. People of all races and ages attended Azusa Street services. Prayer was held twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and, at its

8. Ida E. Jones, "Seymour, William Joseph," *African American National Biography*, ed. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e1757>.

zenith from 1906 to 1909, the Apostolic Faith Mission would attract others who would become world leaders in church organizations. Seymour had early success at holding together a multiracial ensemble of believers in this new Pentecost experience. Both black and white Pentecostals removed themselves from the body to form other organizations. This sparked a pattern of churches separated by race, spawning numerous conferences and associations made up along racial lines. Nonetheless, many Pentecostals remained in interracial churches and organizations, including the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW). In 1913 a doctrinal dispute within Pentecostalism divided Trinitarians and Apostolic believers who were separated by their beliefs in the proper nature and formula for baptism. In 1915 Seymour published “The Doctrines and Disciplines of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission”. In it, Seymour called for an interracial, black-led, Spirit-filled church (that is, a church in which the Holy Spirit is allowed to control the services).⁹ Seymour's Apostolic Faith Mission was the origin from which numerous future Pentecostal church leaders came and had their initial Holy Spirit baptism. National denominations such as the Church of God in Christ, the Assemblies of God, and international ministries throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Caribbean trace their roots to the revival at Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA.

In January 1894, Charles H. Mason left Arkansas Baptist College and set out to full-time ministry. A year later, he met Charles Price Jones, then a Baptist preacher in Jackson, Mississippi, and the two became friends and partners in the ministry. Both were former Baptist ministers who were expelled from the Baptist church for being too closely

9. Ibid.

aligned to the Holiness Movement. Churches in the Holiness tradition were known to be charismatic with charismatic leadership and believed in living a simple lifestyle. Holiness people worshipped enthusiastically with rich music, congregational participation and they were known to welcome the experience of baptism in the Holy Ghost by the evidence of speaking in unknown tongues. Jones preached the doctrine of Holiness and sanctification, or spiritual separation from the sinful world, but he did not preach glossolalia (speaking in tongues).¹⁰ Later that year, Jones split with Mason over the issue of glossolalia, since he felt that it was not necessary to validate one's baptism in the Holy Ghost. The split was also complicated by legal disputes regarding the ownership of church properties. In the aftermath, Mason controlled the Church of God in Christ, while Jones founded the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A. in Selma, Alabama. Mason and his followers incorporated under the name of the Church of God in Christ in 1907 to become what is today the largest black Pentecostal denomination. Like the Azusa Street Revival, the Church of God in Christ was multiracial in its origin. Multiracial revivals and churches were regarded as a symbol of eminent eschaton, looking toward the time when all nations shall come to Christ. Mason ordained many white ministers, and from 1909 to 1914 the number of white and black Churches of God in Christ was roughly equivalent. The Memphis authorities persecuted whites for violating the Jim Crow laws so, between 1913 and 1914, the white members of the Church of God in Christ left to form the Assemblies of God.¹¹

10. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., "Church of God in Christ," *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, Second Edition, Oxford African American Studies Center, accessed Thu Feb 20, 2014, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0002/e0931>.

11. Ibid.

Members of mainline African American churches openly criticized and persecuted members of the Church of God in Christ. Church of God in Christ churches attracted members who were poor and uneducated. They formed churches from farming communities in the South and folks from the South who migrated to the North for better jobs and economic opportunities. The Holiness and sanctified church was referred to as “mess” and was widely seen as ignorance. Their ritualistic behavior was said to resemble the ancient African tribal rituals and was too unsophisticated for a modern people who were trying to ascribe to a worship style akin to the mainstream denominations.

The Church of God in Christ is today the largest African American Pentecostal denomination and one of the influential branches of the international Pentecostal movement sparked by the Azusa Street Revival. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) has more than 30,000 churches in the United States, with over 5.5 million members, as well as another two million members abroad. Still preaching the necessity of the baptism in the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues as the spirit gives the utterance, the Church of God in Christ works to increase the visibility and viability in the public square. However, the organization still proclaims itself as a black Pentecostal organization rather than a culturally or racially mixed organization.

Sociologist Michael Emerson estimates only 5.4 percent of U.S. churches are racially integrated, meaning no one group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation. "If you go back historically, the leaders of denominations have been denouncing racism and separation for at least 100 years, and the people in the pews have been ignoring those pronouncements for at least 100 years," he said. "There's a complete

disconnect."¹² Just as the nation's sanctuaries are segregated, many of the houses of worship within the Church of God in Christ remain relatively racially separate.

According to Professor Emerson, a look at statistics for some of the nation's predominantly white Christian denominations indicates there sometimes has been only a 1 or 2 percent increase in the number of African-Americans in the last decade.

During the week of November 29, 2013, the Assemblies of God (AG) executive leadership hosted the executive leadership of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) at the AG national office in Springfield, Missouri. The historic meeting marked the first time the full leadership of these Pentecostal movements gathered specifically to dialogue over its long separation over race. The joint meeting between COGIC's and AG's leadership was an historic dialogue that represented one step forward in the healing of a racial rift.¹³

Although COGIC is an international organization, no data from the international demographics are available. However, according to Bishop Dr. David Daniels of McCormick Theological Seminary, the 2016 COGIC Leadership Conference discussed multi-racial/ethnic congregations in COGIC. There are congregations with less than 80 percent of African Americans and a few congregations with more than 40 percent of other races/ethnicities in cities as varied as Santa Barbara and East Palo Alto, CA; Albuquerque, NM; Grand Fork, ND; and other places. There are also some majority

12. Michael Emerson, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22.

13. Dan Van Veen, "AG and COGIC Leaders Gather in Historic Meeting, November 29, 2013," (meeting notes on November 29, 2013), accessed on February 8, 2016, at <https://crossmaps.com/news/ag-and-cogic-leaders-gather-in-historic-meeting-7057>.

Latino Native American congregations.¹⁴ Dr. Daniels further reported that during the late 1910s to the early 1930s, William Holt was the superintendent of Spanish-speaking ministries in the U.S. During the 1950's and 1960's Bishop Lorenzo Lucero directed Spanish-speaking ministries, which included sponsoring Spanish-speaking Youth Congresses, having a roster of Spanish-speaking and bi-lingual evangelists overseeing Latino/Spanish-speaking congregations, and conducting a Spanish-speaking COGIC Bible Institute at a dormitory in California. There are Spanish-speaking services of majority African-American congregations in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Hayward, California, along with other cities. There are Latino members, elders, and pastors in COGIC jurisdictions from Texas to California.¹⁵

Although COGIC has congregations and leaders from other ethnic origins, there is no overtly visible initiative to promote the unification of cultural and ethnic diversity at one table of communion.

Refuge Temple Historical Narrative

From its origin, Refuge Temple may have been intentionally designed to reach those who were outside the place of refuge. Its very name signifies the place where the un-sheltered can find shelter and respite from the world. What difference does the name make in terms of the ecclesiology of a local church? How can a church ensure that it will be able to provide "refuge" for those who have no place with which to belong? Creating

14. Dr. David Daniels, "The Black Church in America," (interview by author, Chicago: McCormick Theological Seminary, February 8, 2016).

15. Ibid.

space where the unchurched can find love and community and are afforded a place not only to tell their stories and life journeys but also become a part of a continuing story is absolutely essential to being able to live out the meaning of a place of refuge.

The Cities of Refuge; listed in Numbers 35:9-34, Deuteronomy 19:1-13, and Joshua 20:1-9; describe the cities and the reason for their existence. These cities were typical and symbolic of the church and believer's refuge in Christ (Hebrews 6:18). The Cities of Refuge were a provision of God's mercy. Just as salvation was found in the Cities of Refuge, today salvation is found in the church of Christ (Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:11-22). These cities were within reach after a short day's journey and accessible to all. They were designated for specific use and the way was defined as to making each city accessible. The person who accidentally killed someone was safe only in the City of Refuge. The guilty person's safety was always assured, as long as they remained in the City of Refuge. Today, the guilty world must be able to discern the church as a place of refuge where one can abide in Christ and his church. In the Old Testament text, God wanted to teach the Israelites that murderers (wrongdoers) had to pay for their crimes, hence, the avenger of blood. God also wanted to teach Israel that there was a place of mercy for those who were only guilty of an accident. Therefore, God gave them the Cities of Refuge.

What does it mean for the house of God to no longer be the place of refuge for those running from their guilt? At Refuge Temple, the next generation of refuge-givers are conspicuously absent in today's congregation in Englewood, New Jersey. The preponderance of the church members are octogenarians who are in various stages of aging and declining health. Although the church has a 67-year history that spans the

leadership of three pastors, its familiar homeostatic balance points to its diminishing population. Unless the church redefines its purpose and identifies itself as a place of grace, then it will cease to be recognized as a place of refuge and reconciliation within the community. The future viability of Refuge Temple is inextricably tied to its ability to become known as a place of refuge and reconciliation as its name states and purpose suggests.

One way to promulgate such a message of hope is to formulate an initiative that attracts and retains young people over 20 years of age. This research interest is in the impact of forming an outreach approach aimed expressly at instantiating and growing a presence of young adults. As an outcome, enhancing the growth possibility for the future existence of Refuge Temple is an ideal hypothesis.

Refuge Temple's historical narrative appears truncated by a series of events and circumstances. According to Robert Robinson, the life of the church is the product of a collection of individual narratives and stories about the community framed together to depict movement towards a perceptible ending. It is movement that intertwines plot and character in such a fashion that actions reveal characters and characters advance plot.¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur observed that all human experiences are "...predisposed to narrative because if it is to be understood it demands narrative apprehension and that plot are configured so that they can be identified and understood."¹⁷ Professor Ciangio warns that Refuge Temple has its own narrative of repressed truths, half stories and skewed tales

16. Robert B. Robinson, *Narrative Theology and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 689.

17. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 600.

that has found its homeostatic balance in the lives of the people and, to investigate issues of history and posterity may well create unwanted consternation and fear of destabilizing homeostasis.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is the task of this project to create a forum within which relational growth can occur within the meaning of the stories and history of Refuge Temple as the small groups attempt to construct a path towards new possibilities.

Acknowledging the historical narrative of the faith community at Refuge Temple may help in understanding what new ways could potentially organize and strengthen the practices of ministry. Inviting members of the congregation to participate as the Lay Advisory Committee is not so much a matter of assessing the correctness of the Refuge Temple historical story but rather a matter of allowing a kind of participatory process that Carl Savage described as one to sense its fit for a preferred future.¹⁹ Understanding that the success of the project, in part, hinged on the conversations and actions that take place at the intersection of the various narratives, is a central motivation to invest future explorations. James F. Hopewell proposes that a congregation can learn to tell its stories by giving account of itself through storytelling. Hopewell presents that the characterization of a congregation should be a collaborative undertaking that involves listening for narrative elements, participant observation, guided interviews, and corporate moral inquiry.²⁰ The specific interest in the absence of a particular age group within the Refuge Temple ministry setting alludes to the fact that the church community may have

18. Donna Ciangio, "Topics in Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality" (lecture, Madison, NJ: WSP 960, Drew University, July 7, 2014).

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

20. James F. Hopewell, *Congregation Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 141-142.

learned something about itself that it may not have wanted to learn. How the narrative unfolded into what Hopewell terms as the plot (consequences of change) is of major consequence. Plot, he says, traces the occurrence and consequences of changing events. It narrates what happens as to link, unfold, twist, or thicken.²¹ Plot describes an account of what Hopewell called the church's collective behavior that moves from one moment to the next and illuminates the nature of a congregation.

Refuge Temple's plot may easily be depicted in the Johari's Window graph below. What is known to others but is not known to self is the "Unknown self." The congregation's blind spot inhibits its ability to become self-aware in understanding how the outside community sees the church. It is not an effective or productive space for individuals or groups. In interpersonal communications, information, feelings, latent abilities, aptitudes, and experiences that are unknown to the person him/herself and unknown to others can be prompted or revealed through self-discovery, observation by others, or through collective or mutual discovery. How Refuge Temple might learn from others about itself involves moving beyond the boundary of the church property and interacting with strangers. Reducing the blind area can be accomplished by asking for and then receiving feedback through group experience and discussions. Refuge Temple encouragement to take responsibility for reducing the blind spot may prove to be a vast step towards claiming new identity. For psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, the unknown area could also include repressed or subconscious feelings rooted in formative events and traumatic past experiences which can stay unknown for a lifetime.

21. Ibid., 153-154.



Figure 1: Johari's Window²²

What is known about Refuge Temple is that it is in the city of Englewood, New Jersey, located 10 minutes from New York City. The diverse cultural population of Englewood is approximately 29,000. Within the city's 5 square miles there are over 50 houses of worship and 14 private and public schools.²³ City demographics and race percentages for the city are depicted in the charts below:

Table 1: City of Englewood Demographics²⁴

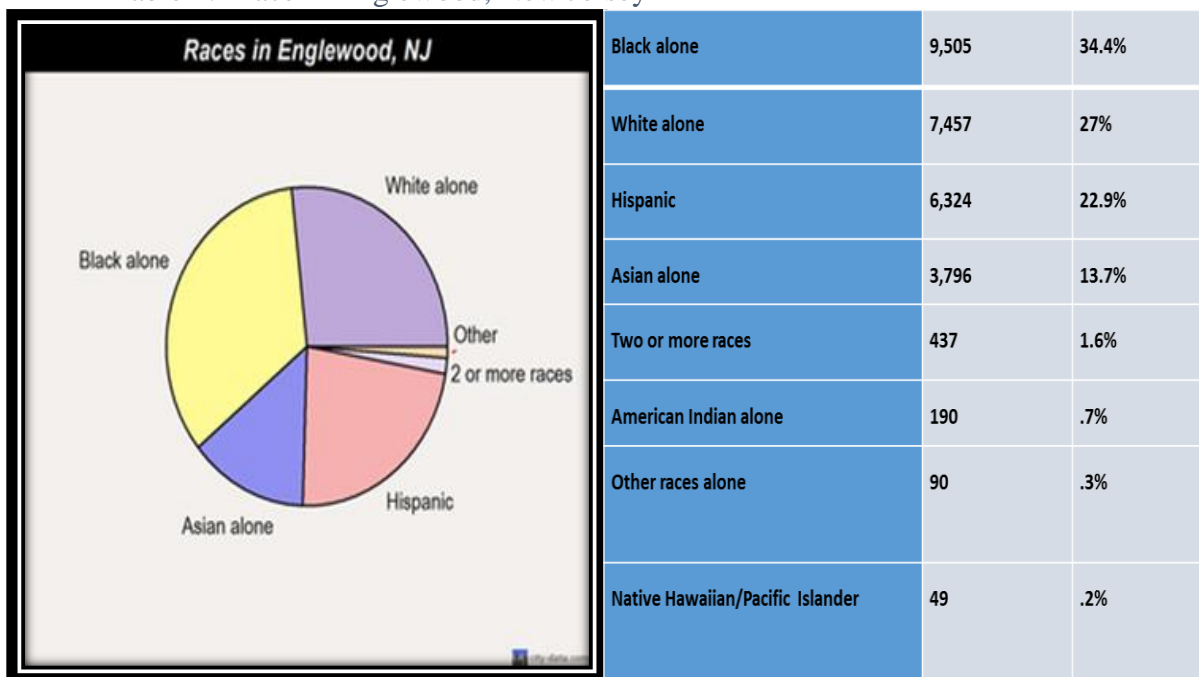
Population 2012	27,605
Persons under 18 years old (2000)	22.2%
Persons 65 years old and over(2000)	14.2%

22. Alan Chapman, Businessballs 201, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.businessballs.com/johariwindowmodel.htm>.

23. Englewood, New Jersey, City Data, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Englewood-New-Jersey.html>.

24. U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quick Facts. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates," County Business Patterns, 2002 *Economic Census*, "Minority- and Women-Owned Business, Building Permits, Consolidated Federal Funds Report."

Female persons (2010)	52.6%
White persons (2010)	45.3%
Black persons (2010)	32.6%
Hispanic or Latino persons (2000)	27.5%
Foreign born persons (2008-2012)	31.8%
Black-owned businesses (2007)	16.5%
Hispanic-owned businesses (2007)	19.2%
Male Polupation 12, 927	47%
Female Population 14, 606	53%
Median Resident Age	37.7 years

Table 2: Race in Englewood, New Jersey²⁵

25. Englewood, New Jersey City Data, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Englewood-New-Jersey.html>.

Figure 2: Language Use in Englewood, New Jersey²⁶

- 61.3% of residents of Englewood speak English at home.
- 20.0% of residents speak Spanish at home
- 18.0% of residents speak other language at home
- 47.8% (2,468 residents) Speak English well
- 52.2% (2,692 residents) Speak English less than very well
- 70.5% of English speaking residents born elsewhere speak Spanish at home
 - ✓ 65.2% Speak English less than very well
 - ✓ 12.7% of residents speak other language at home
 - 23.7% Speak English less than very well

The demographic make up of Refuge Temple's congregation is a predominate population of African-American women who are not the left-overs, but the stay-behind from church split 10 years ago. Their presence is a statement of intent and not one of consequence. They are members because they choose to be. None of the congregation's members live in the immediate community of the ministry site, as everyone drives to Englewood, for some as far away as 60 miles. The neighborhood's ethnic population has changed radically over the past twenty years, from African Americans and Caribbean Islanders to Hispanics and Middle Easterners. The decline in membership severely affects the financial posture of the congregation as the majority of the members are retired and live on the fixed incomes of their Social Security benefits. The lack of revenue can be seen in the deteriorating condition of the facility. The congregation currently shares its facility with a growing Hispanic fellowship, organic to the geographical neighborhood.

26. Ibid.

The genesis of the shared space was not a deliberate attempt to foster ties with the surrounding Hispanic community but more of a necessity for space. The level of integration was initially minimal, as older members were openly antagonistic towards the Hispanic people but now have matured into a relationship of combined fellowship.

Refuge Temple Ministry Assessment

Below is a chart listing C. Peter Wagner's Seven Vital Signs as a tool for assessing congregational movement and Bill Huebsch's Five Dimensions of a Pastoral Plan for congregational movement. Separately, each list appears as no more than a checklist for "how to" build a congregation, but upon closer examination one can see the symmetry between both. It is in the boundaries of both where possibilities begin to emerge.

Figure 2: C. Peter Wagner's Seven Vital Signs and Bill Huebsch Six Dimensions

C. Peter Wagner's Seven Vital Signs	Bill Huebsch Six Dimensions
1. <i>A pastor who is a possibility thinker and whose dynamic leadership has been used to catalyze the entire church into action for growth.</i>	1. <i>Worship (liturgy)</i>
2. <i>A well mobilized laity which has discovered, developed and is using all the spiritual gifts for growth.</i>	2. <i>Service (pastoral care of souls)</i>
3. <i>A church big enough to provide the range of services that meets the needs and expectations of its members.</i>	3. <i>Administration (buildings and financial management)</i>
4. <i>A proper balance of the dynamics relationship between celebration, congregation and cell.</i>	4. <i>Word (education, schools and sacrament preparation)</i>
5. <i>A membership drawn primarily from one homogeneous unit.</i>	5. <i>Opportunities for deeper communion (retreats and encounters)</i>
6. <i>Evangelistic methods that have to make</i>	6. <i>Sustaining the excited faith (adult faith gathering).²⁸</i>

<p><i>disciples.</i> 7. <i>Priorities arranged in biblical order.</i>²⁷</p>	
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Both Wagner and Huebsch attest to the value of worship. Wagner refers to it as a mobilized laity in celebration, while Huebsch names it as liturgy. This component of ministry functions well at Refuge Temple. Refuge Temple is able to attract visitors, however, is not able to gain their sustained commitment towards membership. Huebsch refers to liturgy and worship as the first dimension of a pastoral plan. Preaching has to be the key component to congregational development and church growth. Although Refuge Temple is a small congregation, it would be better served if it had a secondary team of ministers who could function in a pastoral care role in administering Word and Worship to augment the pastor or as a substitute for the pastor when he is unavailable. The ministry team bench strength is consistently limited to only one person.

Wagner calls for a church that is big enough to provide the range of services that meets the needs and expectations of its members, while Huebsch lists pastoral care of souls as the second dimension. They both point to the necessity for providing services to the disabled, daycare for parents, hospital visitation, and any of the demands that a parishioner might have for their pastoral care provider. Refuge Temple did not score well in this area. The pastor is a bi-vocational minister who lives more than an hour away from the ministry site and even farther from the community in which the congregation

28. Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Visions: Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation* (New London, CT; Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 57-80.

27. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 159.

lives. The delivery of pastoral care—beyond congregation Word and Worship—is erratic at best and focused predominately on hospital visitation and funerals while leaving visitation to the home-bound or disabled summarily unattended.

Huebsch inserts the practical matters of buildings, money, and administration into the equation of ministry planning and development. Since Refuge Temple owns its property, it has an inherent responsibility for building maintenance and ministry salaries. Although Refuge Temple is a congregation of fewer than 25 active members, it remains fiscally solvent in spite of the fact that not all parishioners tithe consistently. Refuge Temple restructured its financial management committee and enabled a shared fiduciary responsibility so that no one person maintains control of church funds and that the financial information is fluid and readily available for scrutiny. Although the church has funds for benevolence and scholarship, there has been no distribution of these funds over the past five years. Consequently, Refuge Temple does not function in a way that demonstrates the mission of the Gospel towards the poor and needy.

Thom Rainer's research in his book, *High Expectations*, revealed the Sunday School as being the most effective method at closing the back door of the church and assimilating individuals into the life of the congregation.²⁹ One of the things that the Catholic Church is well known for is its indoctrination and education formation. Catechetical instruction is as familiar to parish life as sacrament. Catholic schools capture children early for religious education even when a school is not present. Religious education is a component that remains permanently fixed in Catholic family worship. By

29. Thom Rainer, *High Expectations* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 23.

any stretch of imagination, Sunday School is at the heart of the future growth of the church because of its outreach potential for youth. Teaching other believers (Matthew 28:20) is implicit to the commission of ministry. In Sunday School, scripture has an opportunity to be revealed in a Biblical context unlike that of preaching. Like Refuge Temple, churches across America are facing the demise of what once was the bedrock of Christianity.

Community Religious Assessment

According to a new study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the nation's spiritual landscape may be becoming a little less religious. Some 45 million people or one-fifth of the U.S. adult population, now say they belong to no church in particular. Six percent of them are either atheist or agnostic.³⁰ In an era of declining church attendance, there are many prophets, pastors, and pundits who purport to understand the underlying reasons for why the church is no longer a culturally relevant centerpiece of society. Many have suggested that the nation is shifting away from its Christian roots, and thus churches are declining consequently to smaller proportions of the population who believe in God and have an active practicing faith in God. Some suggest that, with the proliferation of technology and remote presence, many people have the option to receive their spiritual substance and nourishment asynchronously, on-demand, and at their convenience. There are others that have tended to shy away from or have completely turned from organized religion and mainline denominational churches

30. "Losing Our Religion," Lee Cowan, CBS News, aired December 16, 2012, on CBS, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/losing-our-religion/>.

because they are skeptical of the motives, intents, and actions of church leaders and ministries; and believe that church leaders are overly concerned about politics, wealth, and power. Scandals have headlined the media when preachers have been exposed in twists involving sex, abuse of power, money and lavish lifestyles. Preachers acting badly have promoted mistrust and a reduction in the level of esteem once commonly reserved for clergy. The church is no longer viewed as the one place where the world can look to in order to find its direction in a cosmopolitan society of idealists whose social motto is “Live and Let Live.” Although an issue can be made of the statistical summation of the declining church, evidence suggests that there is not only a cultural shift that is occurring in mainline denominational churches, but also within the Pentecostal church. Church leaders may be unaware of the slow, incremental abatement of the standards and practices that at one time were prominent and paramount. A declining church attendance may reflect the absence of commitment and the lack of meaning found in the traditions and practices of Christianity in general and in holiness in particular. Simply stated, people may no longer believe that the lifestyle boundaries imposed by the traditions of the past are necessary for life and living within a community of faith. People may tend to set aside personal and spiritual standards in order to fit comfortably into a social normalcy that promotes compliance and adherence to the agenda of the majority. Perhaps because of media technology, pastoral theology and church doctrine is no longer hoisted from the pulpit as a declaration for separation between the church and the world’s community. People can and do regularly participate in church services without acclaiming to the denominational or theological tenants of that church.

The 2014 Religious Landscape Study is a follow-up to an equally extensive survey on religion in America, conducted in 2007. An initial report on the findings from the 2014 study, released in May 2015, described the changing size and demographic characteristics of the nation's major religious groups. This report focuses on Americans' religious beliefs and practices and assesses how they have changed in recent years.³¹

The growth of the religiously unaffiliated, the growing share of people who exhibit low levels of traditional forms of religious observance, is demographically broad-based. The level of religiously committed – as measured by respondents' self-assessments of religion's importance in their lives, frequency of prayer and religious attendance – has declined among men and women, college graduates and those with less education, married and unmarried respondents, people in every region of the country and people with various racial and ethnic backgrounds.³² Among Christians, two-thirds say many religions can lead to eternal life, and most of them (50% of all Christians) say some non-Christian religions can lead to life everlasting. The view that some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life is held by roughly two-thirds of Catholics (68%) and mainline Protestants (65%), as well as 59% of Orthodox Christians. Fewer members of the historically black Protestant tradition (38%), evangelical Protestants (31%) and Mormons (31%) say some non-Christian religions can lead to salvation.³³

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

Figure 4: How the US Public Became Less Religious”.³⁴

Wagner calls for a mobilized laity which has discovered, developed and is using all the spiritual gifts for growth, while Huebsch calls for opportunities for deeper communion with God. Both point to discovering methods that are designed to produce the same effect, which is more learning towards a deeper faith. This involves the integration of the horizontal and vertical axis in Christian discipleship. The vertical axis represents humankind revelation and relationship with God while the horizontal axis represents the relationship between and among our fellow man and woman. This

34. “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious,” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, November 3, 2015, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

dimension is geared to facilitate a practical approach to living a spiritual life as a consequence of understanding the relationship between both.

Huebsch's final dimension is sustaining the excitement of faith. Wagner equivalently purports that a pastor who is a possibility thinker, and whose dynamic leadership can be used as a catalyst, can offer the excitement needed to move the entire church into action for growth. Both approaches point to the fact that there is a champion who leads by personal involvement in getting hearts and hands together. One of the challenges at Refuge Temple is that new excitement for octogenarians may be the last thing they are looking for. They have lived their exciting days and are now expecting to go be with the Lord gracefully and faithfully as a member of the faith community. However, there are several members in their 40's who may well enjoy some spiritual stimulation through adult faith gatherings. It was within this age group where the most traction was created in the formation of small groups.

Bridging the Gap

In his book, *I Am a Church Member*, Thom Rainer proposes approaches to the problem of declining attendance. Three of them were used in creating an adult faith formation team. Rainer called for the following:

1. Raise the expectations of membership. You may be surprised how many church members do not really think it is that important to be an active part of the church. No one has ever told them differently.

2. Require an entry class for membership. By doing so, the church makes a statement that membership is meaningful. The class should also be used to state the expectations of what a committed member looks like.

3. Encourage ministry involvement. Many members become less frequent attendees because they have no ministry roles in the church. They do not feel like they are an integral part of the church.³⁵

At Refuge Temple, Sunday School was at an all-time low in attendance. In the future, replacing Sunday School on alternating weekends with a fellowship-driven small group, geared at increasing the level of intimacy among existing and prospective members, could replace a didactic lead teaching format. Bill Easum and John Atkinson in *Go Big with Small Groups*, questions what will help someone grow closer to the Lord? Is it a combination of love, service, and fellowship, or just Bible knowledge?³⁶ Refuge Temple has nothing to lose, at this juncture, in changing the Sunday School schedule by integrating small group formation into an alternating schedule. A faith formation group can easily form around real life issues that challenge the Christian faith walk. Henry Cloud and John Townsend point to deciding on what purpose and type of group would help determine the issue of balancing process versus structure (experience versus truth). One thread involves how the group imparts truth and the other is how much emotional

35. Tom Ranier, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2009), 19-20.

36. Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *Go Big with Small Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 14.

closeness is right for the group.³⁷ Since the group will be forming around spiritual growth they will bring their daily lives (personal, emotional, psychological, and spiritual) and struggles into the meetings. Cloud and Townsend point out that the group's emotional and spiritual needs may vary and that Refuge Temple should adopt a structure that best suits the group members, thereby the group is designed for its members' good.³⁸ Forming a Refuge Temple team and creating a community for the team involved creating a safe environment where group members can share openly without fear of retribution or shame. Easum and Atkinson suggest that people need to belong to before they can believe in.³⁹

Belonging to, before believing in, is an exactly opposite premise from where churches have operated in the past. Perhaps it is based on a similar principle where gangs have effectively recruited and retained its membership amid rampant unemployment, drug infestation and urban violence. Socialization theories suggest that youths who join gangs are socialized into anti-social behavior during or after gang entry. Research suggests that non-anti-social youth may join gangs for reasons of self-esteem, power, or protection, but are encouraged to participate in anti-social behavior by the group after joining.⁴⁰ Offering a place to which people from the community can belong may be initially more valuable than offering them something to believe. Easum and Atkinson

37. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 117.

38. *Ibid.*, 124.

39. Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *Go Big with Small Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 16.

40. Benjamin B. Lahey, Racheal A. Gordon, Rolf Loeber, Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, and David P. Farrington, "Boys Who Join Gangs," *Journal for Abnormal Child Psychology*, 27, no. 4, (1999), 261-276.

clearly state, “Give people the space they need to belong, and you have a good chance of introducing them to Christ.”⁴¹

Creating community around new believers and the unchurched is a critical step in bridging the gap. New believers or the unchurched do not know what to expect in their faith walk and may be eager to have the benefit of someone else who has traveled the same road that they are now on befriend them. Easum and Atkinson say that trust is built by loving and accepting others just where they are and then life changes through biblical principles. They stress welcoming persons who are the farthest from God, not the closest.⁴²

Refuge Temple is best suited for a small group to deepen its understanding of each of our call as a disciple and to make discipleship a priority in our congregation.

Professor Ciangio emphasized that Ministry Communities are formed to:

- Understand that ministry flows from baptism, prayer, community and study
- Help ministers reflect on and evaluate their ministries, spiritual growth, and benefits of those being ministered to
- Do ongoing planning and development of the parish’s ministry
- Develop an understanding of accountability as a team.⁴³

41. Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *Go Big with Small Groups*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 16.

42. Ibid.

43. Donna Ciangio, *Topics in Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality, WSP 960*, (Class Notes), July, 2014.

Refuge Temple's first priority was to center and agree on who we are as a community and determine how we wanted to be projected to the outside world community. It proved prudent to survey the congregation to concretely determine what needs were pertinent to future viability (congregation survey is provided in the appendices.) Cloud and Townsend discuss connecting the dots with what people say, watching for meaning and watching for symbols in their behavior as guidelines to help manifest what may be hidden about the church's self-identity.⁴⁴ They stress the ability to draw out themes and make connections between what is said and what is seen in order to interpret identity accurately. The Lay Advisory Committee worked well to determine the level of commitment within the congregation to finding new and creative ways of reaching others for Christ.

The Lay Advisory Committee was used to facilitate the work of a ministry team to spearhead a new initiative for outreach. The Lay Advisory Committee was dual purposed in that it functioned primarily as the governing body for the research project and secondarily as the ministry committee for outreach operations. As facilitator, I provided guidance and focus for the long-term objective as well as the short-term deliverables. Immediate first steps included:

- (a) a planning meeting that focuses on our vision for our preferred future and what we want to be different;
- (b) describing the desired outcome in great detail;
- (c) identify how success or progress would be measured;

44. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 185.

- (d) act on one step at a time;
- (e) monitor results and record when change began;
- (f) recognize and reward results; and
- (g) continue setting new goals with new actions.

Solution-focused change entailed building a bridge between successes in the past to success in the future. Refuge Temple's planning focused on taking small steps forward instead of a big leap. Taking small steps has the advantage of being easy and requires low energy, little motivation, and small risk. One small improvement unexpectedly brought about the opportunity for greater positive change.

CHAPTER 3

A NARRATIVE OF THE TABLE

The sacrament of Christ's table is without question one of the central themes Christianity celebrates before the world. For Christianity, the table is the point of intersection between what the community (the world) is and who Christ is and what he offers. Without the table or the offering, then the church has no form and is void of purpose and power to reach its intended audience—the world. Without the table or bread, then the community does not gather to witness what is proclaimed and God's house is potentially reduced to a mere house of bartering where the business of the world gets transacted. Without the table then the surrounding humanity ceases to function as community with commonality that binds its likenesses together. Hence, the table functions as a gathering mechanism that connects and transforms singular individuals into groups and parts of the same body. The bread is the object of the gathering. The table functions both as a static and a dynamic altar; a static altar upon which the sacrifice is offered and a dynamic altar around which there is perpetual motion towards one another and towards Christ as the offering. The table is both a distinct location that is a point of demarcation between the faithful and the faithless; and it is a point of convergence where the comingling of that which is holy actively attracts and engages that which is not. Christ's table does not become Christ's until it appears into view by a gathered

community in such a way that Christ is made visible and extends the invitation for all to come and dine.

When the disciples were urging Jesus to eat, Jesus responded by saying, “I have food to eat that you nothing about.”¹ Jesus was saying that just as one takes food and water into their physical body and it brings physical life there is also food to take spiritually to bring spiritual life. Jesus explained that his food was to do the will of him who sent him and to finish his work. Refuge Temple’s new imagined future has to be committed to the same purpose; the will of God. As the gathered community sits around the table it is much similar to that of sitting at King David’s table as described in II Samuel chapter 9. Arranged around the room sat the mighty men of valor who stood by and fought with the king in all his wanderings, campaigns and battles. All of them were heroes and mentioned by name in the chronicles of the king.² At the head of the table sat the king. The king was a shepherd, a killer of beasts and men, the melodious singer, the rhythmic poet, the composer, the skillful musician, a temple architect, a warrior who never stood behind, a leader who always stood at the front of the battle, a skilled tactician, an abled general, a brilliant strategist, the great administrator, a loyalist after God’s own heart, and the anointed shepherd of Israel. Seated at the king’s right and left hands, one would find his sons—princes of the greatest king in the Mediterranean world. Also seated at the table was Mephibosheth, a living descendent of the slain King Saul. He was a condemned man. Knowing as Mephibosheth did, that he was as good as a dead

1. John 4: 32, *The Holy Bible*; New International Version, by Biblica, Inc., 2011, accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=4John+32>.

2. 2 Samuel 23: 8-39, *The Holy Bible*; New International Version, by Biblica, Inc., 2011, accessed February 11, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Samuel+23>.

man, but the King declared his safety while seated at the king's table. Ordered to sit only at the king's table restored Mephibosheth to a place of honor enjoyed only by son-ship. For Mephibosheth, the king's table represented a place of grace. Condemned in a house under judgment but saved by the grace of a table, undoubtedly enabled Mephibosheth's vision to discern the king as someone more than a king; he may have seen him as a savior.



Figure 5: Image of King David at the Table³

In a similar manner, Christ, who is the Lord of the table, gathers the community, not merely to satisfy its physical appetite, but to satisfy the inward soul. It is at the table where the community comes into awareness that its hunger is for unnatural bread; one that is unrecognizable from afar. It is at the table where the awakening spiritual

3. "King David at the Table," Philip Yordan, produced by Samuel Bronston, (film clip, Bing jpeg Images; Bible Films, accessed January 3, 2016, <http://biblefilms.blogspot.com/2006/03/king-of-kings-1961.html>).

consciousness reveals that humanity cannot live by bread alone.⁴ Humanity comes to the table to witness, to hear and to feast upon bread that is other worldly; bread that is life but not just part of this life; yet, it is the bread of life.

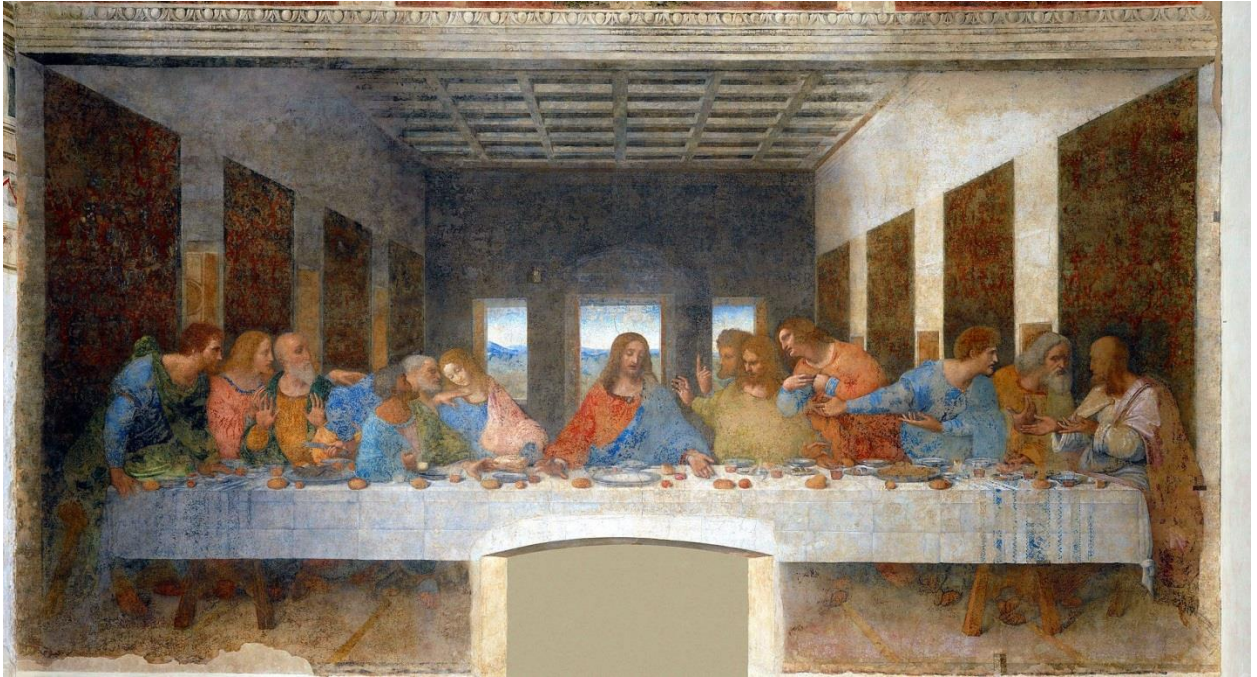


Figure 6: The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci⁵

In one form or another, bread is a recurring symbol of life in the Bible because it was the staple food of ancient times. One of the first indications of the value of the bread of life is hidden in the miracle of feeding the Israelites during the Egyptian exodus. Manna was food that God gave miraculously to the Hebrews in the desert after the food they had brought with them ran out. Exodus 16: 11 records that, “The LORD said to

4. Matthew 4: 4; *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, Biblica, Inc., 2011, accessed February 14, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Matthew%204%3A4>.

5. Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, Última CenaII.jpg, 1498, (picture, Florence, Italy: Museum of Art, accessed January 3, 2016, <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html/html/leonardo/03/4lastsu1.h>

Moses, I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, “At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”⁶ The people of Israel called the bread manna (μάννα τό), meaning “what is it?”⁷ Interestingly, they were familiar with it, saw it, ate it, used it, consumed it and lived by it but could not discern what it was. For forty years its origin, composition and substance remained hidden from the people whose exposure to it meant their survival. Upon reaching the border of Canaan, manna stopped the next day and was never seen again. It is understandable why the Israelites would call manna the bread of heaven.

More than 1,000 years later, Jesus repeated the miracle of providing bread in feeding the crowd of 5,000 men (not including women and children) in the wilderness when he multiplied a few loaves of bread and pieces of fish until everyone had eaten their fill.⁸ Only the men were counted in the gospel’s account of the story but when women and children are added, the crowd could possibly number as great as more than 20,000.⁹ Comparatively, the disciples of the New Testament gospel text could have been as lost as their ancestors who wandered in the desert for 40 years after the Exodus. They too neither understood, nor discerned the origin or purpose of the bread that had been provided. God provided manna that appeared on the ground to feed them in the Exodus for forty years.

6. Exodus 16: 11; Holy Bible; New International Version, by Biblica, Inc.; 2011, accessed January 3, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+16%3A11-15&version=NIV>.

7. Robert L. Thomas, *NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, (Lockman Foundation, 1998), accessed January 3, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/3131.htm>.

8. Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15; *The Holy Bible*; New International Version, Biblica, Inc., 2011, accessed January 3, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search>.

9. Whitney Hopler, “Miracles of Jesus: Feeding the 5,000,” *Angels & Miracles*, (About, Inc., New York, NY), accessed January 16, 2016, <http://www.about.com/help.htm>;

Jesus broke five loaves with bread left over. Both Old and New Testament the people of God met their physical need for bread, but the miracles of bread hide a far more superior offering than bread alone. The miracles allude to the need and supply of spiritual food. Both people of God, in two different time periods, had been exposed to the element of the bread of life.



Figure 7: "The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes" by James Tissot, circa 1894, public domain

This miraculous feeding of the multitude was but another sign that Jesus may have been more than who they saw. He was and is the bread of life. The thousands of people who witnessed this miracle didn't fully understand Jesus' purpose in performing it. Verses 14 and 15 record: "After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew to a mountain by himself.¹⁰ The

10. John 6:1-15, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc., accessed January 3, 2016, Internet, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search>.

people did not understand that he was a spiritual king and that they had been invited to his table in the sharing of supernatural bread. They saw him only as a military leader who could overthrow the Romans. In this instance, it appears possible that one can partake of the bread at the table and not perceive who Jesus is as the bread of the table. Jesus' concealed departure from among them into a place of solitude and seclusion may have been an easy feat as a consequence of their lack of discernment and perception. They were with bread but blind to its presence and origin. It is perhaps in this same way that for as often as communities of faith celebrate communion, the presence and movement of Christ is still undiscerned around and upon the table.

John 6:1-15 provides clearer details toward the point I emphasize. Verses 8 and 9 record that, "Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'"¹¹ It could be that it was a young boy who had a perception unshared by any of the adults around him. Although the five loaves of bread and two fish weren't nearly enough to feed thousands of people for lunch, perhaps the young boy saw something about Jesus that unlocked the mystery of his presence. I suppose that the young boy gave what he had and trusted Jesus for solving the rest of the problem of feeding so many hungry people.

The Bible records another famous miracle that has become known as feeding the 4,000 in two books of the Gospels: Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 8:1-13. According to this text in Mark 8:1-13, Jesus decided to multiply the food that his disciples had with

11. Ibid.

them -- seven loaves of bread and a few fish -- to feed 4,000 men, plus many women and children who were there.¹² Just as in the earlier miraculous event where Jesus multiplied the food from a boy's lunch to feed more than five thousand people, here too, such an abundance of food was created that much was left over. Bible scholars believe that the amount of the leftover food is symbolic in both cases: Twelve baskets were left over when Jesus fed the 5,000 and 12 represents both the 12 tribes of Israel from the Old Testament and Jesus' 12 apostles from the New Testament. Seven baskets were left over when Jesus fed the 4,000, and the number seven symbolizes spiritual completion and perfection in the Bible.¹³

Jesus questioned the disciples' understanding about his miracles with the bread. "When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, 'Twelve.' "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, 'Seven.' And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'"¹⁴ The answer to the questions he posed secondarily are revealed in verse 18 which preceded the question. In it, Jesus questioned: "Having the bread is not visible through physical eyes and ears, rather it is spiritually discerned. Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye

12. Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-13. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc., accessed January 3, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/>.

13. Taylor Marshall, "What is the meaning of the 12 and 7 baskets left over from the feeding of 5000 and 4000?"; (weekly podcast, Catholic Information Center, Washington, D.C.; accessed February 19, 2016, <http://taylormarshall.com/2015/02/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-12-and-7-baskets-left-over-from-the-feeding-of-5000-and-4000.html#more-5917>).

14. Mark 8: 18-21, New International Version, *The Holy Bible*, 2011 Biblica, Inc., New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc., accessed January 3, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/>.

not?”¹⁵ Here Jesus suggested by his question that discernment of the provision of bread is completely perceptible. Jesus’ obvious desire is that they would be able to understand. It is at this precipice where, perhaps, the chasm between the natural and the spiritual is revealed. It is possible to understand. Another example of Jesus’ inference of understanding is recorded in the Mark 8: 27, “Who do men say that I am?” Jesus asked his disciples, and again “But whom say ye that I am?”¹⁶ Peter’s acknowledgment and discernment is enjoined by silence. Peter’s awareness is acknowledged in Matthew’s recording of the Gospel in Matthew 16:17, “Blessed are you Simon, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my father in heaven.”¹⁷ Matthew’s recording also depicts that Jesus’ identity remained concealed. In this case, spiritual identity is known at least by one disciple, yet concealed from the rest of the world. Jesus’ identity though seemingly concealed, is yet knowable.

Rationalist scholars reject the miracles of the gospels and claim that violations of the laws of nature were impossible, that miracles could not happen. Super-naturalists on the other hand, defended not only the historical accuracy of the biblical accounts, but also the element of direct divine causation. For them, the miracles were exactly what they appeared to be: divine interventions. Having rejected both the rationalist and super-naturalist approaches, David Friedrich Strauss, *Miracle and Myth* argues for a mythical approach of explaining the miracle of feeding 5000 men. Rather than reporting something that really happened (with either a rational or supernatural explanation), for

15. Ibid.

16. Mark 8: 27, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011, Biblica, Inc., accessed January 5, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208:27>.

17. Matthew 16: 17, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011, Biblica, Inc., accessed January 5, 2016, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+16%3A+17&version=NIV>.

him, the text has a different purpose. Namely, the text uses the imagery of the early church's inherited religious and literary tradition (the Hebrew Bible as a whole, and in this particular case, the story in Exodus 16.13–36 of God feeding the people of Israel in the wilderness with manna) to make a statement about the spiritual significance of Jesus. That is, the point of the text is not to report what Jesus did on a particular day, but to make the claim that Jesus is 'the bread of life' who feeds his followers with "spiritual food" even to this day.¹⁸ Strauss points out that many of the gospel narratives are mythical in character, and that "myth" is not simply to be equated with "falsehood". This reasoning has become part of mainstream scholarship.¹⁹ Professor Borg, purports that what was wildly controversial in Strauss's time may now have become one of the standard tools of biblical scholarship.

For me, growing up as a child of poor sharecroppers, money was always scarce in our home but there were two things that were constant: a table to gather around and bread to share. There was no meat for every meal, but there was always bread. Bread was a part of our daily meals together as a family. The table was the family gathering place for morning and evening meals. Breakfast was always hastened by the threat of the soon arriving school bus, so its movement was abrupt and jerky and its language hurried. For me, it always carried an unwelcomed tense atmosphere filled with angst over unfinished homework or over the lack of preparation for an exam. The breakfast table was always future-focused and the day's future was shared around pieces of bread. Supper, however,

18. Marcus J. Borg, "*David Friedrich Strauss's Miracle and Myth*," *Religion is the Fourth R*, (Polebridge Press, Westar Institute, Vol. 4-3, May–June, 1991), accessed January 10, 2016, <https://www.westarinstitute.org/resources/the-fourth-r/david-friedrich-strauss>.

19. *Ibid.*

was a completely different arrangement altogether. It was a reflective gathering where every participant was primed with their own narrative of the day's events. It was the collective narratives that we compiled into a series of harmonious stories that today we call growing up at our table.

When the table was set and everybody had gathered the family ritual was to pray the prayer of thanksgiving and blessing. It was at the table where we learned to give thanks; first collectively and then individually. Everybody had their own scripture verse to recite. I did not know it then, but the habit of memorizing scripture was a beginning process of repeating the narrative of our faith. It was a training ritual to keep the narrative fresh and to allow it to become embedded in our memory, so that at the appointed time, the text could or would birth spiritual discernment. Although a long time in coming, discernment became completely possible.

Michael L. Cook, in *Christology as Narrative Quest*, points out that in the gospel of Mark, Jesus—on occasion—would instruct both the crowd and the disciples. In the gospel of Mark, the apostle illustrates the lack of perception on the disciples' part as Jesus provided more and more details about his purpose and his future. Mark (8:22-10:52) shows where Jesus predicts his passion and resurrection but the disciples don't understand (8:32-33; 9:32; 10:35-41), and Jesus then gives the disciples further teachings (8:34-9:1; 9:33-50; 10:42-45). Mark's gospel, 9:30-37, furthers the revelation of Jesus' identity, using the title "Son of Man" (Daniel 7:13). There can be no doubt in Mark's gospel that Jesus is no ordinary rabbi. Yet the disciples are confused. As the blind are given sight in Jesus' miracles similarly, so too are the disciples who are blind to Jesus' mission and identity. Even in the face of the miracle of feeding the five thousand, the

disciples don't understand it (6:52). Jesus rebukes their lack of understanding several times (7:18, 8:16-21), and perhaps most poignantly, in 8:33 to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan, for you think human thoughts, not the thoughts of God".²⁰ Even though they make up Jesus' most private inner circle, the disciples seemed to be the last to understand who Jesus was as the Messiah.

At home there were often times when strangers were at our table. Everyone was welcomed. The guests were offered their fill of whatever was on the table first. They were made to feel invited and valued by being served first. Our family table and our story is not unlike that which the Lord shared with the disciples first and the family of God now. In an instant, the table is positioned in our past, present, and future. The table is the thread of continuity in the narrative that makes the event a living one. My story gives rise to being able to hear the New Testament story and enables the text to be transformative in a way that allows it to be projected from the past into the present and well into the future. When the listening audience becomes part of the story through hearing it being preached, then the narrative has traversed time and space and has become a part of a new narrative. It recreates itself anew, much like a seed. A seed only reproduces itself when planted.

Michael Cook cites Thomas Aquinas's thrust to "give the most exacting account of Christian faith as it relates to realities...facilitating the birth of an environment for academic professional theology which seeks for logical and grammatical consistency in

20. Mark 8:33, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, accessed February, 10, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/mark/8-33.htm>.

telling the story of Jesus.”²¹ It is my contention that textual consistency is not the carrier wave that allows for the transmission of the Jesus story from the past to the future; rather, it is the human experience and connection between different social, cultural and ethnic contexts. The meaning is conveyed by the similarity and the sameness, albeit from different contexts. Once commonality of meaning is achieved then continuity occurs as a by-product. We share meals together as a family at home and at Church because eating and drinking are essentially social activities. The activities around a table and over a meal cement relationships and strengthen the sense of unity as a community. Family gatherings and festivals were neither a new tradition in the Hebrew culture during Jesus’s lifetime nor are they new to modern culture today. There is sameness about both even though the cultural and time gap may well be over two thousand years. Jesus’s story employs the setting of a very ordinary event and transforms it into something extraordinary. It is the narrative that lifts the ordinary from its bonds and transfers it into a place of prominence.



Figure 8: Clinical Pastoral Education Residency Class of 2013 at Einstein Medical Center, Philadelphia, PA (left to right) Derek Solberg, Robert Miller, Rita Milburn-Dobson, Racel Sommer, George Akins, Jr.

21. Michael L. Cook, *Christology as a Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 35.

Taking time to eat together and to be with each other is a sign of the value that one person places on others. In examining a few accounts when Jesus ate with people, it is found where he (1) turns water into wine at a wedding feast; (2) welcomed the unwelcomed by the rest of society, (e.g., tax collectors and prostitutes); and (3) fed five thousand men with 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. Each instance, he is teaching and revealing as they are eating. Jesus used gathering over a meal as a vehicle to convey his story. David Battrick says that, “Jesus took an old Jewish meal that was focused on God’s mercy in the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, and transformed it into an act that looked no longer to the past, but to the future.”²² Jesus taught through the bread and the cup, (signs of his body and blood) that he was being offered as a sacrifice that would inaugurate a new covenant, a new relationship between God and humanity; and there was a consequence to taking part. Eating the bread and drinking the wine meant that the disciples would have a share in what Jesus did and who he was. The bread was his body and the wine was his blood. Anyone who shared in his body and blood are to also share in God’s Kingdom. Today the church still practices the sacrament of the last supper. Perhaps it is in sharing its meaning that Refuge Temple can also share in relationship with its surrounding community.

How is it possible that a common event become a ceremony and transforms the Old Testament Passover as the New Testament Last Supper and into what today is called Holy Communion? I propose that its survival is not in the precision of religious rite or words but in the kinship of the human experience shared over breaking bread together. In some traditions, Holy Communion is celebrated each month as the sacred meal of the

22. David Battrick, “A Sermon on the Sacrament of Holy Communion,” accessed June 2, 2013, <http://www.davidbattrick.org>.

Eucharist. For other Christians, the Last Supper, the Eucharist, and the Mass, are so important that it is celebrated every day. The practices clearly vary, but the single thread that commutes through the various time and context is the story.

They ate the broken bread and drank the cup of wine, not as ordinary food and drink, but as the body and blood of Christ: the names which Jesus himself had given to them on the night before he died. Christians have gone on eating the bread, the body of Christ, and drinking the wine, his blood, as the central act of Christian worship because sharing bread is a central act of our survival as a people.



Figure 9: Eucharist Holy Communion²³

Although there may be little harmony among different Christian practices on the elements of the sacrament or what actually happens in the moment of celebration or even what the celebration is to be properly called, there is, however, one fact that remains constant across the spectrum. It is an experience. Eventually, participants in the

23. David Chidester, *Eucharist Holy Communion*, (picture, Great Britain: *Christianity: A Global Tradition*, Penguin Books Limited, 2000), accessed March 3, 2015, <http://hediedformygrins.blogspot.com/2011/09/eucharist.html>.

Communion develop a deeper understanding of Christ's death and how the church shares in this special remembrance to bind members together as the Body of Christ.

Participating in communion is a deep way of seeing and experiencing God and God's action in these rites. Some congregations reserve Communion for those who are both baptized and confirmed, while others invite all, regardless of baptism or confirmation. It is not uncommon to hear reports of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.^{24 25} Although each faith community may have its own narrative to describe the experience, it appears unquestionable that there is an experience. Although there is disagreement about the theological mechanics of how it happens, it can be surmised that Christ is really present in the Eucharist today and, if today, then Christ can really be present in the Eucharist of future believers just as he has been.

Michael Cook set out to ascertain a response to the question of whether models or narratives are more important to the enterprise of Christology. He points out that systematic reflection need not lead to the priority of system over story and proposes that “all human attempts at systematic conceptualization and formulation have their originating ground in stories...and must constantly return to these stories as the only adequate context for meaning.”²⁶ Cook questions whether narrative is so central to the human experience that it remains as one of the essential ways by which we make sense of

24. Sade Popoola, “Experience after Taking Communion,” accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.josephprince.org/daily-grace/praise-reports/single/family-experiences-healing-after-taking-holy-communion/>.

25. Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historic Parallels,” February 14, 2016, http://works.bepress.com/edward_hahnenberg/18/.

26. Michael L. Cook, *Christology as a Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, MN; The Liturgical Press, 1997), 35.

ourselves and of God. Cook agrees with Terrence Tilley that we live in a world structured by myths and that we need some form of ritual to have a certain stability in life. He further cites Joseph Campbell's explanation as to the necessity of story to give us a comprehensive sense of continuity, order, and participation.²⁷ I agree that we need story to enable the impartation of revelation. Stories are the fundamental building blocks used to invite others into what is a hidden mystery about a concretely-lived life realized through ordinary symbols, practices, and stories. The God of Jesus and the God in Jesus is alive and lives in the actions of relationships of everyday activity, not just in celebratory events like Holy Communion. God is discernible through the eyes and ears that can see and can hear in the narratives of our own experiences. Therefore, the invitation that Jesus extends to come and dine makes contextual sense because of our natural experiences of coming together to dine at the table with family. The table is language from an ordinary narrative that reveals what has been concealed in the realm of God. The narrative that Jesus uses in parables is ordinary language that reveals that which is concealed before one's very eyes. Jesus demonstrates this in the narrative recorded in John 3:1-21 when he teaches Nicodemus that, "... no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."²⁸ Here Jesus uses language that Nicodemus is familiar with already to reveal a meaning that he cannot yet see or understand. Jesus uses the narrative of (a) birth, (b) wind, and (c) of light to illuminate properties of the Kingdom of God so that Nicodemus might perceive. It is in the same manner that we come into contact with

27. *Ibid.*, 49.

28. John 3:1-21, *The Holy Bible*; New international Version, accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.biblestudytools.com>.

the things of the Kingdom of God. The evidence surrounds us and we are enveloped by it and, like the disciples, cannot see it.

Cook's notion that abstract speculation and conceptualization are secondary to the primacy of story when it comes to the development of a Christological understanding of the God-man, Jesus. He emphasizes the utility of text and questions how the image of Jesus is effectively communicated in a variety of historical and cultural circumstances.²⁹ I agree with Cook, in that in order for the text to have a transformative effect upon its audience, then the audience must first personally participate with the text in moving from the immediacy of the words and language experience to a critical appropriation of it becoming a part of the listener's experience. He claims that the full process of appropriation can "only take place when we return to the text with a second, post critical naiveté and "allow" the text's evocative power to be transformative in our lives."³⁰ It is here where I point out that in order to allow the text to have its perfect work then the reading/listening audience must first have an awareness and desire for the experience. This is a critical transition to shift from wherever one has been rooted to moving and wanting to see, wanting to understand, and wanting to experience life from a completely different perspective. To those who were accustomed to being a member of the elite society, Jesus' ministry must have been complete lunacy; but to the hopeless, the outcast and the down-trodden he was the inspiration for liberation and empowerment.

Within the heritage of the Church of God in Christ, it is well documented that the spread of the Pentecostal movement throughout the southern farming communities

29. Michael L. Cook, *Christology as a Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997). 56.

30. *Ibid.*, 57.

kindled like wildfire. It was not so in the industrial north where the socio-economic barometer measured somewhat higher. Poor people of color gravitated towards the experience of a unique impartation of God. The experience amounted to something that may have equalized them to those who had more materially. The culture of the international church today still holds onto its history as a group of small community churches united by a common experience. It is a church which lifts high the name and the person of Jesus in that he is very near and presently interacting in the affairs of everyday life. The Church of God in Christ, in general, and Refuge Temple in particular, still holds fast to the tenants of sanctification. That is, to be set aside for God's use in the world. Although the church lives in a world of carnal vices, the church behaves in a way that reflects that it is not beholden to the practices of the world, thus freeing itself to set an example for the world.

Today our church's identity remains tied to that of a place where the displaced can find a place and where the lost in life can find a life. Although Refuge Temple has a history of ministering to the homeless, hungry and helpless, it appears to do less and less outreach that demonstrates the love of God to draw outsiders to the inside where there is a table of communion. In the geographical community, Refuge Temple attempts to become family to those who are missing from their own family of origin. If Refuge Temple's aim is to become a place where the discouraged can be encouraged and the ashamed will become unashamed, then it can find an identity of its future self around a table with strangers.

Sanctification, for the Pentecostal, is at the core of its identity with Christ. Habits of dress, abstinence from pre-marital sex, alcohol, drugs, tobacco products, and profanity

are all considered standards to help move the believing Christian towards sanctification in being better able to see the kingdom that Jesus described to Nicodemus. These outward behaviors are believed to contribute to the development of an awareness of an inward conversion that holiness contrasts with worldliness. However, there is seemingly a turning away from the language of sanctification towards a language of economic and personal empowerment. It may well be an issue of the loss of narrative. Once, church women wielded the power to confront, as well as the power to comfort. Men were both bearers of responsibility and bearers of the burdens of others. Regionally speaking, the church seems to be shifting away from its foundering heritage and message of holiness. Perhaps the shift in the church's role in post-modern Christianity is directly attributed to the shift in the church's teaching narrative from one of holiness and sanctification to one of empowerment and prosperity. Although there may be more educated members in the church today as there are more college-educated people in society, there also may be less known about God and less awareness about the movement of God in the activities of humanity.

People from the neighborhood and outside community may not be drawn to Refuge Temple by the narrative of concrete experiences or the explicit form of the text preached by the minister. Perhaps people are more drawn to charismatic oratory that is rooted in self-help and pop psychology accompanied by rhythm, beat, and acoustics. The principles of living a sanctified life of holiness may no longer ring in the messages from the pulpit perhaps primarily because there may be a loss in the power of rehearsing foundational and fundamental narratives in the ears of listeners. While all are being

invited to the table, the outside community cannot discern the presence of Christ's body as the bread of heaven presented at the table.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT: PLANNING, EXECUTION AND OUTCOME

Refuge Temple seemed best suited for a type of ministry project to deepen its members' understanding of their calling to form faith and expand discipleship toward the future vitality of its congregation. Professor Donna Ciangio emphasized that Ministry Communities are formed to:

- Understand that ministry flows from baptism, prayer, community, and study;
- Help ministers reflect on and evaluate their ministries, spiritual growth, and benefits of those being ministered to;
- Do ongoing planning and development of the parish's ministry; and to
- Develop an understanding of accountability as a team.¹

Refuge Temple's first priority was to agree on who it is as a faith community and determine how that identity can be projected to the outside world. It proved prudent to survey the congregation to concretely determine the needs thought pertinent to the congregation's future viability. Cloud and Townsend discuss connecting the dots with what people say, watching for meaning and watching for symbols in their behavior as

1. Professor Donna Ciangio, "WSP 960 Topics in Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality," (lecture, Drew university, Madison, NJ, July 10, 2014).

guidelines to help manifest what may be hidden about the church's self-identity.² They stress the ability to draw out themes and make connections between what is said and what is seen in order to interpret identity accurately. Initial committee meetings were set to determine the level of commitment within the congregation to find new and creative ways of reaching others for Christ. The table below lists the composition and membership of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) who worked to identify the needs and desires.

Table 3: Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) Membership

Position	Name
Committee Chairperson	Lisa D. Akins
Church Clerk	Beverly White
Administrative Assistant	Lynn Kitchings
Chairman of Deacon Board	Matthew Yarrell
Deacon	Michael D. Walden
Member	Minnie Kitchings
Church Mother	Henrietta Smalls
Jurisdictional Advisor	Dianne Keel-Atkins
Pastoral Advisor	Pastor Manuel Montero
Chairperson Trustee Committee	Mildred Mitchell (Deceased)

Dates when the Advisory Committee met during the course of the Project are listed below:

Table 4: LAC Meeting Dates

2/15/15	3/4/15	3/8/15	3/15/15	3/25/15
4/8/15	4/19/15	4/22/15	4/29/15	5/6/15
5/9/15	5/13/15	5/16/15	5/20/15	5/27/15
5/30/15	6/3/15	6/10/15	6/17/15	6/24/15

Process, Activities and Learning

Twelve weeks leading up to the project launch date, the focus of the Sunday morning sermons and Wednesday night Bible study was on faith formation within our community context and discovery of future possibilities for both our personal lives and

the life of the congregation. The teaching series focused on Biblical narratives that depict how individuals and groups found themselves in circumstances where they were challenged to pursue other possibilities than the ones they thought most expedient. Studies included Rahab, the prostitute, merging into the families of the Hebrew (Joshua 2); Abraham, when he was called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Genesis 12); Abraham saw in faith what God could do if he believed and obeyed (Hebrews 11); Hannah's pain, petition and practice to produce a priest (1 Samuel 1); the reward of changing positions: fishing from the other side of the boat (John 21: 4-6); and the story of the sower in unlocking the Word of God as seed to possibilities (Mark 4:13). The sermons and lesson series were designed to inspire and cultivate the thinking to imagine change and dare to dream of different conditions by having the courage and commitment to change.

The first outreach event was held on May 9, 2015. The group included the LAC, church members, and members from two sister congregations. The committee met in Depot Square Park in Englewood, New Jersey. The group activity included engaging community residents in conversations and discussions about community life and their personal lives including work, family, recreation and faith practices. While becoming familiar with community residents, the LAC queried residents and completed initial survey forms (see Appendix G). Approximately 50 local residents were interviewed; however, only 18 completed a survey. Of the 18 who completed the survey, 9 agreed to continue to participate in the research project by providing their contact information. There was an apparent language barrier between non-English speaking community

residents and the LAC. None of the LAC spoke Spanish. It was not until members of the sister churches arrived that the LAC could communicate with the Spanish-speaking people at the survey site.

One of the problems noticed is that the Spanish speaking members of the sister church were solely focused on conducting their own outreach initiative. Although both senior pastors had agreed in concept on working together, the execution was not highly synchronized in the implementation and operation on the ground. The activity resulted in having two separate activities by two separate churches. Refuge Temple lacked the ability to cross the language barrier to engage Spanish-speaking community residents.

During the second Depot Square Park community event on May 16, 2015, the LAC planned to conduct a discussion forum utilizing a discussion panel from the LAC members. Panel members were prepared to discuss current hot topics including victims of violence, marital relationships, parenting, sexual behaviors, living single, single parenting and negative church experiences. Because of absent panel members and a sparsely present crowd, no panel discussion was held. Alternatively, the sister Spanish church performed a park concert with a live band. Although the band may have facilitated a greater level of attention, we were yet unable to gather a crowd. People continued to meander through the park with their children or pass through the park en route to the grocery store which was situated less than a block away. More than 90 interviews were conducted and 20 survey questionnaires were completed. Of the 20 questionnaires, 10 responded that they would continue to participate in the project by participating in small group discussions concerning community life and their faith journey.

The third and final community event was scheduled for May 30, 2015, on the campus grounds of Refuge Temple Church, located at 244 Waldo Place. This event was a church open-house held in conjunction with a community cookout. All registered participants were invited to formalize their plan for participation and have an opportunity to meet other project participants. Registered participants were encouraged to select a three-week schedule that best suited their lifestyle, schedule, and living patterns. The schedule options included: Wednesday evening 8:00 pm – 9:00 pm at the church location; Saturday afternoon 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm at an off-site location selected by the group; Sunday morning 11:30 am - 12:30 pm at the church location; or Sunday afternoon 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm at an off-site location selected by the group.

Small group leaders were trained on facilitation techniques and organizing small groups. Facilitator training was conducted utilizing Bill Easum and John Atkinson’s, *Go Big with Small Groups*; Donna Ciangio’s, WSP 960 – “Topics in Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality Class Lecture”; and Henry Cloud and John Townsend’s, *Making Small Groups Work*, as reference resources and training guides.

Table 5: Small Group Training Dates

2/15/15	3/4/15	3/8/15	3/15/15	3/25/15
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Small group meetings were scheduled to be conducted June 1-21, 2015, to begin developing personal relationships. However, none of the registered participants followed-up to participate on any of the scheduled dates. Group facilitators continued personal growth and development throughout the months of June through September in the event

registered participants would seek to start participating. Additional participants were sought for follow-up monthly community events conducted at the Depot Square Park and at the church site. No new participants were recruited and no new events were scheduled. The LAC agreed to continue seeking to form small groups on an ongoing basis and to continue to solicit participant's faith formation journey towards discipleship.

Evaluation of the process entailed weekly after-action reviews that assessed coordination activities and recruitment efforts. It was during the after-action reviews that accountability checks were initiated. It was the work of the LAC to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the strategy as it related to advancing the mission of Christ and insuring the continued vitality of Refuge Temple. It was hoped that a heightened awareness of the need for Refuge Temple's inter-connectedness within the external community would create a desire for interconnection within our internal ministry. The researcher and the LAC have followed the guidelines prescribed in the prospectus.

Situations and Circumstances that Impeded the Progress of the Project

The project experienced difficulties with the schedule and with committed participants, which affected the project outcome. The project timetable was severely impacted by: (a) sickness of three of the church matriarchs, (b) poor weather conditions, and (c) lack of availability of two key LAC members. Of the three matriarchal LAC members, two are sisters and both of them had been cared for by two daughters of one of the matriarchs. Both of the daughters are also LAC members. One of the matriarchal sisters died during the project and the other two matriarchs still receive extensive care from two of the LAC members. Additionally, severe winter weather prevented weekly

services and facilitator training meetings from occurring. Services were cancelled both on Sunday and Wednesday nights during the month of January and February, 2015, due to icy roads, snow, and poor driving conditions. Due to the protracted winter weather season, the LAC leadership thought it would be—at minimum—difficult and—at maximum—impossible to sponsor a community event that was designed to attract the attention and participation of the community residents. Consequently, the launch of the community activity component of the project was delayed for 30 days from its original schedule of March 15-April 26, 2015, to April 20-June 20, 2015.

Another area of difficulty in the project was the unavailability of LAC members. Two of the LAC members had minimal engagement in facilitator-training due to their work schedules. One is an independent cross country truck driver and the other is a security systems engineer for Chase Bank. The work schedule of the LAC member, who is a bank employee, changed after Chase disclosed security breaches in its IT architecture and ATM infrastructure. His lack of availability impacted the developmental operations of the project and has consequently impacted the presence (absence) of a younger adult who could interact with other young adults from the community. The other LAC member, who is a cross-country truck driver, is also the single parent of a teenage daughter. He is a devoted father who lacks the presence and strong support of a parenting partner who may be more adept at parenting a teenage daughter. His devotion to the church remains constant; however, his work schedule and his personal parenting challenges severely inhibited his presence and participation in the project.

Evaluation of the Project from Missionary Lynn Kitchings

My overall evaluation of the project and its impact on the committee and congregation is that the committee and congregation (being one and the same) grew personally by its experiences while carrying out the project. We worked together to think and pray about the community we are in. We reached outside of our borders to gain insight on where our neighbors are in relationship to God, faith, and the church. It provided us with an avenue to continue outreaching to the community and to implement change in the way we may do things in the future. It also gave us a means for purposeful prayer. This is related to the people who allowed us to interview them and continue our communication with them.

The Project's Impact on the Research Candidate from Missionary Lynn

Kitchings

I believe the outcome has been positive in that Pastor Akins continued to pursue with the project in spite of the multiple delays and interruptions. He carefully considered the thoughts and ideas of the members, thereby, making changes to the design of the project. He ensured that we stayed focused on the purpose of the project.

Evaluation of the Project from Sister Lisa DeAnn Akins

Initially, I believe Pastor Akins was optimistic in what we were asked to do. I believe that he imagined that our research would be happily received by the surrounding community. He was very excited to have the church committee executing a community outreach program focusing on faith formation and building the kingdom. After the kickoff, it appeared as if Pastor Akins was surprised at some of the responses we were receiving while out in the community talking to people in the neighborhood. I believe he

expected more from the people and more transparency. I don't believe that his initial experience shattered his hope for the project; rather it made him more determined and encouraged to find ways to accomplish the project's goal. He became more curious and discussed with us ways to become more engaging in order to solicit participation. I strongly believe that our community of focus is comprised of people who are aloof and unwilling to be open about their attitude concerning their faith journey. I think Northern urban people are biased against, and simply unwilling, to actively participate in research about their church activity.

The Projects Impact on the Research Candidate from Sister Lisa DeAnn Akins

Regarding the committee, I initially felt the attitude was that we were just helping out with a project. I'm not sure if, in the beginning, the committee truly grasped the urgent timing of the project and its potential impact on the future of our church. Many of the committee members are stuck in the past and how things used to be done. It was challenging for them to initially embrace and understand that it is not just a project, but also a potential lifeline for growing the church. After being out in the community a couple of times with the committee, I was able to see how their approach changed. They started to have a revelation about all the work that was required to be done in kingdom building. Also they were able to see how the community, where they have been worshiping for over 40 years, had changed. It changed right before their eyes and yet they were unaware. Everyone was surprised! Because of the eye-opening experience, the committee shared their experiences during Sunday morning worship and felt that there was a greater need in the community. The committee proposed that we continue meeting

in the park and conducting community outreach at least once a month after the project ends. This was very refreshing because it appears as if a fire had been lit.

Assessment of the Researcher's Leadership on the Project from Missionary Lynn Kitchings

The Researcher took initiative to educate the Committee, church leaders, and the congregation about the project. It was accomplished via phone sessions, Wednesday night Bible study, and during some pre- or post-Sunday morning services. We were also provided reading materials to understand our roles in the project.

The Research Candidate demonstrated to the congregation the potential benefits of the Project for the life and ministry of the congregation. The strengths of Pastor's leadership have been that he is our first example of how to carry out the project. He entertained our questions, concerns, and insecurities. He encouraged us along the way by consciously noticing our input and the amount of input we gave. He sought to capitalize on our individual strengths as well as provide us with support in areas of insecurity (i.e. documentation on running groups, articles, and books on purposeful small group gatherings).

Pastor Akins shared the results of the research and involved the Committee in its interpretation for the ministry, but only to a limited degree. I believe there is more to learn from the responses we received from those with whom we engaged in the project. For example, we as a ministry should prepare how to respond to the multitude of discontentment of our community concerning their faith, God, and the church. It is a foundation for building true and skilled disciples.

**Assessment of the Researcher's Leadership Communications Skills from Missionary
Lynn Kitchings**

I believe Pastor Akins demonstrated effective and appropriate leadership communications skills. It has been a trying experience, and the congregation is very small. He has not substituted us for a more glamorous group of people. He has remained focused and has kept us involved in the whole picture. My suggestion for improvement is to hear God, as He has given us a tool. I believe Pastor should stir that up with prayer and fasting to seek out, perhaps, more detailed direction. The process has been unconventional for the history of the church. It may guide us to a place of growth in our Christian witness and discipleship.

**Assessment of the Researcher's Leadership Communications Skills from Sister Lisa
DeAnn Akins**

Pastor Akins conducted several face-to-face tutorials and conference-call sessions with the church and the LAC, discussing the scope of the project and its overall goals. It was during our initial tutorial session of the project that it was identified that there were some committee members who were not comfortable, nor had enough experience, to actively participate in the project. Pastor Akins discussed the concerns with the committee members and found 3 books for us to read and discuss to ensure we all had a comfort level when it came to doing the actual work of facilitating. The committee members were very appreciative of the additional reading materials, as well as the tutorial and felt prepared to start the project.

Pastor Akins demonstrated to the congregation the potential benefits of the project. On many occasions he advised the congregation of the many benefits. He expressed the main one as the potential for church growth in sustaining the church for its future viability. He expressed how important it is for the church and church members to participate in this activity, and that it was an opportunity for everyone to take responsibility. Pastor Akins' strengths were that he was steadfast, faithful, and that he was always encouraging the committee to be positive. Pastor Akins' positive attitude was transferred over to the committee throughout the project. I think that was very important, because there were many instances when we received negative feedback while conducting the project. I personally do not feel that Pastor Akins showed any weakness in his leadership during this project's lifespan. Pastor Akins worked sufficiently and stayed engaged with the committee throughout the entire project process but did not direct the conduct of the project. He left the operation up to us.

After every community outreach, Pastor Akins would debrief with the committee on the outcome of the project for that particular event. We would also identify what went well, what we could have done better, and what we observed. He took it a step further and provided a briefing to the church on what took place during the project. He shared some of the details of our findings while participating in this project. On one instance, Pastor Akins shared that the community demographics had changed. The community demographics had shifted, and it appeared that what used to be an African-American and Caucasian community has now changed to a predominantly Spanish community; one that does not speak English. With that said, Pastor Akins shared that it is his interpretation that we would possibly have to incorporate Spanish-speaking services, church activities,

and/or programs in our process. One great idea he shared with the committee and the church was we could possibly start an English speaking class on Saturdays. The committee thought it was a great idea and was excited about developing and starting the course.

Pastor Akins demonstrated effective and appropriate communication skills in his leadership while educating the committee on the project. He was always clear, and he always asked questions to ensure the committee understood what we were asked to do and how we were to do it. Pastor Akins was always available for any questions the committee might have had or redirected the questions if needed. Although this started out as a project for some, I think that it has changed many church members' attitudes and willingness to do more. They were able to see firsthand that there was much work to be done and a lot of people who were hurting and lost.

Researcher's Project Observations

The initial timeline outlined in the prospectus was not feasible to maintain. Weather conditions, coupled with sickness, care-giving responsibilities, and death all contributed to a lag in the schedule. Additionally, the LAC advised that it would be better to wait until late spring to interact with people from the community as inclement weather often prevents people from being outside and being accessible. The delay forfeited the timeline and the grading period for the course. Permission to delay the project launch was asked and granted through the advisor and program director.

I underestimated the level of participation (and the lack thereof) from the community. After two weekends of observing the survey activity, it was clear that the

number of survey-takers was far less than what was anticipated. In addition, the limited number of participants willing to come to small group meetings was dramatically low. Low attendance ultimately resulted in the inability to conduct some small group meetings. Perhaps more time could have been devoted to conducting surveys and more time devoted to interacting with prospective participants to generate a larger pool of candidates who would have agreed to participate in small group meetings.

The language barrier was a huge obstacle. It was never successfully overcome. The community is predominately Hispanic and we have no Spanish-speaking persons on the committee or serving as a member in the church.

The important success of the project rests in the growth of the members of the LAC. They each realized that the methods by which the church engages the unchurched in the community must begin with a conversation and lead to the ability to establish a relationship. Although they were focusing on offering something to the community, what they experienced was something the community was offering to them--an opportunity to open their eyes and minds. The experience was invaluable.

In addition to reading about managing and facilitating small groups and the effects of small groups for faith formation and discipleship, I spent time reading about identifying the unchurched and understanding why the unchurched are the unchurched, about spiritual recovery, reframing theological understanding, accompanying the unchurched, growing an engaged church by being a church that attracts and retains newcomers, preparing the soil of the church for growth, methods of keeping people in the

church, ways to understand and reach people of all ages, becoming a church for all generations, and studying congregations.

Church meetings were held starting in September, 2014, where information briefings were conducted after morning worship outlining the project proposal and soliciting participation and project buy-in. Information sessions provided in-depth details about project planning, implementation, and evaluation. In addition, individual sessions were held with each LAC member to ensure a thorough understanding and commitments were achieved.

I invited the congregation to participate in a community outreach project in which they, along with the LAC, could meet and greet residents from the community. In the process of getting outside the physical walls of our church building, it was discovered that the real learning was in how to establish rapport with each other and with strangers. There was a high level of anxiety for some LAC members reflected in some members being present but watching from afar. Although none of the congregation's older members ever participated in the any of the Saturday afternoon events, they listened and had the opportunity to question and provide input during the Sunday morning congregational briefings. They provided input on techniques and experiences from their past. We celebrated their stories and discussed ways to incorporate their input.

The first impact of the project was one of the congregation's epiphany about its own immediate future has come into sharp focus against its current state. It has created the beginning of a dialog about our collective future and life within our community and geographical context. It was my intent to allow the LAC to own the outreach process,

adopt it as a standard ministry practice, to learn by practice the degree of separation between past behaviors, and to discern what new practices might enable church outreach and the ability to adopt others into the church family.

The project has functioned as a precursor for outlining new tenets of the church's strategic plan for its future outlook. It presents a vivid image of the cultural diversity of the community surrounding the church and the distance between where the surrounding community lives and where the church ministers. Members of the LAC were surprised to learn the racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the community and the lack of similar representation within the current church membership. LAC members were astonished to learn that the now deeply-entrenched Hispanic community has replaced what was once a predominately African-American/African-Caribbean community. Although some Hispanics speak little English, most speak none at all. Often they reported that they do not speak English, but in some cases they spoke limited English. The language barrier presented a profound impediment to ministry in this community context. This experience has given way to examining ways to approach and minister to the Hispanic community. One such way is the possibility of offering English-As-A-Second-Language (ESL) classes to those who seek to improve their language skills.

The number of survey participants, who reported having had a history of a faith practice but currently do not practice their faith, was also astonishing. According to some CBS national reports, there is a growing number of Americans who do not affiliate with any church denomination or religious order. This revelatory information causes us to question whether the church is attempting to offer something that is no longer desired in

this community. The congregation appears to be better able to understand the urgency and the necessity of being able to adopt “strangers” into our church community.

It is uncertain whether this project experience has motivated the congregation to approach ministry differently as in learning to become one church with a Hispanic denomination or relocating into a different neighborhood that is more culturally homogenized. Awareness alone may not be enough to be a catalyst for change. However, as the matriarchs move off of the active church scene, it may create an impact on how the congregation views new ideas and new faces in the congregation. The experience of working closely with the LAC has created new, stronger, and deeper bonds with church members that were unperceivable before the project.

I believe that my leadership allowed the LAC to perform its work and allowed the church to be informed about how it may want to proceed from this point. I believe that the leadership that was provided enabled the church and the LAC to move from within its contained walls to the outside community along a journey of self-discovery. The primary strength of my leadership is that it has enabled a vision to come forth that was not one that I produced and gave the church. It allows for the participation in the development of our future self-vision and potential. A weakness of my leadership is that I am not available to perform the work of this ministry as consistently as a full time pastor might be available to do.

I am solely disappointed in the outcome of the project. I thought that, if we altered the schedule to accommodate the community in a spring-time climate, then people would be willing or curious to participate. The weather may not have been a factor. The ability

to really get at the information about people's faith behavior has to be done in a way where people feel comfortable and willing to share their practices. I think that people are private about their faith practices and would like to convey a more favorable impression held by others than what is actually the truth. Since no small groups were formed, no assessment of the LAC's ability to facilitate small groups could be made. From the feedback received, I overestimated the comfort and confidence level within the LAC to initially engage total strangers in a conversation about their faith practices. It was naïve to suppose that church members inherently possessed those skills.

The best outcome, however, has been seeing the LAC members engage each other and the congregation on their experience and the value it has had in fueling efforts for continued change. Interpreting the research has developed into an ongoing conversation; specifically, in terms of next steps for our faith community and the LAC. There is more conversation that needs to take place in order to formalize change management, techniques and strategies for ministry operations, outreach, and personal growth.

The church members received periodic updates on my academic studies at the conclusion of each class. I began to discuss the need for a Lay Advisory Committee early during the summer semester and began to be more specific after Dr. Donna Ciangio's, WSP 960 – "Topics in Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality" class. It was in her class that the project was formulated. After receiving guidance from my advisor, Dr. Heather Elkins, I was able to develop a vision for the project that was easy to grasp. I tied the project goals and objectives directly to a current challenge we are experiencing in our congregation; one of stagnation without growth. The lack of growth will eventually result

in a loss of membership too great to sustain the future viability of the church. I made the project real for the congregation as opposed to a study.

I understood their anxiety of not knowing, so I believed that I needed to create a bridge between where they felt they were and where they felt they needed to be. I ordered each LAC member a copy of two books: Bill Easum and John Atkinson's *Go Big with Small Groups*, and Henry Cloud and John Townsend's *Making Small Groups Work*. We conducted training sessions on the practice of facilitating small groups to ease their discomfort.

By the time it came to launch the outreach event, each of the members felt fully prepared. They were present, on time, and moved with purpose. Some did not confess their fears until the debriefing at the end of the day. The important thing is that they were able to move past their fears into a place of confidence. As the weeks went by, they became more comfortable and more curious about ways to improve the project and the process. They brainstormed ways to conduct a community panel where they would have discussions about present day issues concerning social justice, parenting, violence, crime, church politics, the social church outcasts, and spiritual hunger. They developed a format to conduct the panel and volunteered to lead specific topics. Their investment was paying off in their involvement. Surprisingly, the investment was being made by people who habitually do not invest themselves. I felt as if ownership had transferred from me to the committee.

Conclusion

The genesis of this project was born out of an observation that there were few young adults between the ages of 20 and 30 attending Refuge Temple in Englewood, New Jersey. The few who were attending did not live in the surrounding community. As the church membership would decline, it became paramount to explore ways to invigorate the surrounding community towards church attendance and to invoke the passion of the church to welcome the outside community into the Refuge Temple family.

After examining ways to interest the church in redefining its future for growth and vitality, we developed two surveys; one for the members of our church community and one for the neighborhood surrounding the church within a 3-4 block vicinity. Both surveys are included in the appendices. The Lay Advisory Committee grew interest and agreed to interview and survey community residents to gather evidence on church attendance. The participating members of the LAC were trained as small group leaders focused on facilitating community residents' discussion groups designed to form a bond among "strangers." Although no community residents committed to participate or participated in the formation of small groups, the bond between the LAC members while working on the project cemented their interpersonal relationships. The experience of unity was consistently reported among the members and has consequently improved the overall sense of community within the congregation.

From the onset, the project was about initiating change in the surrounding community. While there are no new members present from the introduction of, interim, and/or conclusion of this project, the renewed value of unity has produced tangible

changes within the membership itself. There is more of a sense of ownership over what the Refuge Temple ministry does as indicated by the amount of feedback and discussion in ministry planning and focus of opportunities. There is clearly a higher level of engagement and passion among those who fully engaged in the project.

Discovering Solutions

The discovery of reasons why community residents did not choose Refuge Temple as a community church is tied to the lack of involvement Refuge Temple has in the local community. Community residents know the building but have no experience with the people. Consequently, planning for efforts to create first an impression and then a footprint in the community are underway for calendar year 2016.

Additionally, Refuge Temple is involved in a budding relationship with a local Hispanic congregation. Efforts to enrich the congregational ties with the Hispanic congregation must be reflected in joint services and joint community outreach events. While the pastors of both congregations enjoy a brotherly relationship, it remains imperative to create ways to bridge the language barrier between Spanish and English speaking people in the community. One proposed approach to bridging the language gap is to offer English-As-A-Second-Language (ESL) classes. These ESL classes would be free to the public.

It was also discovered that there is a false perception of our church's presence and reputation. Many community residents thought that the church was now a Hispanic congregation because they only see Hispanic people outside working or coming for prayer or worship. It became clear to me that visible activity has meaning in that,

although people may not come to church, they still see the external activities going on around church. Non-Hispanic community residents are more likely to visit a culturally familiar congregation of Jamaican or Haitian ethnicity. It is for this reason that the Hispanic community residents are literally walking in from the streets.

Although Refuge Temple is not deemed as a high society church with members who earn high incomes, have high standards of living, or have a history of high academic achievements; it may be deemed as a church in which some of the community residents felt they did not belong. A strategy to remedy the fractured image of Refuge Temple rests in the ability to decisively engage a marketing and branding campaign for the church, its leader, and its congregation. The historical challenge of Refuge Temple has been the fact that the church's leadership does not enjoy a notable presence in the community. Consequently, community involvement has not been an avenue to gain recognition or respect.

I conclude that the church and its surrounding communities are now in a place to address some of the distractors that have prevented an effective level of engagement between Refuge Temple and the surrounding community. The LAC role remains intact as Refuge Temple looks forward to the process of re-imagining itself in the future of its community life. Consequently, the LAC is proposed as a permanent standing committee charged with the responsibility for continuous process improvement for internal ministry operations.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

The whole of Refuge Temple cannot be reduced to its institutional structure, or to its processes of inclusion or exclusion. It cannot be discerned whether its need for mourning outweighs its need for imagining its future self or whether it can do both at the same time. Its essence exists on a deeper reality, one where the mystery of God's presence to human beings is revealed. The ecclesologist of Romantic Idealism, Johann Adam Mohler (1796-1838), set the stage for modern ecclesiology by offering the question: "What is the relationship between the deeper dimension, the Church as mystery, and the Church's outward historical forms?"¹ His early work proposed a creative and dynamic answer to this question, one that stressed the activity of God's Spirit in both individual and community.

In 1922, Romano Guardini declared that "the church is awakening in souls"². By this phrase, Guardini referred to the growing awareness that the church is life, and that believers are incorporated into the church and the church lives in believers. Guardini

1. Edward P. Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historic Parallels," accessed February 14, 2016, http://works.bepress.com/edward_hahnenberg/18/.

2. Romano Guardini, *Vom Sinn des Kirches*; (Mainz: Matthias Grunwald, 1990; orig. ed. 1922), 19.

blamed an institutional view of the church on the individualism of the modern world. He offered the image of the mystical body of Christ as a response to the search for community. It is in the same way that I offer the mystical body of Christ, the bread of life, to the geographical community of Englewood, New Jersey. It is the theology of the local church and the centrality of the Eucharist in the community's life and mission.

From inception, the COGIC denomination established itself as a unique ministry to promote the unity of race and culture in the church. This project calls into question the impact on the broader social context that has mainly been unheralded in the general historical accounts of the early Pentecostal movement. Specifically, it raises the question of assessing the cultural diversity of the predominately black church and determining whether it can embrace cultural diversity to be inclusive of Hispanic Pentecostals in adopting and imagining a future for the community of Refuge Temple.

The Church of God in Christ of the 1920's through 1950s' was a church of southern blacks migrating to the north and west in search of greater opportunities. Today America remains the same land of opportunities for people migrating from Central and South America. Hispanic families moving into urban spaces present a new challenge for local and national COGIC leaders. But it is not unlike the spread of Pentecostalism when church women taught other women how to make their way in the city and how to live holy in places where the secular world lived in close proximity to black families. The COGIC women then, according to Althea Butler— “poured into the streets, preaching on street corners and opening storefront churches—opened a new venue of religious service

that did not rely solely on the power of the pulpit.”³ The message of holiness then was poised on the lips of those who would carry it to the places where people were clustered. Then rural practices of empowerment had to be adapted to an urban setting. Then the sanctified storefronts provided a place of stability for the southern migrants moving into the city life. The church probably became family to other people who were displaced, misplaced, and lost in society. The church became home to those who were homeless, hungry, and alone. They became family to those who were missing from their own family spaces, and they were the source of encouragement and inspiration for both men and women who were struggling to make it in a new environment.

The role of the black church in general, and the role of the Church of God in Christ specifically, in society have been very different from that of other racial or cultural ethnicities. Although the function of providing a place of worship and a place of belonging to the family of God may not differ across denominations; what does appear to be different is who has access to the church according to ethnicity.

Refuge Temple does not appear to be equally inviting to strangers, especially strangers who speak a strange language. Cultural exclusion in the church is a growing debate and is one worthy of critical assessment for the future of Refuge Temple. Whether Refuge Temple desires to and can remain vital as a historically black Pentecostal church nestled inside a homogenously mixed community context in Englewood, New Jersey, will be the focus of its new strategic vision.

3. Althea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007), 36.

High points of future focus for the Refuge Temple family were made clear to the Lay Advisory Committee. These future focus areas include:

- (1) working together to think and pray about the community;
- (2) reaching outside the boundaries of the church property to become familiar with community neighbors;
- (3) becoming acquainted with the life of the community;
- (4) offering a place for the community to become more connected as a community;
- (5) establishing Refuge Temple as a relevant place of worship and prayer;
- (6) continuing to conduct outreach events to form highly relational small groups;
- (7) continuing to solicit community participants' inclination towards faith formation and their journey towards discipleship;
- (8) incorporating Spanish-speaking services, church activities, and/or programs in our process; and
- (9) begin teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) as a Saturday community program.

The outcome of the project rested on one key factor, namely, the personal growth of the participating members. They each realized that the methods by which they had engaged the unchurched in the community must now begin with a conversation and lead to the ability to establish a relationship. Secondly, as a commuter church, Refuge Temple suffers from poor interpersonal relationships. To the community the church is unknown, and to the church the community is unknown. The real learning was in how to establish rapport with each other first and then with strangers.

The project has functioned as a precursor for outlining new tenets of the church's strategic plan for its future viability. It presents a vivid image of the cultural diversity of the community surrounding the church and the abyss between where the surrounding community lives and where the church ministers. Accessing the racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the community and the lack of similar representation within the current church membership causes the LAC members to seek ways and means to build bridges within the diversity towards a future where everyone has a place of belonging at the table.

I see the element of everyone having a place of belonging at the table as central to the inclusivity of the gospel. I am not referring to the gospel of inclusion as simply universalism where every doctrine and every belief are equally ascribed as truth and everybody is saved and everybody is heaven bound. Rather, I point to the power of inclusion through the gospel. Just as the table is central for the community of believers so then is the table also central for the community of the excluded. Both insiders and outsiders are brought into fellowship as a result of the table. The table functions as a place, a point of convergence and the meal function as the cohesive agent that bind insiders and outsiders together towards physically and spiritually nourishment. Jesus alone offers himself as the source of salvation. Not the church, but the messiah. The church then is the engrafted body becoming part of his body. Therefore no body, no part, has privilege in excluding any other part of the body. When religion excludes and denies others then the denial invalidates their communion. How can they say that they love God when they hate their brother?

There is debate over whether churches should maintain ethnic and cultural separation because of the fear over losing identity and uniqueness in multicultural settings. If the universality of the gospel can be heard across cultural and ethnic boundaries then the necessity of maintaining ethnic uniqueness disappears. If the authenticity of love in the gospel can be demonstrated in a way that it transcends language then the challenge is no longer how to make connections but rather how to maintain connection.

One of the most beautiful benefits of this project has been the invitation and opportunity to worship in a combined cultural setting. The Hispanic church community's response to Refuge Temple invitation has materialized by repeated requests for joint services and continuously growing demand to minister in Hispanic services through an interpreter. At the time of this writing, more joint services are planned, now including pastors from the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Newark. The planning stages are underway to support a foreign mission trip to the Dominican Republic for evangelism and preaching, community building and church planting. To my great surprise the Hispanic community is much larger than the local vicinity. This project began as an evangelism tool to increase congregation membership of the local church but it has become an outreach mechanism far beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood.

Living the experience of being the cultural minority in the community has broadened my personal view of what it truly means to be in fellowship with others. Deliberately practicing inclusion then is the process where Refuge Temple now must critically think through what historically has been learned and practiced in order to decide and embrace a new way to being in the community.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Drew University Debriefing Form

Appendix B: Drew University Human Participant Research Review Form

Appendix C: Drew University Research Determination Form

Appendix D: Pre-Project Church Membership Survey

Appendix E: Post-Project Member Survey

Appendix F: Pre-Project Community Survey

Appendix G: Post Project Community Survey

APPENDIX A: DREW UNIVERSITY DEBRIEFING FORM

PRACTICES IN FAITH FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP TOWARDS THE NEXT GENERATION CHURCH AT REFUGE TEMPLE CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study in which you just participated was designed to develop a program that allows the current members of Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ to identify strategies and actions in attracting and integrating young adults between the ages of 20-40 to becoming Christian disciples as part of the Refuge Temple church family. This project has sought to work through the small-group dynamics of equipping laity for the ministry by forming relational groups within the congregation of Refuge Temple Church. The objective of this project is to influence the practices of the outreach and evangelism ministry through the impact of developing and transforming small group members into highly relational members who are committed to leading a life of Christian discipleship.

Although this research is expressly designed for the spiritual vitality of the Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ in Englewood, New Jersey and is intended for generalized knowledge, it may also, be published specifically to the audience of the Church of God in Christ, Incorporated. It will be made available to other denominational groups or individual churches that are interested in faith formation in small groups that lend to congregational growth and development.

I believe that the results of this project will impact the way my national church trains and develops pastors in church growth. I also believe the results of this project will have direct implications for pastors who are struggling to maintain congregational viability in changing demographics within their environmental setting. It can offer new idea of focus for evangelism and outreach that is not initially Bible teaching but rather relationship focused.

I think younger pastors are trained by senior pastors according to the means and methods that may have been successful for them in their era. But social needs are different now from 30 years ago. With the advent of technology, people are less connected through social means that use to have value. Ministry can now be offered to consumers in a variety of means including Twitter, UTube, FaceBook, Internet, and video. In order for the local community church to continue to have relevance in the lives of the public then the public needs a place to which to belong. Local community churches can become the center of community life when it functions as the gathering place for the community.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study you were asked to participate in creating a forum within which a dynamic

small group can grow within the existing congregational setting thereby creating future possibilities of existence for the Refuge Temple Church. The purpose of this initiative was to fortify the Refuge Temple Church community, develop new relationships, promote unity by creating a sense of belonging for new-comers and ultimately create a community of accountability for all people who are searching for a higher spiritual dimension of living and a deeper commitment to Christian discipleship.

The project participants were invited or have recently visited the church while looking for a church home. They were invited through community outreach events such as a church Open House; a Community Awareness Rally; an outdoor Concert; a Kick-off Fellowship Celebration; Weekly Worship Services and Weekly Fellowship Events. They were invited to participate in weekly fellowship activities followed by small group discussions that are designed to foster group intimacy and faith formation. They were asked to share their narrative about the events (challenges and successes) they faced in their life journey. They were asked to evaluate their level of connectedness to the group based upon their feeling of safety in openness and transparency. They were asked to define or clarify what needs they may have had that could be met by regular attendance at group fellowship events.

3. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the topic of this research please review the following resources:

- Allen, Holly Catterton, *Inter-generational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).
- Bass, Diana Butler; *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*, (New York: Harper One, 2006)
- Becker, Palmer; *Called to Care: A Training Manual for Small Group Leaders*, (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 1993)
- Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000 (Originally 1871))
- Coleman, Robert, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987).
- Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).
- Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, (London: SPCK, 2006)
- Hammet, Edward, *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People Over 60* (Hickory, NC: The Columbia Partnership, 2007)
- In the event that you feel a need to speak to a professional concerning any uncomfortable feelings arising as a result of your participation in this research, please contact: Bishop William T. Cahoon at the New Garden State Jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ 973-674-4022.

4. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in learning more about the research being conducted, or the results of the research of which you were a part, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Madison, NJ 07940

Thank you for your help and participation in this study.

APPENDIX B: DREW UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANT RESEARCH REVIEW FORM

1. Project Title: Practices in Faith Formation and Discipleship Towards the Next Generation Church at Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ

2. Principal Investigator(s): George Akins, Jr.

If student research, name of faculty sponsors: Dr. Carl Savage and Dr. Heather Elkins.

Name of anyone else involved in the study administration/data collection:

Lisa D. Akins, Lynn Kitchings, Beverly White, Michael D. Walden, Dianne Atkins

3. Email address of Principal Investigator(s): gakins@drew.edu

4. Duration of the Project (approximate starting date and completion date of data collection):

March 15, 2015 – April 26, 2015

5. Describe how the requirement to obtain training in the responsible conduct of research involving human subjects was met:

On-Line Course offered by NIH Protecting Human Research Participants

6. Electronic Signature(s):

Principal Investigator: George Akins, Jr.

Date: January 12, 2015

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Heather Elkins
2015

Date: January 12,

7. Provide a brief description of the purpose and goals of the proposed research, including in what form the research is potentially to be published (e.g. thesis, dissertation, article, and book).

Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ next generation age group is conspicuously absent in today's congregational demographics. Ages 1-19 and 20 -40, respectively, make up 8% of the congregation's population. Ages 41-60 and ages 61 and over, respectively, each makes up 42% of the congregation. The low density population of young adults combined with the high density population of elderly, retired members presents a unique opportunity for the congregation to re-imagine its identity as it looks towards its future self. My hypothesis is that unless Refuge Temple can implement an effective faith formation and discipleship initiative that not only attracts and retains young adults but

also develops them spiritually then the future viability of Refuge Temple is seriously compromised.

This project addresses the strategy and actions of the Refuge Temple Church in attracting and integrating young adults between the ages of 20-40 to becoming Christian disciples as part of the Refuge Temple church family. This project seeks to work through the small-group dynamics of equipping laity for the ministry by forming relational groups within the congregation of Refuge Temple Church. The goal of this project is to influence the practices of the outreach and evangelism ministry through the impact of developing and transforming small group members into highly relational members who are committed to leading a life of Christian discipleship.

This research will be published as a completed dissertation project for the Doctorate of Ministry degree.

8. Describe your participants. Indicate the total number of participants and whether any of the participants will be minors or will be from other protected populations (e.g., pregnant women, mentally disabled, etc.).

The research participants are local community members who live within a 2 mile radius of the Refuge Temple Church located at 244 Waldo Place, Englewood, NJ. They are 5-12 people (\pm) who, upon being interview, self-identified as people who do not belong to any particular home church but who are interested in participating in a series of small group discussion on life journey issues.

The research target group is 5 current members of the Refuge Temple Church who are functioning as the Lay Advisory Committee. They are invested members of the church who are implementing a strategy and actions plans designed to attract and invite project participants to engage in small group discussions to build and strengthen personal relationships that foster the formation of a faith group and one that can lead to a lifestyle of a committed disciple of Christ.

None of the participants will be under age 20 and none will be included as participants in a protected population (i.e. mental disabilities, pregnancy or minors).

9. How will participants be recruited? Are there any specific selection criteria? Will participants be compensated in any way for their participation?

Participants will be recruited through one-on-one interviews at locations within the community where people already gather socially (i.e. Panera Bread, Shop-Rite, the VFW, the park, the corner bodega and church meetings including special events). The specific locations will be defined and refined by the members of the target research group upon identifying common gathering places within the community.

The selection criteria will be individuals who voluntarily agree to participate in a study project with a commitment of 2-3 hours per week. There will be no compensation offered to any participant.

10. How will you obtain consent from participants (and legal guardians, if minors are involved)?

Consent from participants age 20 and older will be obtained through signed written consent forms. (See Attachment). No minors will be permitted to participate.

11. Describe the study's procedures and all activities that participants will be asked to perform. Remember that copies of ALL materials should be submitted as part of this completed form.

Refuge Temple Next Generation is first and foremost a marketing strategy for faith formation and discipleship designed to invite, inform, initiate and integrate local community members who may be un-churched and non-believers into becoming disciples of Christ as new church members of the Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ. We are marketing a new way of reaching outwardly with a fresh language and behavior that non church-goers can understand. People may not understand church doctrine but they know what it feels like when someone demonstrates genuine care for them. People may not know Bible history or scripture but they know when someone has made a genuine connection with them. It is through small group interactions that people from the community will experience koinonia. It is through the effect of relationship building that community members may be converted to church members in their individual quest for discipleship. The core functioning of the project is to build relationships with community residents so that they will see Refuge Temple Church as their own future place of fellowship and worship.

One of the deepest cries of our culture is the desire to fit in and belong. At the heart of Refuge Temple is the desire to be connected to the community it serves. The project's aim is to be the place where people feel as if they belong. Our purpose is to build a Christian community, develop relationships, promote unity by creating a sense of belonging and as a by-product create a community of accountability for people who are searching for a higher spiritual plain of living as Christian disciples.

People long for a place where we are accepted, loved, respected, known and cared for. At Refuge Temple, our greatest method of outreach will be to provide an environment for young adults by young adults. As an outcome, the participants will learn from each other and ultimately lean upon each other whether in crisis, in routine daily challenges or in celebrating the many joys of life. The Next Generation Project intends to model a community family support system with the addition of an experienced minister who is well trained in Biblical scholarship, pastoral care and family systems.

It is my goal that the Next Generation Project to be much more than a dissertation project. It potentially is the genesis of the birth of a new culture within the church that seeks to deliberately disciple new believers, hence, one that is continually giving birth to new members in new ways in the community. The new culture is to remain connected to the main body to maintain a sense of community but it is also liberated to have its own identity that permits it to be free to discover what it means to live in the Spirit of its own generation. In addition to Bible study meetings to teach and enrich the community of young people, the project also provides a time of fellowship, networking and sharing. Within the project, sharing will be the crown jewel of the time spent together. At its core the Next Generation Project forms its existence around the fact that the community as a whole is better when we learn and grow together.

12. Where will this research be conducted?

Project activities will be held at the Refuge Temple Church located at 244 Waldo Place, Englewood, NJ. Discipleship gatherings will be held on alternating Saturday or Sunday evening during times for fellowship bonding and strengthening at the church facility at 244 Waldo Place, Englewood, NJ. These designated periods of fellowship are designed a round social fellowship rather than Bible study. Small group meetings have the option to meet at locations and times that are convenient to the group and are not restricted to meet at the church. They are encouraged to meet away from the usual church facility and meet in private homes or in public places. They are being asked to come to the church to experience fellowship so that both group members and church members may experience each other.

We desire to target and create small groups although, the focus of the project is the behavior and performance of the facilitators. Relationship development and maturation demand situational and contextual awareness. Group facilitator meetings will be held one hour prior to discipleship gathering at the church facility location. As a facilitator each group leader must develop a functional understanding of the community and the neighborhood activities and personalities. Inherent to understanding the community is the requirement for questionnaires, surveys and interviews to assess the needs, climate and susceptibility for participation. Inquiries and interviews will be conducted in various locations depending upon where likely candidates can be found.

13. Are any aspects of your research kept secret from participants? If yes, indicate what will be hidden and why it is necessary to hide this information.

No aspect of the research will be kept secret from the project participants or the target research group.

14. Describe any potential benefits of your research to participants and/or society.

The potential benefits of this research to the participants are that it can create opportunities for deeper relational experiences that facilitate the feeling of belonging in becoming a more closely knit community family. Life challenges can create social fractures and disrupt ties that customarily bind communities together. This project can impact communities by increasing the participant's perceived value of unity.

I believe that the results of this project will impact the way the Church of God in Christ, Incorporated trains and develops pastors in congregation formation and church planting. More specifically, I believe the results of this project will have direct implications for pastors who are struggling to maintain congregational viability in the midst of changing contexts and demographics. It can offer new ideas and a fresh approach to how to focus on evangelism and outreach in growing a church.

I think younger pastors who are new to ministry and have been trained as apprentices by senior pastors according to the means and methods that may have been successful for them in their generation may find this project enlightening as they assume the role of senior pastoral leaders. Social needs are different now from 30 years ago. With the advent of technology, people are less connected now through the social means that

once held communities together. Social media means may have changed our social values but not our social needs.

Ministry can now be offered as a product to consumers. Through the use of FaceTime, Skype, Twitter, UTube, FaceBook, Instagram, the internet, and smartphones consumers have the ability to access media broadcasts, podcasts and downloads on-demand and at their convenience. What is not known is the sociological/spiritual cost. In order for the local community church to continue to have relevance in the lives of the public then people needs a place to which to belong that is structured around the Word of God. Local community churches can become the center of community life when it functions purposefully as the anchoring place for the community. If the church losses the next generation population and the presence of God then the invitation for lawlessness and moral decadence will lead the nation to uncontained Godlessness. The next generation church is the bedrock of our future as a nation and our nation as a world superpower.

15. Consider the risks that your study may pose to participants, including physical, psychological, social, economic, or other types of risks or harms. Explain these risks even if minimal or routine to daily life.

This project could serve to divide people when they learn more about each other and realize that they may not like each other and do not want to be in community with others who may be very different from themselves. People could be harmed if they are made to feel embarrassment, shame or guilt over some issue or public image from their past.

This project may pose a physical risk to those who may have been marginalized because of some recognizable disability. Physically impaired people may be motivated to actively participate in ways unanticipated by the project research team. People with physical disabilities may be expected to navigate entry ways into facilities that are not conducive to their mobility. Similarly, people with mental health or psychological disabilities may be motivated to participate in ways unanticipated by the project research team. Allowing their access to small group meetings may expose their right to privacy in the event they disclose information about themselves which is normally held as private and sensitive.

The risks this study may also pose to participants are those with emotional traumas associated with hidden truths, lies and stories untold and unresolved about past. The level of intimacy found in small group meetings may permit secret narratives an opportunity to be aired and separated from its dark and sometimes painful past. Participants may be unprepared to cope with the emotional and psychological fall-out of coming into contact with their own hidden self and hidden pain.

16. If applicable, explain the procedures that you will use to minimize the risks to participants that you identified in your answer to question 15.

A. To mitigate the risk of disclosure of private and sensitive information all participants will be asked to sign a Statement of Non-Disclosure attesting that they:
 (1) Shall keep all Confidential Information strictly confidential by using a reasonable

degree of care in safeguarding confidential information; and

- (2) Will not disclose any Confidential Information received to any third parties
- (3) Will not disclose information concerning others outside the small group discussions
- (4) Will only share in small group discussion issues that they are comfortable divulging to others.

B. To mitigate any potential for emotional distress each person may receive pastoral counseling from the Senior Pastor on matters that disturbs or unsettles their spiritual or emotional comfort. In the event further counseling is desired or required then the participant will be referred to external resources.

17. Discuss the procedures you will utilize to protect the anonymity or confidentiality of your participants and your data.

I will ensure that I will not disclose identifiable information about participants and protect the identity of every research participant by making anonymous each record and data file. To make anonymous the processes include disassociating names, Social Security numbers, phone numbers or addresses on research material. Measures to maintain confidentiality of data include not being able to identify individual participants and their specific by:

- Maintaining confidentiality of data/records: ensuring the separation of data from identifiable individuals and securely storing the code linking data to individuals
- Ensuring those who have access to the data maintain confidentiality by not discuss the issues arising from an individual interview with others publicly in ways that might identify a particular individual
- Removing the opportunities for others to infer identities from their data

Breaking Confidentiality: Deliberate Disclosure

The intentional breaking of confidentiality is an action which compromises the integrity of the research project, however, it is recognized that there may be occasions when my research may have justifiable causes to break confidentiality. The legal frameworks describe instances in which confidentiality may be deliberately broken. Instances include if a participant discloses having committed or about to commit a crime. Additionally, as a researcher I reserve the right to exercise a moral duty to disclose information if a study participant reports being a victim of a crime or if a researcher feels a study participant is at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm.

18. For the majority of research projects, participants should be provided with a debriefing form that contains further information about the study and contact information for the principal investigator(s). Will you provide a debriefing form? If not, indicate why.

A research Debriefing Form will be provided to participants upon conclusion of the research project. See enclosure.

APPENDIX C: DREW UNIVERSITY RESEARCH DETERMINATION FORM

Project Title: Practices in Faith Formation and Discipleship Towards the Next Generation
Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ

1. Principal Investigator(s): George Akins, Jr.

If student research, name of faculty supervisor: Dr. Carl Savage, Director of the Doctor
of Ministries Program (Doctor of Ministries Program Liaison)

Name of anyone else involved in the study administration/data collection: None

2. Email address of Principal Investigator(s): gakins@drew.edu
3. Duration of the Project (approximate starting date and completion date of data
collection):

March 15 through April 26, 2015

4. Electronic Signature(s):

Principal Investigator: George Akins, Jr.

Date: December 1, 2014

Faculty Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

5. Describe your project, including who your participants will be, how they will be recruited, and what they will be asked to do.

The next generation church is conspicuously absent in today's congregational configuration of the Refuge Temple Church of God in Christ in Englewood, New Jersey. The preponderance of the church membership are octogenarians who are in various stages of declining health. Although the church has a 67-year history that spans the leadership of three pastors, its familiar homeostatic balance points to its demise as the octogenarian population decline. Unless the church can implement an effective faith formation and discipleship initiative that attracts and retains youth and young adults then the future viability of Refuge Temple is seriously jeopardized. My concern is for the next generation of Refuge Temple and how to grow the next generation within the current contextual structure or framing a different context that would allow for its future growth. I am interested in the impact of forming an evangelical outreach approach aimed expressly at instantiating and growing a presence of youth and young adults. I hope to create a forum within which a dynamic small group can grow within the existing congregational setting thereby creating future possibilities of existence for the Refuge Temple Church. At the heart of Refuge Temple initiative is the desire to fellowship and be connected to the community it serves. The purpose of this initiative is to fortify this Christian community, develop new relationships, promote unity by creating a sense of belonging for new comers and ultimately create a community of accountability for all people who are searching for a higher spiritual dimension of living and a deeper commitment to Christian discipleship.

The project participants are people who have been invited or have recently visited the church while looking for a church home. They will be recruited through community outreach events such as a church Open House, a Community Awareness Rally; an outdoor Concert; a Kick-off Fellowship Celebration; Weekly Worship Services and Weekly Fellowship Events. They will be invited to participate in weekly fellowship activities followed by small group discussions that are designed to foster group intimacy and faith formation. They will be asked to share their narrative about the events (challenges and successes) they face in their life journey. They will be asked to evaluate their level of connectedness to the group based upon their feeling of safety in openness and transparency. They will also be asked to define or clarify what needs they may have that could be met by regular attendance at group fellowship events.

6. Do you have any research hypotheses or specific research questions that you are investigating? If yes, describe them. If no, what is the aim or purpose of your project?

Creating community around new believers and the unchurched is at the crux of Refuge Temple's ability to reimagine itself as a viable church. New believers or the unchurched do not know what to expect in their faith walk and may be eager to have the benefit of someone else that has traveled the same road that they have now befriend them. Easum and Atkinson say that trust is built by loving and accepting other just where they are and then life changes through biblical principles. They stress welcoming persons who are the farthest from God, not the closest. My hypothesis is that Refuge Temple future is tied to

its ability to befriend, learn and grow as a ministry to a community that it understands at the individual level. The focus for outreach and growth for Refuge Temple may rest in its ability to form cohesion around group life. I believe that shifting the initial focus towards the issues and challenges of urban life first is key and essential to church growth. After small groups are formed and functioning as small groups then the principles of Christian education and Bible study can occur as an outgrowth of a group finding its sense of belonging.

7. Do you plan to publish or present the results of your project? If yes, to what audience will these publications/presentations be directed? If no, what is your intended end product?

Yes, the results of the project will be published specifically to the audience of the Church of God in Christ, Incorporated. It will also be available to other denominational groups or individual churches that are interested in faith formation in small groups that lend to congregational growth.

8. Do you believe that the results of your project could inform policy or lead to research hypotheses in the future? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

I believe that the results of this project will impact the way the national church trains and develops pastors in church growth. I also believe the results of this project will have direct implications for pastors who are struggling to maintain congregational viability in changing demographics within their environmental setting. It can offer new idea of focus for evangelism and outreach that is not initially Bible teaching but rather relationship focused.

I think younger pastors are trained by senior pastors according to the means and methods that may have been successful for them in their era. But social needs are different now from 30 years ago. With the advent of technology, people are less connected through social means that used to have value. Ministry can now be offered to consumers in a variety of means including Twitter, UTube, FaceBook, Internet, and video. In order for the local community church to continue to have relevance in the lives of the public then the public needs a place to which to belong. Local community churches can become the center of community life when it functions as the gathering place for the community.

APPENDIX D: PRE PROJECT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

In order to carry out our project task we must deal with certain organizational issues such as making decisions, sharing information, and developing resources. Listed below are a number of statements describing a list of such issues.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that each statement describes your congregation?

A "Don't Know" response is provided, but please try not to use it as it invalidates your response. Use it only when absolutely necessary.

A = Strongly Agree

B = Agree

C = Disagree

D = Strongly Disagree

E = Don't Know

1. Members are well informed about what the various committees and groups in the church are doing.

A = Strongly Agree

B = Agree

C = Disagree

D = Strongly Disagree

E = Don't Know

2. The activities taking place in the congregation are well publicized to the surrounding community.

A = Strongly Agree

B = Agree

C = Disagree

D = Strongly Disagree

E = Don't Know

3. Study of the needs of the congregation and the community is regularly assessed as the basis for church planning.

A = Strongly Agree

B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

4. Members and groups get a lot of support and encouragement for trying something new in the congregation.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

5. Members are encouraged to discover their particular gifts for ministry and service.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

6. Lay leaders are provided the training they need for their committee and task assignments.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

7. Every member who is capable and interested has an equal opportunity to hold key leadership positions.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

8. The theological and biblical implications of important decisions are regularly discussed.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

9. Important decisions about the life of the church are rarely made without open discussion by church leaders and members.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

10. Disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly rather than hushed up or hidden behind closed doors.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

11. It is easy to summarize for visitors and nonmembers how our congregation differs from other congregations in the area.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

12. Members help each other out in times of trouble.

A = Strongly Agree
B = Agree
C = Disagree
D = Strongly Disagree
E = Don't Know

13. Cooperative programs with churches of other denominations are highly valued in our church.

- A = Strongly Agree
- B = Agree
- C = Disagree
- D = Strongly Disagree
- E = Don't Know

14. The current morale of our church membership is high.

- A = Strongly Agree
- B = Agree
- C = Disagree
- D = Strongly Disagree
- E = Don't Know

15. There is a sense of excitement among members about our church's future.

- A = Strongly Agree
- B = Agree
- C = Disagree
- D = Strongly Disagree
- E = Don't Know

Listed below are several alternatives touching upon important dimensions of a church's identity. Using the seven point scale between each set of alternatives, please check the number which best describes where your congregation falls. A score of "1" means most like the characteristic on the left. A score of "7" means most like the characteristic on the right. A score of "4" means an equal mix of both.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Our church is more influenced by history and tradition OR by contemporary ideas and trends.

16. Historical						Traditional
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. Modern						Contemporary
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Members are similar to OR very different from the people who live immediately around the church.

Similar to

Different from

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Our church is very involved OR not at all involved with the community around the church.

Very Involved
Involved

Not at all

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. Our church is primarily oriented to serving our members OR to serving the world beyond our membership.

Serving our Members

Serving the World

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. Our congregation feels like one large family OR like a loosely knit association of individuals and groups.

One Large Family

Loose Knit Association

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. Our church is known as a prestigious one in the area OR is not considered one of the "status" churches in the area.

Known as Prestigious
Church

Considered "Status"

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. Not all congregations have an identity, or a sense of who they are that all members share in and yet any individual member stands somewhat apart from. Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements from your perspective as an individual looking at your congregation's overall identity and vision.

Educational

Activist

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. Being at this church has made a difference in my spiritual life.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

A. For you, personally, how important are each of the following in the mix of qualities that make a good worship service?

B. For you, personally, how important are each of the following in the mix of qualities that make a good sermon?

34. Providing time for members to greet one another.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

35. Providing worship that is emotionally moving.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

36. Providing worship that is intellectually challenging.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

37. Attention given to sacraments

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

38. Lay participation in leading worship

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

39. Use of creeds or statements of faith

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

40. Silent prayer/meditation

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

41. Having parts of the worship especially for children.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

42. Use of new or unfamiliar hymns

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

43. Corporate prayer in which the entire congregation participates

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

44. Providing worship at times other than Sunday morning

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

45. Use of contemporary worship styles, music and Language.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

46. Sets forth a clear faith position as a guide for making decisions and living a faithful life

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

47. Based on a clear, unambiguous religious authority.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
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48. Touches directly on my everyday life

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
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49. Contains scholarly or literary illustrations.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
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50. Is biblically based and illustrated.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
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51. Makes me reflect on issues and events that go beyond my personal life and local community.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
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52. Sermons and services are challenging and thought provoking.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

53. Obviously flows from the depth of the preacher's own personal faith and spiritual convictions.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

54. Is comforting and reassuring

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

55. Sermons are carefully composed and skillfully delivered

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

56. Pastor Is spiritually moving and inspirational.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

57. Sets forth various sides of an issue without advocating one position as the only Christian position.

Need more Attention	Very Satisfied	Generally Satisfied	Receives too Much Attention
------------------------	-------------------	------------------------	--------------------------------

Please identify to what extent you are satisfied with the following aspects of your church:

58. If you could choose any time on Sunday morning, what time would you prefer for worship to start?

9:00 am later	9:30 am	10:00 am	10:30 am	11:00 am	11:30 am or later
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59. The music (choir, anthems, and instrumentals) during Sunday worship.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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60. The congregation's Sunday worship, other than the music.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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61. The way your spiritual needs are being met in the worship service.

Very Satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied

In your judgment how high or low a priority would you like each of the following to be for the pastor of this church? It is worth remembering that not every task can be highest priority, and that in reality, only 3 or 4 probably can be. You may want to read the entire list, then go back and make your priority rankings.

62. Providing administrative leadership for the congregation's ministry

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

63. Actively and visibly supporting the church's stewardship program

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

64. Directly involving laity in the planning and leadership of church programs and events

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

65. Planning and leading a program of new member recruitment.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

66. Participating in local community activities, issues and problems.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

67. Holding social justice issues before members.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

68. Planning and leading worship sensitive to the needs of the congregation

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

69. Emphasizing the spiritual development of members.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

70. Visiting the sick, shut-in and bereaved.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

71. Visiting members at their homes.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

72. Pastoral counseling of members having personal, family and/or work related problems

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

73. Developing and supporting religious education programs for children and youth

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

74. Developing and leading adult education programs

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

75. Supporting the world mission of the church.

Very high priority High priority Moderate priority Low priority

APPENDIX E: POST PROJECT MEMBER SURVEY

1. What was your initial reaction to the next generation church project idea?

Very positive Somewhat positive Neutral Somewhat negative Very Negative

2. What is your post project reaction?

Very positive Somewhat positive Neutral Somewhat negative Very Negative

3. How well, if at all, does the word “new outreach” describe this approach?

Extremely well Very well Moderately well Slightly well Not at all well

4. How well, if at all, do the words “HIGHLY EFFECTIVE” describe this approach?

Extremely well Very well Moderately well Slightly well Not at all well

5. How often, if ever, do you believe we should use small group formations in outreach?

Extremely often Very often Moderately often Slightly often Not at all

6. If relational small groups were available today, how likely would you be to use it in evangelism and outreach?

Extremely likely Very likely Moderately likely Slightly likely Not at all

7. How likely is it that you would recommend using small groups in evangelism and outreach to a friend in another church?

Not at all likely Extremely Likely
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. When you think about small groups and faith formation and discipleship, do you think of it as something churches might NEED or as something churches might WANT?

Need _____ Want _____ Both Equally _____

9. When you're considering evangelism, outreach and community impact in your area, what are the top two things you generally consider? (Circle two boxes only).

Cost Target Community Innovation Effectiveness Value
Other (specify)

10. Briefly describe what things you like most about participating in this project.

11. Briefly describe what things you believe would most improve community outreach ministry at Refuge Temple?

APPENDIX F: PRE-PROJECT COMMUNITY SURVEY

This survey tool allows the congregation of Refuge Temple Church an opportunity to assess who we are as a congregation and who we might become by inviting others to become a part of who we are and what we do. This survey is designed to assist the Refuge Temple Church in becoming a place within the community where people can feel that they have a church home to which they belong. It specifically seeks to better understanding the community surrounding the church facility located at 244 Waldo Place, Englewood, New Jersey.

The survey asks several sets of questions about your involvement in ministry, what you seek in terms of pastoral leadership and your vision for your own future spiritual growth and development. Completing this survey ensures that your views have been heard and it will give us a baseline to measure whether we are moving in directions that will make our church as a place for spiritual growth and development.

We ask that each member of your household over the age of 20 complete the survey. You may complete this survey online at this site or on paper. If you choose to fill out the survey online, please try to complete it in one sitting. However if you are disconnected or are otherwise interrupted, you won't lose any of this information as it is automatically saved. To complete the survey, you can begin a new questionnaire and page forward to pick up the survey where you left off. If you complete the paper survey please return it to the church so that your responses can be counted and entered into the computer. This survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

It is important that you complete this survey. When answering this survey, please check the appropriate box or supply the required information as indicated. If answering questions with a limited number of choices, please choose the answer that comes closest to the right answer for you, even if it does not fit perfectly. Unanswered items reduce the usefulness of the survey.

All of your responses are anonymous.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping us define who we can become in the future of our community. Your participation will have direct implications to us understanding your church experience, and hopes for your future.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact the research investigator Pastor George Akins, Jr., at 703-586-8542 or gakins@drew.edu.

1. Are you currently a member of a local church?

NO

YES

2. How long have you been actively participating in church ministry?

1 yr/less

1 yr/more

3 yr/more

5 yrs/more

3. Have you ever been an adult member of an active church ministry?

NO

YES

4. How long has it been since you last regularly attended church?

1 yr/less

1 yr/more

3 yr/more

5 yrs/more

5. How long does it usually take you to travel from home to church?

< 20 mins.
mins.

> 30 mins.

> 45 mins.

> 60

6. On the average, about how many times have you attended church worship during the past year?

0-5 times

6-10 times

20-40 times

>52 times

7. In how many church organizations, committees, and groups do you hold membership (not counting congregational membership itself)?

None

1-3

4-5

6-8

8. Has your involvement in the congregation increased, decreased, or remained about the same in the last few years?

Increased

Decreased

Remained the Same

9. If your participation has INCREASED, which of the following are reasons for that?
(check all that apply):

- More time Available
 Better Health
 Stronger faith
 More positive Attitude Towards Church

10. If your participation has DECREASED, which of the following are reasons for that?
(check all that apply):

- Your Church Participation Less Availability
 Poor Health
 Less Faith
 Negative Attitude

11. Approximately how much does your family household contribute to your church per year? (If single or widowed, you as an individual?)

- <\$500
 >\$2000
 >\$4,000
 >\$8,000

12. How many times have you been invited to visit or join the church in the past year?

- None
 2 or more
 5 or more
 10 or more

13. How many of your closest friends attend church?

- None
 2 or more
 5 or more
 10 or more

Listed below are a number of tasks that a local church is likely to perform. Please respond to each item by indicating whether you feel the congregation needs to give it more emphasis; Whether you would be are very or generally satisfied with a congregation's performance of the task; or whether you feel the task receives too much emphasis.

14. Which ONE task should a congregation do best?

- Singing Ministry
 Preaching Ministry
 Raise Money
 Soul Winning

15. Which ONE task should a congregation not be involved with?

- Social Justice
 Family Systems
 Community Activism
 Social

Networking

In order to attract your personal involvement in a congregation, rank the priority of emphasis for each tasks according to the scale of emphasis using:

Tasks of the Church

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

16. Offering worship that provides a meaningful experience of God and the Christian tradition:

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

17. Providing worship that expresses the Gospel in contemporary language and forms

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

18. Providing Christian formation and education for children and youth.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

19. Providing Christian formation and education programs for adults.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

20. Helping members deepen their personal, spiritual relationship with God.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

21. Networking to share the good news of the Gospel with the un-churched.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

22. Engaging in acts of charity and service to persons in need

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D

= No Emphasis

23. Encouraging members to act on the relationship of the Christian faith to social, political, and economic issues.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

24. Providing a caring ministry for the sick, shut-ins and the bereaved.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

25. Providing pastoral counseling to help members deal with personal problems

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

26. Providing fellowship opportunities for members.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

27. Helping members understand their use of money, time and talents as expressions of Christian stewardship.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

28. Participating in activities and programs within the church to build unity of the group.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

29. Provide Bible Study to help develop Christian Bible knowledge.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

30. Provide a church community forum to build stronger communities to live in.

A = Most Emphasis B = Some Emphasis C = Little Emphasis D = No Emphasis

APPENDIX G: POST PROJECT COMMUNITY SURVEY

Group Facilitator: Centers ministry around work with small groups of people, helping them relate particular interests and needs to the needs and interests of the formed small group.

1. In thinking about what **ORIGINALLY** attracted you to this project, select from the list below those reasons that best match your reasons to start to come. You may select more than one.

- a. The Minister
- b. My friends are here
- c. The church's reputation
- d. Adult education program
- e. Child and youth program
- f. The music program
- g. The social outreach
- h. The worship style
- i. The self-help groups
- j. The denominational ties

2. In thinking about what **KEEPS** you as part of this congregation, select from the list below those reasons that best match your reasons for staying. You may select more than one.

- a. The Minister
- b. My friends are here
- c. The church's reputation
- d. Adult education program
- e. Child and youth program
- f. The music program
- g. The social outreach
- h. The worship style
- i. The self-help groups
- j. The denominational ties

Evangelism

3. Please assess each of the following in terms of general condition and aesthetic appeal.

Size and Condition of Facilities

A. Worship space

Excellent
Attention

Adequate

Needs Attention

Needs Immediate

B. Educational space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
C. Fellowship space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
D. Office space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
E. Parking				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
F. Worship space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
G. Educational space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
H. Fellowship space				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate
I. Exterior and grounds				
Excellent Attention	Adequate		Needs Attention	Needs Immediate

Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the following belief statements.

Religious Beliefs and Personal Practices

4. There is no other way to salvation but through belief in Jesus Christ.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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5. Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was an actual event.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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4. All religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral or Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. The Bible has answers for all of the basic questions of life

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral or Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Social justice is at the heart of the Gospel

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral or Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. It is often difficult to live out my faith in daily work, leisure and community life.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral or Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. How often do you spend time in private devotional activity such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible or other spiritual books?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

9. How often do you use the Web at home or at your office?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

10. How often do you use email?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

11. How often do you go on Facebook?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

12. How often do you look at religious Internet sites?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

13. How often do you volunteer your time in social service?

Daily Few times a week Once a week Few times a month Seldom or never

14. The Bible is an ancient book of history, legends and cultural stories recorded by man. It has little value today except as classic literature.

True_____

False_____

15. The Bible is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good people. I do not believe it is really God's word but it can teach us many moral precepts.

True_____

False_____

16. The Bible is the record of many different people's response to God and because of this, people and churches today must interpret the Bible's basic moral and religious teachings for themselves.

True_____

False_____

17. The Bible is the inspired Word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error.

True_____

False_____

18. The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be taken literally.

True_____

False_____

19. Racial/Ethnic Background?_____

20. Marital Status?_____

Single, never married

Living in a committed relationship

Married

Widowed

Separated or divorced

One person living alone

A couple without children

21. What is your highest level of formal education?_____

22. How many years have you lived in this general area?_____

23. How likely is it that you might move out of this general area within the next few years?

24. Did you grow up going to church?_____

25. In what denomination were you raised?_____

26. If you were involved with more than one denomination when you were growing up, with which did you have the greatest

identification? _____

Baptist Disciples of Christ Episcopal Lutheran
 Methodist Presbyterian United Church of Christ
 Unitarian/Universalist Roman Catholic Protestant
 Other _____ (please specify)

Now that you have spent this time reflecting on the congregation present situation, think for a bit about your vision for the future of this church. Please take a few final minutes and discuss your hope for the church's future.

27. What are your dreams, desires, and wishes for your life over the next few years (1-3)?

28. What would be your dreams, desires, and wishes for your church over the next few years (1-3)?

29. Do you see yourself remaining an integral part of Refuge Temple Church in the future? _____

30. Why or why not?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We appreciate the time and thought you have given to it.

Thank you again.

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