

LESSONS FROM A CHURCH MERGER

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of

Drew University in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Ministry

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Madison, N.J.

December 2016

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ABSTRACT
LESSONS FROM A CHURCH MERGER

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First United Methodist Church

Port St. Lucie, Florida

The United Methodist Church of Port St. Lucie, in its desire to reach out to the Hispanic community, had merged with *El Aposento Alto*, a small Spanish speaking congregation that had been meeting on site for the last twelve years. The Florida Conference of the *UMC* placed its backing behind this merger in order to plant within the community a multicultural and multiethnic Church that would mimic the existing demographics of Port St. Lucie.

Our challenge was to be intentional, to celebrate our differences, and to move towards a culture of community building inspired by the Spirit of God. These challenges, or the lack of, are not new to the multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial congregations but those that have defined it throughout its history. We dreamed of allowing the Holy Spirit to direct us through these challenges but we also knew that the resolve of the church in continuing its mission to the world would once again be tested. We knew that our response to these new challenges would fail unless it was one that depended on God, was corporate, and rooted in faith and experience.

For this project, the LAC and I developed a group of activities that we hoped would bring the Churches and pastoral staff closer together. These activities included an evangelistic event inviting the Bishop of Cuba, Ricardo

Pereira, to be our guest speaker; a joint luncheon, a joint preaching schedule for lent, and a joint mission trip to Cuba.

It was during these activities that we discovered the voice of God speaking through us and in us. We heard the Holy Spirit nudge us forward toward a better future that would give testimony to the world about a united, holy, catholic, and apostolic church living out its calling.

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DEDICATION
PARA MADELINE

INTRODUCTION

Marty was sitting in the pews at *First United Methodist Church* in Port St. Lucie one Sunday morning. She was wondering how to get involved and was listening for the whisper of God to direct her to a specific need within the life of the church where she could be useful. Marty, recently widowed, had decided to join us at our community lunch where proceeds would provide funds for our joint mission trip to our sister church *Oasis Church* in Cabezo, Cuba. This trip would include persons from *First PSL* as well as from *El Aposento Alto*, the Hispanic ministry. During dessert Associate Pastor Josías Andújar and Radamee Orlandí, the Pastor's Assistant, started a PowerPoint presentation which entailed travel information and other specifics for the trip.

Among the items we mentioned in the presentation was the desire to raise funds for a new drum set for the church in Cuba to replace the existing set which had worn out. In addition, there was a need to purchase Vacation Bible School material for that church. Marty leaned over to her brother-in-law and whispered "that's it!" Once we finalized our presentation, Marty walked over to me and



Figure 1- Existing Drum Set in Cabezo, Cuba

asked what was needed to make these things happen. Tentatively, I mentioned a thousand dollars for the drum set and five hundred dollars for the VBS material – "I will have a check for you on Monday" was her immediate response.

Meanwhile in Cuba is the story of a young man, Yuniel Dominguez Leyva, born totally deaf in one ear and partially deaf in the other. His mother was the first to visit *Oasis Church* in Cabezo and shortly after accept Jesus Christ as her personal savior. Yuniel and his sister followed along with their father, an alcoholic and idolatrous parent – who as a testimony to his newfound faith and in recognition of the work of God in his family, burned his idols for all to see. You see, among the miracles God had been working in the Dominguez family was the miracle of healing the hearing of Yuniel – who now had recovered all of his hearing in one ear and fifty percent in the other. And now, Yuniel had not only taken an interest in playing the dilapidated drum set the church owned, but had actually taken ownership of them to the extent that he met the prospect of family vacations with the statement “if I go, who will play the drums?”

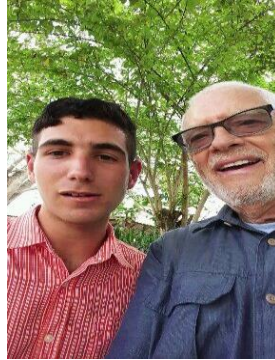


Figure 2- Yuniel with Chuck W Waldron, March 2016

As the church prayed for musical instruments to reward Yuniel’s faithfulness, just 100 miles north, the Holy Spirit whispered into Marti’s ear. Interestingly enough, though one person was nearly deaf, another person managed to hear the tiny voice of the Holy Spirit.

Upon arriving in Holguin, Cuba the church decided to surprise Yuniel and do an unveiling of the drum set. The drum set was covered and Yuniel was not allowed to assume his position to play the drums. Pastor Blanca and Raciel Quintana proceeded ceremoniously to roast Yuniel and



Figure 3- The covering of the new drum set in Holguin, Cuba

his family about their journey together and how God was involved with them in their journey. They then unveiled the new drum set to cheers, applause, and a lot of heartfelt tears.

According to Pew Research, immigration since 1965 is changing the makeup of the American racial and ethnic landscape. Hispanics alone have gone from four percent of the U.S. population in 1965 to eighteen percent in 2015. Gone are the days of preparing local pastors to be administrators of a local parish – sitting in plush offices preparing sermons for their next preaching series. In times like this, leaders at local churches are the new missionaries of their very own barrios, staring at communities that look nothing like them, do not speak their language, or practice their customs. We have been surrounded by these multi-ethnic communities and we struggle to reach them.

In short, the landscape is changing. We, as a Church, have lost the home court advantage, so to speak, and the denominational churches have taken notice through declining attendance and church closings. There is a shift in our thinking as we seek models of a church that looks more like the people who live within our communities. The opening narrative is indicative of this because it reveals what can happen when two communities come together to engage in ministry. We shall look more closely at this and other narratives which have arisen from our Doctor of Ministry Project: Lessons from a Church Merger.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF PORT ST. LUCIE

In September of 2004, the state of Florida was hit by a double whammy. Two hurricanes blasted through central Florida and the shoreline cities of Vero Beach, Ft. Pierce, and Port St. Lucie were especially hard hit. In Port St. Lucie, a building that had stood for over fifty years was badly damaged and needed repair. Goddard Hall, the first



Figure 4- First United Methodist Church Port St. Lucie. Goddard Hall¹

church building in the city, had housed various ministries at *First United Methodist Church* and was an important part of that community of faith's facilities. After the hurricane, though, it became an eyesore, growing mold and mildew day by day and in need of

structural repairs. According to church administrator, Gladys Dolan, the damages exceeded one million dollars. The church struggled to find solutions for its' growing congregation as, during the next year, leadership reshuffled ministries and housed them in the outreach center in order to continue to minister to the community. And continue to minister to the community it did via new ministries born out of the needs of the community during these times.

¹ Figure 4- First United Methodist Church of Port St. Lucie. Goddard Hall inaugurated September 1961.

A Beacon of Light

Furthermore, the illuminated tower on the roof of the sanctuary had shifted just enough to worry the congregation that it would eventually tip over. This tower was a landmark for the community of Port St. Lucie; since 1974 it had stood tall amongst the buildings west of I-95 – shining a beacon toward the heavens – and then the hurricanes hit.

Not only was there great cause for concern but also we had reached a crossroads in the life of our community of faith. As we began to address the issues at hand, we experienced a level of stress and anxiety rarely seen at the church that, ultimately, brought the church together.

In 2011 the church again came to a crossroads as the *El Aposento Alto* Hispanic congregation asked the *Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church* to merge with the larger church. *El Aposento Alto* had been meeting within the UMC campus for over eleven years at the time of this initiative.

The Great Commission

According to scripture the Church's mission is clear:

And he said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15-16 KJV)

In this day and age, there is no longer a need to go into all the world because all the world has come to us. When missionaries go off to far off lands they spend years learning the customs and practices of people in these lands – and yet, when people from far off lands come to this country it is as if they are the ones that need to learn the U.S. language and customs. I submit that there is no difference in this paradigm as completing our mission will only be possible if we are able to insert ourselves within these collective

communities, (or to use current military parlance, embed ourselves as to journalists in war zones). I believe effective evangelism can only be achieved by breaching the inner circles of any community and this requires that community begins to feel that the minister is part of their tribe. As I see things, we are in need of a serious commitment to develop cross-cultural evangelism and missions. I believe that if we are to succeed we must innovate and listen to those with whom we are ministering. We must stand with these groups through social action and engage in events that are meaningful to them. Leadership must be multi-cultural and, at the same time, we must confront racism in all its ugly aspects.

Application to Missions

It is difficult to understand what part of “GO!” we don’t understand. As a church we are very effective at throwing money at the missional efforts of our church. We construct buildings in Haiti and Cuba, feed the hungry, adopt a child and a pastor, fall in love with efforts and people abroad. Yet we fail to engage meaningfully our own local communities, help our needy neighbors, assimilate those who visit our churches, and embrace those within our own communities who are different from us. A thousand miles from home people are in need but the neighbor across the street is just irresponsible and simply needs to get a job! This was a question we posed to the group mission trip in March of 2016 – what will it take for the Hispanic ministry of our church to feel and sense the outpouring of love and approval that is sensed by our sister church in Cuba? How is it that we open our hearts to a Hispanic sister church one hundred miles south but we cannot do the same with those closest to us? One answer came from our small group: “we must continue to do things together.”

The Atlantic Central District Superintendent, Rev. Mike Oliver, visited the church with *New Church Development* members and soon afterwards, conversations started between the two congregations. Leaders from both congregations created a joint task force to deal with practical issues such as space, finances, programming, leadership roles, and connectional ministries. *First United Methodist Church* named Radamee Orlandi, the pastor's assistant, to lead this task force.



Figure 5-
Rev. Mike Oliver
Atlantic Central District
Superintendent 2011 2

The church conference proceedings that ensued eventually culminated in a vote to merge the two congregations: The Hispanic congregation voted unanimously and the result from *First United Methodist Church of Port St. Lucie* (FUMC-PSL) was seventy-four to two. That vote culminated the conference strategic plan for Port St. Lucie, but it was not without its detractors. Some members overheard an individual who said: "This will never work and that is why I voted against it." There was another family from the Hispanic ministry (a member of the inner circle of the now defunct Administrative Council) who decided to worship with the Anglo side of the church because of what I now perceive to be a loss of power and control. This said, however, the voice of the Church spoke overwhelmingly as we followed the lead of the Holy Spirit.

In June of 2011 Rev. Oliver presided over a joint church conference to announce the merger effective July 1, 2011.³ The result was that two healthy churches became one

² Figure 5- Mike Oliver, District Superintendent 2004-2012. Uploaded from Conference website www.flumc.org. Accessed on June 10, 2016.

³ *El Aposento Alto* minutes from Administrative Council Meeting. January 2011.

to try to produce a unified church with a biblical vision to expand God's reign. But as we shall see, there were storm clouds on the horizon.

This new intersection of discovery fits in perfectly to our context since, as a church, there are many continuous moving parts. In the case of the Hispanic ministry, coming into this new venture, there are movements and many new voices every time a new family joins the church and the Hispanic ministry. We see these in the yearly changes in lay leadership committees, and even at the District and Conference levels. My mother used to liken church membership and participation to the waves of the sea. Carmen would tell us that you just never knew how long a particular wave would last before it receded back into the sea. As I look at this from the perspective of the church, I can sense how God brings in people to deal with the specific challenges of the church at any particular time. I can now assume the responsibility to identify both the challenges of the time and the narratives of the people and resources that come into the church to be able to produce a vehicle to move things forward. This process of discovery has now become one that demands continuing focus and time.

The story of my church reveals many contradictions. It seemed that the vast majority was in favor of this merger and understood that we were perfect fit for this kind of ministry. Port St. Lucie has five of the ten fastest growing zip codes in the state of Florida with regard to minorities, especially Hispanics. The external metrics were all a go to embark on such an endeavor. And yet, the ugly face of racism, pastoral competition, classism, time and space, and ownership came into play as the honeymoon ended.

The campus at First UMC has five buildings as seen in Figure 5. Building #1 is the educational structure which houses the Youth Ministry and initially housed the Hispanic Ministry at the start of our journey together. Building #2 is the Beacon Life Center, the newest of our buildings, which houses the administrative offices and our 9:30 a.m. contemporary worship. Building #3 is the Sanctuary where we celebrate our 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 traditional services. Building #4 is the Kid's zone that houses the



Figure 6- First UMC Port St. Lucie Campus Layout

children's ARK ministry and preschool and Building #5 which is the church's Sunday school children's meeting area.

In October of 2011 the Hispanic Ministry started plans to move from the education building to the Beacon Life Center – and that's when the fireworks started! Up to this point, as far as worship services were concerned, the only service at the Beacon Center was the 9:30 a.m. contemporary service which now needed to be cleared out by 10:50 a.m. so the Hispanic Ministry could move in and set up for the 11:00 a.m. start. Moving out of the worship area after the service did not sit well with some, especially when I started the Call to Worship in Spanish while the contemporary congregants were still huddling! Phone calls started to inundate the secretary: "What in the world is going

on?” “When did this happen?” “Can’t they just back up their meeting till 11:30 a.m.?” One month into our move, during November’s worship meeting, an individual spoke up: “No one is authorized to change the settings on the sound board, who authorized people to do that?” Our answer was: “We need different settings for different forms of worship” and we explained that the sound engineer at the Hispanic Ministry is professional musician and sound tech Tim Gordon, a highly qualified individual.

The sign in front of the church, as you can see in figure 2, provides the start times for three of the services start times. It took church leadership four years to place



Figure 7- First UMC Port St. Lucie sign

the Hispanic portion of the sign and afterwards one of the trustees said “Why is the sign in Spanish? This will give people the impression that we are a Spanish church!”

Then there were the pastoral staff conflicts between the then senior pastor and myself. At every turn we seemed to have conflict, and every time there was conflict, he seemed to distance himself from the Hispanic Ministry and me. When the District Superintendent transferred me to UMC-PSL, he told me that the then senior pastor would mentor me as I transferred into the denomination but after four years of conflict, the District Superintendent told me that the senior pastor had distanced himself because I did not accept his leadership. This conflict now brought to the forefront new growth areas both for me and the senior pastor.

We also had cultural conflicts such as the annual pumpkin patch that for years produced a source of income for youth mission trips but for the Hispanic Ministry was a pagan celebration of Halloween. We go further into detail on this issue in chapter three.

October is the month that I go into a semi depressive state at my current appointment because it is the time when I experience the most complaints and alienation from people. Newcomers report making a commitment to visit our church, pulling up to church



Figure 8- First PSL Annual Pumpkin patch

grounds, and then turning back around to attend worship somewhere else. The reason? “How can a church that calls themselves Christian celebrate Halloween?” And, why do they believe we are celebrating Halloween? Because of the pumpkin patch.

Even when we embarked on this project and spoke to people about becoming part of our Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) because we believed they would be a huge asset and could supply us with a set of narratives that would enrich our experience, they disappointed us by their absence. In our conversations we heard from our prospects that time would not permit them to participate and in our emails we were met with silence – but privately there were comments like “I will not be a guinea pig.” I was saddened that some were unable to see this project for what we hoped it would become – a discernment process to find a way forward.

Reaching out to the Community

The Florida Conference had now established that the *El Aposento Alto* (The Upper Room) church would become the Hispanic ministry of the post-merger church with representation on all the committees of the church. A newly appointed Pastor would

lead the Hispanic ministry and also serve as the Associate Pastor of the post-merger church. The Associate Pastor would help integrate the ministry into the larger church, lead worship, and engage with the various committees of the church.

As that new Associate pastor and with regard to my personal perspective, let me share that I served over twenty-five years as a minister with the *Missionary Church of Christ*, a Pentecostal denomination. Having traveled to over fifteen countries in the Caribbean, and Central and South America I think I have a good perspective on the Hispanic community. An example of this comes from an earlier time during the 1980's when I was serving as Vice President of the *Ambassadors of Christ*, the youth movement of the *Assemblies of God*. I would visit churches where sectors of people from countries such as Honduras, where civil war had broken out, could not seem to get along. Having come from a country torn by internal conflict, in order to survive, people had to take sides. It was people from these divisions of war and strife that had then come to the United States and found themselves in our congregations.

In summary, the leadership of the Florida Conference of the *United Methodist Church* hoped to create a MOSAIC church; a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic church that would reach out and minister to the existing demographic. Much like a mosaic picture is made up of many individual pieces of sizes and colors, we believed our church should mirror both heaven and our diverse community here in Port St. Lucie. Simply put, one of our directives was diversity.

The Merriam- Webster dictionary defines diversity as:

the condition of having or being composed of differing elements: variety; especially: the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization.⁴

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity>. Accessed 1/5/2017.

But what should this look like in the church? Certainly, the church is not Home Depot selling paint and tile. The Hispanic ministry compiled a total of thirty-five people but was aging; at the time of the merger the average age was seventy-seven



Figure 9- Mosaic Tile Pattern made up of many pieces and colors

years old and the founders were in their early seventies. The ministry was reaching the end of its life cycle but yet was doing vital work within the community through pastoral care. The church welcomed my wife and me with open arms that wonderful day in June of 2011. However, coming from a Pentecostal background both of us sensed that the leadership heights we had reached within our previous denomination would be tested in this context.

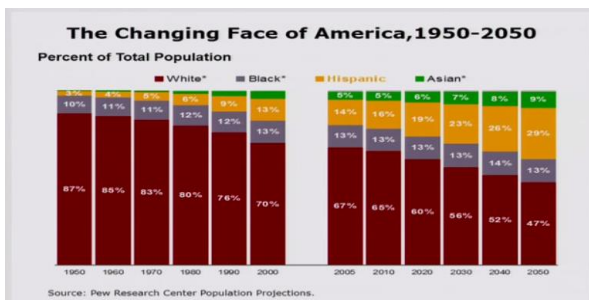


Figure 10- The changing face of America, 1950-2050 ⁵

cultural demographic population of Port St. Lucie, which, at the time of this writing, is eighteen percent Hispanic.

Again, let's look at the Pew Research graph in Figure 8 which presents the changing face of America. The figure represents very well the

⁵ The changing face of America. Pew Research Center for Population Projections. www.pewresearch.org. Accessed on 6/1/2016.

In the United Methodist Church, we have a connectional ministry. We believe in the ministry of all Christians; that is to say that every baptized Christian is a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, no exceptions.

The Book of Discipline of the UMC states:

¶ 132. The Journey of a Connectional People-

Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one charge conference to another. It is rather a vital web of interactive relationships. We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith, including our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules (¶ 103); by sharing together a constitutional polity, including a leadership of general superintendency; by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusive and missional character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things.⁶

These ministers – lay or clergy – are connected together and committed to each other by a covenant relationship which upholds our faith and Christian standards. In sharing this common mission, the Conference provides funds and leadership to the District Superintendent, who as the chief missional officer in the District, has identified areas of ministry and future growth within his area of responsibility. The Bishop and District Superintendent then make appointments at the local church level and they subsequently issue a charge of leadership to local clergy in a given ministerial context. Since the merger in 2011, there have been many changes at the local, District, and Superintendency levels that have in one way or another affected the merger. For instance, in 2012 Bishop Timothy Whitaker completed his term in office and the UM College of Bishops assigned a new Bishop, Kenneth Carter, to the Florida Conference. Bishop

⁶ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church- 2012. Copyright 2012 by The United Methodist Publishing House.

Carter brought with him the vision of implementing a system of missional vital signs to measure the progress of the local church. These vital signs include:

• **Radical Hospitality/POF & RAF (Joining the Church)**

Radical hospitality: the total number of persons received into membership measured by “profession of faith” (POF) and “reaffirmation of faith” (RAF). Continued...

POF: The first public expression of commitment to Christian faith by an individual in which she or he acknowledges commitment to Jesus Christ and pledges to learn to live as one of His disciples. This number includes youth who join the church through the confirmation process. It also includes adults who have never been a member of a congregation who come to faith and choose to live out that faith as part of your congregation. RAF: Reaffirmation of faith indicates “a person who has been baptized at some point in his or her life, has made a profession of faith, and has possibly been a member of a congregation but has not actively been involved for quite some time. These people are renewing their faith as part of your congregation. They are not a transfer from another congregation.

• **Commitment to Christ (Evangelism, saying YES to Christ)** This number represents the number of persons making a first time commitment to Christ. (not same as POF) Purpose: To see if “Commitments to Christ” translate into POF’s. Are we bringing people in with evangelism and then into a faith journey? Are there systems in place for people’s spiritual journey?

• **Intentional Discipling Small Groups**

This measure is the number of persons involved in intentional discipling small groups. A discipling small group is defined as any group with two or more individuals who meet at least monthly (to be counted the week of meeting), share a commitment to become more like Jesus, read and reflect on scripture, explore what it means to apply God’s word to their lives, share honest feedback, and pray for one another. Examples include discipleship study, most Sunday school classes, alpha groups, youth groups, Emmaus reunion groups, Financial Peace, and Celebrate Recovery small groups. Not counted are Scouts, outside groups like AA, choir (unless intentional about the above criteria), or child care for group meetings.

• **Salty Service (Redefined)**

For measurement purposes and understanding the health of the church, count the number of persons serving through church ministries to the community for a least one hour.

People serve other people in many ways and this is still very important (Rotary, Guardian Ad Litem, hospital volunteers). Please know this is great ministry. For our purpose of evaluating the health of the church, we are focusing on the outreach ministries, missions, serving through the local church.

• **Extravagant Generosity**

This number is the total amount given to God's church for budgeted operating and

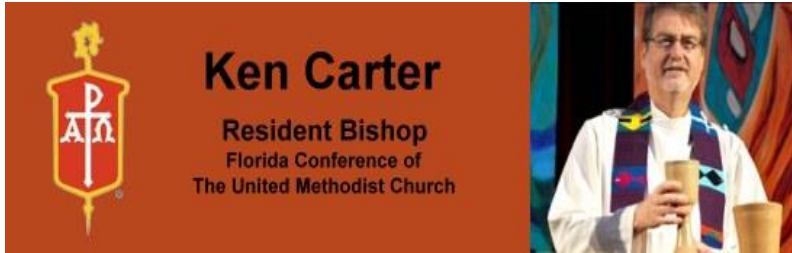


Figure 11- Bishop Kenneth Carter. Presiding Bishop of the Florida Annual Conference of the UMC ⁸

capital expenses and missional purposes in addition to or part of the budget. This includes all contributions received by pledged and unpledged giving, loose plate offerings, and funds given for capital debt, building or repairs, or special offerings to ministries beyond the church (UMCH, youth mission trip, Africa University, Habitat for Humanity, Storm Recovery or a sister congregation in Cuba or Angola). Excluded are interest income, memorial bequeaths, facility use fees, income from child care, adult day care ministries, thrift stores, pumpkin patches and similar fundraisers, as these do not reflect the financial generosity of the congregation.

These Missional Vital Signs also came with challenges. The new Bishop and Conference leadership team also understood that the Florida Annual Conference could operate in the next few years with about 500 churches. Currently the Florida Conference has about 680 congregations. This would mean that current churches that were not “vital” would go through a process of “reconfiguration” where some could be closed, merged, or re-launched. All of these changes produced consequences that had a ripple effect on both the congregations within the conference and the Hispanic ministry.

The goals, objectives, and priorities were clear at the outset of this project. They had been defined in the early days of the merger. Both congregations were to come

⁷ Bishop Kenneth Carter. Presiding Bishop of the Florida Annual Conference of the UMC. accessed on 12/28/2016.

⁸ Florida Conference Presiding Bishop Kenneth Carter. www.flumc.org. accessed on 8.10.2016

Field Code Changed

Field Code Changed

together to reach out to form a new congregation and to reach out to the community. Our mission and vision were to “shine the light of God’s love” and to do so effectively in two languages. The purpose of this merger was not to have a bigger church or to have more members, though these were among our objectives. Our purpose was to reach out and present Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and on the way we would have barometers to measure our progress.

While this purpose was clear for most of us, the working environment at the church was far from ready to take on this merger. Much like a family prepares a room for a new member of the family or a bird prepares a nest for a newborn, our congregation could have easily produced a stillborn child. One of the Hispanic leaders who had been a part of a congregation in Orlando in years past observed that, like our merger, he went through many of the same roadblocks and likened our merger to a “child in the womb” of the larger Anglo congregation. His language was one that invoked the need for nurture and care. We struggled those first few years against racial barriers that inhibited us from achieving our initial goals and perspectives. Our project chose to identify some of these barriers and address them head on. The task ahead, then, was one of preparing specific activities to knock on the door of these barriers and to produce an ongoing conversation from all sides. We were under no illusions that during the next six months we would sprint to a complete transformation of our fears, anxieties, issues, or complexities. Our purpose was to send out a Morse code by tapping the wall and pray for an answer to come from the other side of the wall.

First United Methodist Church of Port St. Lucie, and El Aposento Alto Church
would come together to become one Church, a new Church, a Church that understood the

door that was opening in Port St. Lucie to minister to the growing Hispanic community. Even though we all saw the storms that lay ahead, we believed we were ready for the challenge that God had set before us. I will expand later in my writing on all of these and other faith-quakes that have shaken this merger to its utter core but for now I hope I have painted a picture of some of the relevant issues that have marked our journey up to the time of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

KEY BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

I remember a story I heard from my Cuban friend Liborio Suarez. Because of his Christian faith, Liborio had been arrested and served time in prison for almost two years during the early years of the Castro Revolution. Undaunted, he and his fellow prisoners would often hide pieces of moldy bread in their boots and also squeeze pieces of sugar cane for juice in order to celebrate a make-shift rite of communion. He did this because there were no clergy members present. Liborio eventually was able to emigrate from Cuba to America, where he became one of our congregants and a key supporter of both our church merger and our project activities. He wanted to return to Cuba for the project activity (which we shall see in the next chapter), but his visa was rejected at the airport. I mention this at the outset of a chapter on the theological basis of this project because he is an example of one piece in the mosaic of people who comprise the picture of the merger of two churches. I also want to point out the adjustments he and other political prisoners needed to make in the midst of their circumstances. They, much like this church merger, needed to adjust to their context in order to be able to worship effectively. Liborio and his wife Idelsa are perfect examples of people who kept their eyes on the purpose of God for their lives even when difficulty inundated their lives. Idelsa was left at home with a one-year-old son who would come to visit the labor camp and tell the guards that they needed to let his father go free. The guards would ask, “And why is that,

young man?" To which Liborio Jr. would respond: "Because that is my father and he is a man of God." In the merger many difficulties would arise and produce culture, systems, and familial shock waves within the congregation, and yet keeping our eye on our purpose became vitally important for every one of us.

Early Models of a Mosaic notion of Church¹

Old Testament Notions

As early as Genesis we can see God's purpose for creation as we read: "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." (Genesis 9:7 NASV) As we view this in context in Genesis, Chapters Ten and Eleven, a pattern stands out to us. Biblical scholar Theodore Hiebert, Professor of Old Testament and Dean of faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary, states that Chapters Ten and Eleven may not necessarily be in chronological order as we encounter this narrative.² Chapter Ten speaks of different tribes and languages that populated the earth while sharing a mandate from God. Humanity decided to go against the wishes of God and some of them came together around a different purpose. They refused to fulfill the orders of God to fill the earth and steward it. They refused to scatter and they proposed instead to build a



Figure 12- Marten Van Valckenborch, The Elder (1535-1612) The Tower of Babel ³

¹ The term, Mosaic Church refers to a picture or idea that we can produce a church of differing colors or cultures by arranging for their mutual interests to come together to form one pattern.

² Hiebert, Theodore "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 29–58.

³ Marten Van Valckenborch, The Elder (1535-1612) The Tower of Babel. accessed 8/20/2016 from www.wikigallery.org.

monument which for me was an attempt to hide their insecurities – a tower that would pierce the heavens, so to speak, in order to wage war against God. God did not send judgment against the people but made a not-so-subtle adjustment to human languages and showed grace by allowing humanity to comply with God’s initial mandate "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." (Genesis 9:1 NIV) The problem in these passages is not the desire to reach God, but an attitude of settling for ease or accommodation. This attitude of *Yashav*, which means to sit, remain, and dwell, was an affront to the plan of God and God’s intervention gifted them with a way to get back on track.⁴

In this way God blessed the people through diversity of tongues, much in the same way the Holy Spirit did at Pentecost. In the first case, God seemed to be involved in both maintaining course and giving perspective to the goal and in the latter, God helped with a supernatural ability to help us understand exactly what that is.

Process theologians John Cobb and David Ray Griffin write about our pilgrimage and how our walk requires the direction of the Spirit of God: "If the churches are to participate in the original Church, they must be creatively transformed through their openness to Christ."⁵

I understand that our church merger might reveal God’s ability to bring us together; that, if we are to succeed, we must be dependent on that same Holy Spirit to breathe new life into us. As a result, in order to become a healthy congregation, I believe

⁴ NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries Copyright © 1981, 1998 by The Lockman Foundation.

⁵ John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 131

we need to again become teachable so we can relearn how to do ministry in this new context. This *koinonia* is not only about sharing and having things in common but also about relinquishing control. When we relinquish control God does his greatest work. We have Scriptural examples in Moses, Mary, and Paul among others, whose lives bore the greatest fruit when they lived into their vulnerabilities. Being vulnerable is the key to intimacy; it means opening ourselves up to others without holding anything back and is not weakness but strength in action. One example of this is the openness I needed to have with the Hispanic ministry once my Bishop appointed me here. Remember that this ministry had been in existence for over twelve years at the church before becoming the official Hispanic ministry. This was not a group that we were about to create – it had its own way of operating with its own leadership that had been functioning over the years.

On top of that, the average age of the thirty-five people involved was seventy-seven years old! This was a group that did not like change and yet had voted unanimously to merge. Upon my arrival I saw the need to get this inwardly focused group to move outward utilizing a discipleship system of small groups. Initially, this began to occur only during a Thursday night Bible study. Eventually, it took me two years to convince the ministry to make the change. I had to win them over before I could ask them to follow my lead. Gaining their trust was a major obstacle to overcome before I could make any changes. How can we worship our way together into our preferred future? It starts by being vulnerable to God and to each other as we gather to worship and for ministry in the community both near and far.

Walter Brueggemann, the United Church of Christ Old Testament Scholar, describes all human language as the language of disobedience. It is this, brought on by

the inability to listen to God's purpose, that becomes evident in the story of the Tower of Babel. He makes emphasis not on the ability to speak but on the ability given at Pentecost to be able to listen and understand each other. This would prove to be essential if the merger were to succeed.

I will be forever haunted by my terrible relationship with the former senior pastor at First PSL. The first year of my appointment at the church went well until both our egos began to clash. In addition, I perceived that he had a lack of cultural sensitivity coupled with a lack of trust about my ministry activities. Combined, these things so affected our relationship that we became estranged from each other. Whenever there was an issue at the church I instantly became a scapegoat and I spent more time defending myself than being the active agent for change to which God had called me. We will need to be culturally sensitive and become partners in ministry if we are to succeed at God's plan to



Figure 13- Walter Brueggemann-
Old Testament Scholar ⁶

be a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural church. God looks for a people not because of their race or creed, but because their primary loyalty in life is to God. It is this language of communication that stands out in Scripture – a God effectively

trying to communicate the purpose of the realm – it is this fresh capacity to listen that sets the Acts message apart. Truth be told, we spend so much time and energy avoiding the love language of listening to others. People in this world are caught in acts of selfishness when God created us to be beings of selflessness.

Brueggemann continues:

⁶ Walter Brueggemann is widely considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the last several decades. Accessed on August 16, 2016 from www.walterbrueggemann.com.

The creator has a purpose and will for creation. The creation exists only because of that will. The creator continues to address the creation, calling it to faithful response and glad obedience to his will. The creation has not been turned loose on its own. Nor has it been given free rein for its own inclinations. But the purposes of the creator are not imposed in a coercive way or imposed as a tyrant might. The creator loves and respects the creation. The freedom of creation is taken seriously by the creator. Therefore, his sovereign rule is expressed in terms of faithfulness, patience, and anguish.

Second, the creation, which exists only because of and for the sake of the creator's purpose, has freedom to respond to the creator in various ways. As the texts indicate, the response of creation to creator is a mixture of faithful obedience and recalcitrant self-assertion. Both are present, though the negative response tends to dominate the narrative.⁷

Brueggemann teaches that when we violate God's commandments, we go against our own God-given DNA to live in a covenantal relationship with God and with each

other. It is precisely these nucleotides, that

God has embedded in our DNA strands as a

people of God, that have produced in our

innermost being the sense that we are simply

not listening – hence our confusion and

division as seen in the Babel narrative. We seem to be caught up either in how things are

– or appear depressed because of those things of which we have to let go. We have

become not the church but apostates of God's desire for multiplicity in all of its

forms. We are stuck because God is already on the other side of a new life, a new way,

and new beginnings and we just don't want to let go of our created structures

concomitant with individualistic thinking.

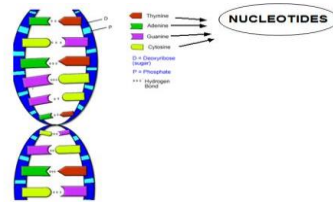


Figure 14- Nucleotides are the basic structural unit and building blocks of DNA ⁸

⁷ Genesis: Interpretation, 13.

⁸ Nucleotides, the basis of DNA. Downloaded from www.prosol-spa.it on August 5, 2016. Part of the nucleotide structure includes the four bases in DNA: Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine and Thymine, which hold the two strands of the double helix together. Collectively they help encode phenotype, a person's visible traits. (Accessed, September 16, 2016) <http://knowgenetics.org/nucleotides-and-bases/>

New Testament Notions

The Apostle Paul lists three theological virtues that I find echoed throughout Scripture. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV) The first of these is faith. Faith is both a basic belief in God and defined as a way of life for a Christian. The writer in the Book of Hebrews says that without faith “it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6 NIV) Faith is the most basic of values and described by Luke as a small seed. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed” (Luke 17:6 ESV) This faith is both defined and exhibited by the giants of our faith. “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” (Hebrews 11:1-2 NIV) It is with faith that the UMC approached this merger; faith that God would identify the desire of the Holy Spirit to present a multi-ethnic church.

The second of these virtues is hope. While all three of these virtues speak to this project, hope speaks to the expectation and desire of receiving God’s gift; refraining from despair and capability of not giving up. Hope speaks to the belief that God has preceded us in this project and that the Spirit of God will be eternally present in every human's life and that God will never give up on His love.

The third of these virtues is love. Agape love is the supernatural virtue that helps us love God and our neighbors, no matter what their ethnic heritage, more than ourselves.

As we read in Scripture:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV)

Love is accepting of the other and allows us to listen to God as he lures us to venture out – with our suitcase in hand, containing both faith and hope – to encounter others who love God just as much as we do and to bond with them at various levels. Tradition teaches us that these virtues come to us during baptism and help us grow in our relationship with God as we exhibit these virtues.

The Work of Oscar Romero

Oscar Arnulfo Romero was a prelate of the Roman Catholic Church who served as the Archbishop of El Salvador until his assassination in 1980. He was widely known for his ministry with the poor and needy. Romero knew that if there was to be reform it had to come from the work of the Holy Spirit on the interior of the soul of the

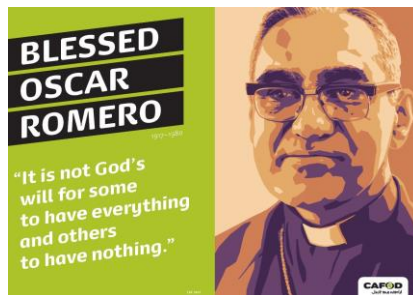


Figure 15- Oscar A. Romero
Archbishop of El Salvador (1917-1980) 9

individual. He was quoted as saying that “the most profound social revolution is the serious, supernatural, interior reform of a Christian.”¹⁰ These insights became a call to action for our project. Romero, the LAC and I understood that real change and transformation – or any movement that mattered – would only be possible if it was a change from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, one produced by the Holy Spirit, and one produced in covenant with God. Both the LAC and I knew that simply looking for improvement would be like painting over something without first pressure washing the substrate. This would be like the Biblical narrative of placing new wine in old wineskins

⁹ Oscar A. Romero. accessed August 26, 2016. www.cafodwestminster.wordpress.com.

¹⁰ Oscar A. Romero, *La Más Profunda Revolución Social*, DIARIO DE ORIENTE, No. 30867 – p. 1, August 28, 1973.

– the result would produce failure. In this project we would be brought to face demons of division within ourselves and in those of individuals we encountered. Our prayers were that these cold, hard, hearts would find the warmth of the Holy Spirit and be broken open to start to beat again for God’s glory.

At only twenty-five years old, Romero penned this unpublished comment in his diary: “I have been thinking of how far a soul can ascend if it lets itself be possessed entirely by God. It’s a shame to waste such precious time and such valuable gifts.”¹¹

We found this to be the case with FUMC-PSL, a seven-hundred-member congregation surrounded by many people hungry for God and desiring to find a purpose. We discovered this through the Church’s spiritual gifts surveys (see appendix) given to the new members and in discipleship courses. People filled with gifts of the Holy Spirit intended to invigorate the Church and had the time and resources to do so. All our project needed to do was come into contact with them in order for God to do the work.

Liberation Theology

While admittedly not a liberation theologian, the protection of human dignity and opposition to violence were at the top of Romero’s priorities. He states:

The liberation of Christ and of His Church is not reduced to the dimension of a purely temporal project. It does not reduce its objectives to an anthropocentric perspective: to a material well-being or to initiatives of a political or social, economic or cultural order, only.¹²

¹¹ <http://opcentral.org/resources/2015/01/21/james-r-brockman-s-j-the-spiritual-journey-of-oscar-romero/> Accessed on 1/13/2017.

¹² Oscar A. Romero. Sermon 6 August 1976.

With regard to the merger, the hope for the Florida conference was not simply to throw money at an issue but to reach out to a growing part of the Hispanic demographic in Port St. Lucie. We were intentional to develop a ministry that would be vital to the community. This sense of vision drove the merger process and continued during the project phase. Concomitant with Romero's assertions our journey was not primarily motivated by political, social, economic, or even cultural elements even though these all play a part in one way or another. Our intention was to show how a united church could work better together to show the presence of Christ in the world. Human dignity and opposition to violence are issues not only on our streets but also in our churches. In order to see results that will surpass our tenure with FUMC-PSL there will need to be a change in our hearts and minds as Romero mentions above and we will see the beginnings of this change revealed in the narratives recorded in the project results chapter. This is not about money; although there are financial aspects associated with the merger, it is about being the body of Christ. All of us need to respect human dignity for persons of every culture.

The Work of Michael C. Hawn

This leads us to C. Michael Hawn, Distinguished Professor of Church Music and Director, Master of Sacred Music Program at Southern Methodist University, who reflects on the mosaic concept:

A mosaic consists of thousands of tiny pieces, each with its own distinct hue and shape. Each has its own identity defined by size, color, shape, and texture. When the distinct fragments come together under the hand of a creative artist, a larger picture emerges. Complexity and diversity intensify this picture, especially when one sees the larger view. Does this "larger view" suggest that each piece has an identical role in the larger picture or reflects light in the same way? Probably not. Does this mean that each tiny fragment has an important part to play in the overall design of the mosaic? Yes!¹³

¹³ C. Michael Hawn. *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, 14.

Hawn goes on to present four different views or models of worship within our pluralistic society. These are cultural uniformity, cultural assimilation, cultural openness, and cultural partnership. I believe the one closest to what we are practicing at First PSL is the Cultural Partnership approach which adheres to the vision in Ephesians.¹⁴ As the Apostle Paul relates to us: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” (Ephesians 2:19 NASB)

At our church and through this project we have discerned a partnership woven together by the recognition of our present broken condition and our desire for future wholeness and oneness in Christ. We seem to have come to recognize our biases and prejudices and still seem to have unearthed an innate desire to relate to one another better. One of the best examples of this occurred most recently during the joint Cuba caravan in March of 2016. During the trip a small group of those who traveled met poolside at the *Mirador de Mayabe* hotel where we lodged during the trip. In an upcoming chapter, we shall see how the trip and the ministry unfolded in an enthusiastic manner. Our conversation that day centered on what we needed to do in order to become one church back home at *First PSL*. We heard from the group on the importance of joint services, some spoke of a desire to attend the Hispanic services now that we knew each other, and all shared their sense that the pastoral staff had begun to work well together.

Certainly there was a time in this venture where an exclusive posture toward cultural perspectives became evident and, in my view, began to undermine the whole purpose of our project. My relationship with the senior pastor, disagreements in how to

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

do ministry, the challenges of shared space, and staff conflicts are just a few of the issues that threatened the merger. I thank God that we are now starting to celebrate cultural diversity and are currently open to rethinking our views and the perspectives of others.

The United Methodist Church – like this merger – is also comprised of a very delicate quality for it is made up of many mosaic-like pieces (individual church contexts) that affect the whole and yet each piece has its own individual beauty. Though it may be the best intention of a denomination to place the right people in leadership, we sometimes miss the mark. When a “my way or the highway” mentality becomes more important than that of creating unity and the importance of leadership becomes more central than serving as a docent for others in God’s hands, we have veered off course. I come from New York where we enjoy the best museums in the world. When I ask God how a minister should function, I recall the work of a docent at the museums I have visited. That individual points out and explains the works of art in the museum. By the time you leave the museum you realize that you have forgotten the first thing the docent mentioned – their name. In the same way, the minister is not the important one in the story. Our job is to point people to God and get out of the way so that when people leave the building they forget my name and remember that of the Supreme Artist. No one part is more important than the whole; although all parts are important, none is indispensable. Key leadership is one of the most important aspects for producing intended results in mergers like that of *First PSL*. Again and again, we encountered our need to evaluate continually and ask ourselves: do we have the right leaders for this ministry context?

The work of Dom Anscar Chupungho

Inculturation Principles and Implications

This project has shown the value of continuing to celebrate cultural diversity. This is important as our context exists within the United Methodist Church. I have reviewed the work of Filipino Benedictine priest Anscar Chupungco who comes from a Roman Catholic perspective where the many aspects of the liturgy are invariable, for the most part.¹⁵ Most of his work centers on the concept of inculturation. By this he means the desire not only to designate the interaction between liturgy and culture but also to identify ways to find common ground and then fill in the gaps as we try to direct people toward right practices. This can produce fragmentation, not unity within our church. This is why Chupungco holds the view that inculturation needs to come about through acculturation:

“a process whereby cultural elements which are compatible with the Roman liturgy are incorporated into it either as substitutes or illustrations of eucharistical and ritual elements of the Roman rite.”^{16,17} By doing so, congregations might lessen the danger of religious cultural shock.¹⁸ I believe we all



Figure 16- Dom Anscar Chupungco, OSB. 15

need to become more culturally aware as different things are important to different groups. In my experience, all of us believe that there are essential parts to our worship

¹⁵ Filipino priest Dom Anscar Chupungco, accessed August 24, 2016. Dom is an honorific prefixed to the given name. It derives from the Latin Dominus.

¹⁶ The study of the Eastern Orthodox ritual.

¹⁷ Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B. *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (Wipf & Stock Publishers; Eugene, Oregon) 1982. 81.

¹⁸ Ibid. 86.

services – but not all of us agree about the areas of greatest importance. We celebrate our most sacred of traditions in the most contextual manners.

Even in the presence of openness, we recognize that our biases and context may produce limitations to this openness. In our context, the UMC Anglo congregation and the senior pastor preferred the security of structure in the liturgy and since I come from a Pentecostal denomination, that background has influenced the Hispanic ministry. As such, we prefer the freedom of spontaneous worship: freedom to give testimony, preaching outside the common lectionary, altar calls, and revivals are all commonplace in the Hispanic ministry. Due to the nature of that kind of spontaneity, we have experienced disruptions in scheduling. For example, I have a special relationship with our church administrator, Gladys and we share our enjoyment of a television commercial about people who get aggravated and are thus in need of a Snickers bar to calm them down. Gladys and I gift each other with Snickers bars because, though I coordinate monthly events with her on the calendar, Gladys will sometimes get aggravated because of new needs and adjustments to accommodate the Hispanic ministry and or service schedules.

Bridging these gaps is not for the faint of heart because for the charismatic Christian the fifty-nine-minute traditional Methodist scripted service may seem dry and devoid of the movement of the Spirit. And yet, for those who prefer this type of liturgy, a free flowing service with no written liturgy may seem disorganized – hence the need for both groups to understand the charism of inculturation.

Chupungco, in his book *Liturgies of the Future* goes further by stating that:

If the church is to be in a position to offer to all the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself

to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived.¹⁹

In this project, narratives like those of Chuck, Pam and Sandra seem to indicate that this was indeed the case.

Inculturation implies collaboration and it has been said that there is “no I in team.” Well, “there is no I in Church either.” I remember going to my first Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) interview in the United Methodist Church in 2011 and the interview did not go well. However, the BOOM wanted to work with me and assigned a mentor to help me work through areas they felt were challenging for me. My mentor and I worked through these contingencies and found that there were gaps in my understanding of UMC Polity and Doctrine. If it had not been for the BOOM, my mentor, and I working together for weeks at a time, we would never have worked through this step in the ministry process. I thus gained valuable insights in the collaborative process that the LAC and I have been better able to evoke in this project. If we are to achieve a mosaic church in Port St. Lucie, we must all work together toward a common goal. Among the biggest of these gaps is the communication barriers produced by social and theological understandings.

One of the things that my mentor brought up was her understanding that I should eliminate all of my *we* statements in my writing. She told me that it was important for me to articulate to the Board what *I* had accomplished in ministry. However, to this day, I strongly disagree with that mentor and uphold my version of *we*. It is *we* that fits into the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace – the concept that God goes before us and

¹⁹ Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B. *Liturgies of the Future* (Paulist Press; New York) 1989. 28.

partners with us in our walk of faith. It is *we* who embody the reality of how we understand ministry as “the ministry of all Christians” – as one body both lay and clergy, one people of all nations and creeds working toward the transformation of the world. It is

**THE FIRST DUTY OF
LOVE IS TO LISTEN**
– PAUL TILLICH ²⁰

we that speaks to a connectional form of administration within the church that invites all to participate.

It is precisely this *I* as in an exclusivist society that is clashing with the *we* of the collective society in the merger.

Even though the congregation is now over fifty-two years old, as Christ grafted his presence into our own, we too can become enriched by allowing the work of the Holy Spirit to overwhelm us with discernment to pursue his purpose.

The cultural incarnation of Jesus takes place front and center as we speak of God inserting Godself into a Jewish home in a small town in Galilee. Emmanuel amongst us – taking on a native tongue and learning customs and the culture of those with whom he lived. Imagine Jesus as a young boy in the Jewish Temple

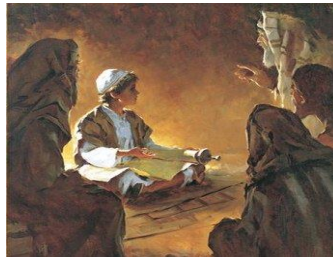


Figure 17- Finding the Child Jesus. ²¹

listening to people tell second-hand stories of events that Jesus, as part of the Godhead, had already lived in person and of which he had first-hand knowledge. How many times during the ministry of Christ did the Levites, Pharisees, and Sadducees come to Christ with specific interpretations of the law only to have Jesus say to them how they had

²⁰ www.Brainyquotes.com/paultillichquotes. Accessed on 9/1/2016.

²¹ www.catholicbookwriter.com Finding the Child Jesus, Accessed August 8, 2016.

overlooked the main principles behind the teachings. It is clear that church mergers that are failing may have missed the main purpose for their creation. The culture affected and nurtured Jesus; and Jesus affected and nurtured the culture. Here God opens a dialogue with humanity only to be misunderstood because we – as humanity – have strayed so far off course.

I remember when the Hispanic ministry first moved into our church's Beacon Center, a multi-million-dollar facility inaugurated in 2007. One of the things that is vital to the Hispanic ministry is our second service after worship. This is the sharing portion of time where each of us brings a small dish of food to share. We get together to taste the food – our time together may last up to an hour. This will sometimes involve the use of the full size kitchen at this facility. Everyone who uses the kitchen completes a sign out sheet stating that they left the kitchen clean. Conflict with other groups arose over definitions of "clean" and we lost sight of the common goal of unity as we focused merely on each other's definitions.

The act of sharing space is commonplace in mergers. There is a common phrase among families that when they have visitors in their house they begin to stink after a couple of weeks. Not the most hospitable understanding, but it does serve as a kind of mirror to what occurred at First PSL after our merger. After the merger, following an initial welcome and honeymoon period, to other groups the Hispanic ministry began to appear like invaders who required the use of space and adjustments in worship times. There were problems about the use and care of sound equipment and ministry activity storage space allocations. Thus, we were not very popular the first few months of the merger and since I was the Associate Pastor overlooking the ministry, I became the

lightning rod for all the adjustments that needed to happen which, at times, appeared in the form of complaints and even scoldings.

Continuing with our New Testament analysis, when I speak of a mosaic church I also reference the first century church in Antioch. That church brought people from a variety of socio-economic circumstances, life stages, religious backgrounds, and walks of life to a personal faith in Jesus. This was a church born out of the fresh breath of God – a perfected understanding of purpose, communication, and understanding – given at Pentecost. Luke relates the occurrence:

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[a] 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. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:1-11 NIV)

Peter addresses the new church and explains that this was the promise prophesized by Joel that “in the last days God will pour out His Spirit upon all people.” (Acts 2:17 NIV) This ability to communicate fully between three entities is essential within any mosaic venture. By this, I mean the ability of God to communicate effectively to the bearer of the message, open the ears of the listeners and invoke a response both from the bearer and the listener not only to God but to each other. In other words, as in

marriage, I see any mosaic venture as a dance between three and not two persons; God is in the middle.

Further, in our Church merger, we sought to produce a union that attempted to look more like the ethnic diversity we enjoy in Port St. Lucie. If we read Genesis 11:1-4 correctly, it has always been the intention of God for the church to be multicultural and multiethnic, a church that receives people from all walks of life. Even before the merger, both *First PSL* and *El Aposento Alto* had reputations as churches with the gift of radical hospitality. We are both known in the community as accepting, open and ministering to the needs of those in our neighborhood and beyond. The same was true with the primitive Church in Acts as we read, “some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 11:20 NIV)

After the merger, each of these individual churches was to overcome the single focus of preaching and reaching only one sector of the community because now we could do this effectively in two languages. The church at Antioch in Acts chapter eleven stopped preaching only to the Jews and developed a diverse group of leadership represented by people from the Mediterranean (Cypress), North Africa (Cyrene), West Africa (Simeon) Syria (Lucius), and Jerusalem (Saul and Barnabas). These leaders maintained a prophetic voice within the church. This too has held true with the model offered by *First PSL* in offering a variety of services that minister to Port St. Lucie’s existing demographic diversity. After the merger we were able to offer services in Spanish to a city that had become eighteen percent Hispanic as of 2011. Not only have we encountered a large ethnic diversity within the Hispanic ministry, but we have also

found large doctrinal distinctions as well. At the time of this writing there are twelve different nations represented, including people from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Columbia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, the Virgin Islands, El Salvador, Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, and Costa Rica. The church is also home to many new people within our community. Some of them come to us from other Christian denominations such as Pentecostals, Baptists, and Holiness Churches.

Within the last year, I sat down with Professor C. Michael Hawn in Dallas, Texas to get his observations on non-verbal communication – the symbols, expressions, and body language that sometimes speaks more clearly than words themselves (semiotics). Some might say that if it was not spoken, it did not really happen. However, Professor Hawn spoke to me about the in-between content that can communicate meaning. He spoke about the gestures, hugs, and embraces that can bring people back to our pews because that simple gesture was more important to individuals than the sermon itself. I will forever be haunted by the looks, shrugs, false empathy, and the lack of cultural sensitivity portrayed by a minority of people during the first few months after the merger. This unspoken language screamed at me in a much higher and deafening tone and was more defining to the Hispanic ministry than even the lack of words of encouragement.

The Hidden Stories

Echoing the method of theological reflection modelled by practical theologian Stephen Pattison in *Some Straw for Bricks*, I see the church and myself engaging in a

three way conversation or dialogue between our own ideas, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions; the beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation which

is being considered.²⁴ This critical conversation arises from our church wanting to gain a real understanding of questions which are of contemporary relevance rather than just handing down the truths of our past.²⁵

The three categories Pattison mentions are akin to a theological analysis of myself, my Methodist Denomination and my local context: the now merged *First PSL* and *El Aposento Alto*. Let us now consider each of these:

I see the LAC and myself entering into this critical conversation and doing our best to clean the slate of previous biased notions as we contemplate our present situation. For me, the question is not whether a merger is a good idea, but how this can facilitate our mission of making disciples of Christ for evangelization. I see myself leading the way to help those in this merger knock down the walls of division and hate. In so doing, together we can present to the local community a Church that is one body and thus give testimony of the uniting power of the Holy Spirit. I now can imagine how this project can produce results that may arise from these conversations and how this work can produce a deeper connection not only for the issues surrounding the merger but between God, the Lay Advisory Committee, me, and the church as a whole. I must confess that I still see the Church as a whole stuck in Babel – entrenched in building structures and wanting them to be a testament of God’s blessing – all the while still being reluctant to seek oneness with each other in the kingdom.

²⁴ Stephen Pattison “*Some Straw for Bricks: A basic introduction to Theological Reflection*,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Oxford Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, (2000), 135.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

Savage and Presnell use terms like “disengage”, and “retreat” to refer to the process of research and evaluation.²⁶ I liken this to the analogy of attempting to remove myself from the fish bowl of everyday normalcy in order to look in from the outside for a fresh view and perspective toward those in the tank.

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat describe this as Reflexivity and acknowledge its difficulty when they write:

Put simply, ‘reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to the proceedings’. Reflexivity is a mode of knowing that accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively.²⁷

With regard to the role of my denomination, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church defines its mission statement as follows: the mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.²⁸ It is the wish of The United Methodist Church of the Florida Conference to propose a Fresh Expression of faith. Florida UMC Bishop Ken Carter recently quoted a report titled “Mission Shaped Ministry” and commented on the Fresh Expressions movement stating:

The Fresh Expressions movement began in England in 2004, through a report of the Church of England about the state of the church in that nation, and the need for a new direction. The word “fresh expression” is taken from the Book of Common Prayer: “The Church of England...professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and

²⁶ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 123.

²⁷ John Swinton and Harriet Mowan, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2016 (SCM Press; London. Second Edition, 2016), 57.

²⁸ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Section 1: The Churches. ¶120.

set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.”²⁹

The report goes on to give us a working definition of this movement:

“A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, contextual mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the Gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.”³⁰

This is concomitant with what Pattison describes above to gain a real understanding of the theological dynamics of this merger because it has contemporary relevance.³¹

The United Methodist Church has traditionally been a white, upper middle class denomination. They are the second largest evangelical denomination in the United States. But as many mainline historical churches, they have been in decline for the last forty years. Statistics show that if the current decline prevails, the UMC will cease to exist in the next fifty years. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, feared this future for the church when he said:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.³²

Seeing this decline, the UMC has set out since the 1980’s to reach out to minorities through strategic plans such as the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino

²⁹ Ken Carter. Florida Conference United Methodist Church Bishop. Fresh Expressions: A Movement Begins. Accessed on 10/14.2016, www.flumc.org.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pattison, 137.

³² John Wesley, Works (Bicentennial edition), 9, 527. ‘Thoughts upon Methodism’ (1786).

Ministry. The vision of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry is based on the experience of the Holy Spirit's power on the day of Pentecost, of a "Church for all the Nations, where all can hear the mighty works of God in their own tongue" (Acts 2:8 NIV)³³

The declaration goes on to say that, "We must eradicate racism and cultural chauvinism from our perspectives and rejoice in the future God is opening to us."³⁴

With regard to our ministerial context let me start by saying that my wife and I are second generation preachers from a Pentecostal heritage. As we continue with the third voice of the conversation, we have always sought to discern what God has in store for us and we seek this insight through spiritual practices such as fasting and prayer. Following the lead of Pastor Gary who is a huge proponent of the power of fasting and prayer, we engaged in both of these activities together. These practices gave us some insights on how to proceed with the project. The practices allowed us as a team to discuss what God is whispering in our hearts and many times we have discerned what God is saying to us, despite the times of conflict. In short, this project has deepened our conviction to continue to pray together in order to discern the voice of God in our lives. For example, I asked the group that travelled together to Cabezo to pray for our trip and our time together. During our time in Cabezo some of us spent a day of fasting to prepare for our activities on the island. We also set up a day to come together as a group and talk about our visit. We formed a circle, prayed, heard narratives, and became closer as a result of all of these activities.

³³ umcmission.org. National Plan for Hispanic/ Latino Ministry. accessed on 12/21/ 2016.

³⁴ Ibid.

As we reflect on our current circumstances and through this act of faith, deepen our relationship with God, we can hopefully rid ourselves of past expectations and portray an inclusive image to the world: a picture that relates more closely to God's purpose. More than ever, denominations are reflecting on Church decline and how to turn the tide. One method to begin the revitalization process can be through Church mergers. Some of these merge two previously separate Churches, others, like our own, merge two ethnically distinct segments within the same congregation. These mergers might produce new life, changes in the context, and produce a new manifestation within the Body of Christ.

Other factors that affect this ministry context have occurred since 2011. During that time, there have been some leadership changes both at the conference level and local level. The Rev. Mike Oliver completed his tenure in 2012 and the Rev. Gary Spencer took the helm as District Superintendent and his leadership has been vital in helping to address various components of the project to which we will turn in a later section of this paper.

In the UMC we have an itinerant appointment system. This system basically assures clergy an appointment at a local church in exchange for allowing the Bishop to send us to where he or she feels we need to serve. At *First PSL*, the Bishop sent then senior pastor, Rev. Wayne Williams to another church in Ocala, Fl. and the Rev. Gary Upleger came to *First PSL* effective July 1, 2015. Earlier in this paper, I mentioned the conflicts I experienced with the former Senior Pastor. While this change in leadership was one of the key factors in eliminating built up anxiety and clergy conflict after the merger occurred, it also left unresolved tensions that had built up over time.

Of course, and as Pattison points out, we will not always agree at every point. As we discuss the differing points of view, some of these conversations could become extremely difficult, produce anxieties and lead some into a defense mode. And yet, one of the wisest person in Scripture tells us that “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17 NIV) We can be of great help to one another by entering into conversation and challenging lifelong views that may be somewhat off course. First PSL was over fifty years old as a Church when this merger came together. I believe we can no longer wear the armor of past generations when we go into battle with the Goliaths of this generation. This was a lesson that David learned and one that the church of this generation continues to learn the hard way. Conversations have become and may become even more tenuous, but in the end we can emerge as more effective instruments for the Holy Spirit by sharpening each other’s thinking and theology, a sharpening that comes from engagement with divergent points of view occasioned by merging communities of faith.

The alternative, however, can give us the sense that we are avoiding the issues that can lead to resentment and division as was the case at First PSL. As noted sociologist Nancy Ammerman states:

A peaceful congregation is often a declining congregation, whereas a congregation responding to a changing community will naturally have conflict. Constructive conflict is a natural part of congregational change and broadening consensus.³⁵

Being one body of Christ is about abiding, and by this I mean that I come to the table of Christ as an equal awaiting a prophetic word that will hopefully connect more clearly with my mission as a child of God. But just as a call to ministry is a calling from

³⁵ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (Rutgers University Press) 1997, 335.

God, it is also a calling from the Church. With regard to this and to my notion of the local context, the United Methodist Church has called out the local church in Port St. Lucie, Florida and its pastoral staff to stir up the process of disciple-making. One way to do this is by being an example to the community via this church merger. And yet, the voices engaged in this activity must be in sync with the message or risk being garbled in static. A radio not tuned to a specific frequency cannot project a voice that hearers can understand. So too, a church whose message has become distorted by the lack of inclusion and unspoken prejudices can project a similarly garbled mixed message to each other and into the local community.

In the next chapter we shall see how these theological and biblical engagements and a clarity of voices played out as we planned the methodology for our project.

CHAPTER THREE
OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER
Together at the Platform

I remember my time growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y. The Andújar family was rather large for this day and age. I was the eighth of nine children. Because my parents were part of a Pentecostal denomination which, much like the United Methodist Church, had an itinerant system for its pastors, appointments back then were rather short and our family moved around a lot. It did not help that some of my siblings did not



Figure 18- 7th Ave. Train 1.

fit the model of respectable children of pastors because in a word, they were troublemakers. I was the only one that came into ministry. While I remember walking to school and being driven to church, I also remember the times my parents would take us on train rides. Shopping trips, Coney Island, Prospect Park, and Delancey Street, were among the destinations upon which our family would embark just before school started. I sometimes think about walking down the steps of the railroad station then onto the concrete walkways and into waiting areas next to the railway tracks. I can still hear my parents saying “manténgansen juntos, el tren esta por llegar en cualquier momento” (stay

¹ www.movingintonewyork.com/new-york-subway-part-2-subway-station. Accessed 10/29/2016.

together, the train will arrive at any moment) or “cuidado, no se paren muy cerca de las vias” (Careful, don’t get too close to the tracks) and “Cuidado donde pisan al subir y bajarse del tren” (watch your step when getting on and off of the train) But I also heard other voices – voices that I did not quite understand for they were in other languages. I saw people of other cultures who were different from me, people who distinguished themselves by their clothing or by their attitudes. There were young, old, singles, couples, families, members of the working class, and others who seemed totally lost but for one distinguishing characteristic – we were all awaiting a train that would take us to the next stop on our journey.

We were all on the same train and heading in the same direction and yet there is



Figure 19- Hoboken Train Station 2.

no mistaking that each had his or her own purpose and agenda for the day. Some had already calculated the time and number of stops to their destinations while others were dependent on those who had previously undertaken this journey. This project was a project of discovery with no preconceived

notions, as we committed ourselves to ask questions and to listen to each other in this new experience we knew would be earthshaking. The very act of getting on a train for the first time is a bit unsettling. First, we will bump into people; and this is not a terrible thing and perfect for our project. Secondly, the concept of timeliness on trains is always a bit iffy: ten to fifteen minutes late is usually considered on time for a train and we had no

² Inside the Hoboken station after a commuter train crash on Thursday, Sept. 29. Accessed 10/29/2016, www.people.com.

illusions about arrival times. Thirdly, complaints on trains are rarely taken seriously – there are no customer service reps waiting for complaints – the best we can do is write and collect our narratives.

Narrative of Concern and Opportunity

In the very first year of the merger everyone seemed to be on the same page and before us loomed a bright rosy future. Three years later, we are better equipped to deal with issues that we encounter. Today's society is culturally diverse. Leonard Sweet, in his book *FaithQuakes*, says that:

Americans now eat more tortillas for breakfast than bagels or biscuits or pita bread; more salsa is sold than ketchup. The year 2056 is the magic date cited by sociologists as the moment when the majority of the US population will be non-European, nonwhite. As it is now, Asians, Africans and Hispanics make up one-fourth of the population.³

Hispanics now number 52 million and are the largest growing demographic within the US. One of the issues facing the Hispanic church is its own diversity. As I mentioned earlier in this paper in chapter two, our church's Hispanic ministry is home to members from over ten different nationalities which include Puerto Rico, Cuba, Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Brazil, Santo Domingo, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. The Hispanic Latino community of Port St. Lucie has grown to over twenty percent of the city's population and so requires a stronger



Figure 20- Spanish speaking countries flags 4

³ Leonard Sweet, *FaithQuakes* (Nashville, Tenn. Abingdon Press; 6th Printing edition 1995), 12.

⁴ http://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Degrees/DAH/LCD/bilingualism/Documents/Spanish/index_span.htm. accessed on 10/29/2016.

ministerial presence. And yet, one of the issues we confront is how we deal with cultural sensitivity around traditional practices at the church.

The pumpkin patch issue which I mentioned in chapter one is an evocative example. As mentioned, this activity is part of the church's annual Fall Festival which over two thousand people attend and has been a financial engine for the Anglo congregation for twenty-five years. The proceeds from pumpkin sales help to finance youth mission trips. But, for many in the Hispanic ministry, this event is too closely related to the secular side of Halloween and to them seems linked somehow to witchcraft. In their home contexts, some of our brothers and sisters saw firsthand, experienced, and refused to accept certain North American cultural icons that white missionaries tried to introduce and in some cases tried to impose.

As an example, Cuba is one country that stands out on this pertaining to the need for people to separate themselves from secular issues. American Methodist missionaries were in Cuba until the 1959 revolution as part of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. This American Methodist expression was already less than thriving when the revolution closed down churches and expelled pastors from the country. But ironically, the revolution gave birth to a persecuted church that is now thriving and growing at rates never seen before. This Cuban church now credits its revival to the very separation from those who would impose foreign practices or try to eliminate religious freedoms. So members of the church in Cuba are crushed to come to the United States and see their beloved Methodist Church with a pumpkin patch on the front lawn. Later, we shall see how ramifications from this project have affected how we now approach the Pumpkin Patch event.

Leadership created this merger out of a sense of divine mission. Even so, many church members did not realize that voting for a merger also meant voting for a new church. Members of this new church would listen to each other, identify each other's strengths, and produce new ministries and new life into the community. Our hopes were to create a sacred place that would become part of the DNA of our church. On the back of a U.S. coin are etched the words *E Pluribus Unum* which mean "out of many one." This oneness is our mission and purpose for the church and a driving force behind the purpose for this project.



Figure 21- Sacagawea Dollar 5

Purpose of the Project

As previously discussed, I wanted to consider who God has called us to be within a mosaic church context.

And so, with this in mind, and keeping in line with the initial purpose of this project outlined earlier on page 17, we chose to put together a series of activities and evaluate these by utilizing the methods endemic to Narrative Research in Ministry. Our team planned to gather the views of the different sectors of the church and employ these diverse views in various joint ministry activities that will hopefully show how we might respond to the call to be more effective as a mosaic multicultural church.

Scope of the Project

We planned to limit the scope of this project to the new mosaic context of *First United Methodist Church in Port St. Lucie*. We hoped the Bishop of the Florida

⁵ <http://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces923.html/> Sacagawea (1788-1812), a Shoshone native American, with her son Jean Baptiste Charbonneau. She was a translator and guide to the Lewis and Clark expedition. Accessed on 10/29/2016.

Conference, the Conference Leadership of New Church Development, the District Superintendents, the Pastoral staff from our church, Pastors, local leadership, our Lay Advisory Committee (more on this group below), and other lay members would contribute to our project story. We expected the reading of books and the participation of church leaders who have faced similar situations and contexts to prove helpful, as well.

LAC planning together to address issues

The last few months of 2015 was a time of deep reflection. The task before me was to choose a team of Lay Advisors who would help me develop an array of activities that would allow different affinity groups within our church to enter into conversation with each other. The Lay Advisory Committee would include members from all sectors of the church. After much prayer, my initial email went out to various lay members, both Anglo and Hispanic, and the pastoral staff of the church. I was met with a wide range of questions, declarations, and even a lack of responses. These questions included age old issues such as: “Why are we doing this?” “Why are we doing this now?” and “Why should we do this at all?” Any of these questions may represent old guard attitudes which perceive that things should stay as they are and that there is no reason for change. The declarations were of a subtler nature; while we received no such declarations in our emails, there were so-called hallway comments about people refusing to become what they referred to as guinea pigs for the project. “I will not participate because I’m not going to become a guinea pig.” While some gave these reasons for not participating with our LAC, they were the ones asking questions during the process. They would ask, “Whatever happened to that project?” The LAC would answer, “We are doing it!” This

project was in no way a format to take sides but to work together towards the unity of our beloved church.

BALANCING THE TRAIN

Project Planning Phase

The LAC came together with the Pastoral staff of the church which included Pastor Gary Upleger, Provisional Deacon Rad Orlandi and myself to put together a group of four activities that we saw as important in order to see if we might be able to uncover transformation. These four activities included a lunch the proceeds from which would go to help our sister church in Cabezo, Cuba, a three-day evangelistic event where the speaker would be Ricardo Pereira, the Methodist Bishop of Cuba, a joint mission trip to our sister church in Cabezo, Cuba, and a joint preaching schedule for our Lenten series in 2016. I will now elaborate on the planning of each of these events.

Church-wide Fundraiser for Sister Church in Cuba

We planned this event as a lunch that featured Cuban cuisine and scheduled it after our four Sunday worship services on January 10, 2016. The event would start at 12:15 p.m. and include music by the Hispanic Praise band, a typical Cuban lunch, and a PowerPoint presentation on our future mission trip to our sister church. The cost of the fundraiser was to be \$10.00 per person and, as I mentioned above, all proceeds would go toward completing the sanctuary in Cabezo. Our hopes were to raise at least 1,000.00 for this cause. The event would start on “tiempo Americano” (American Time) and gosh this would be the

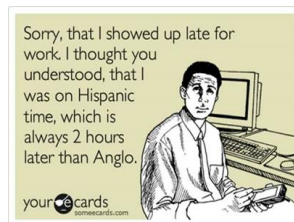


Figure 22- Hispanic time. 6

⁶ <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/10-things-weve-all-experienced-growing-up-latino>. Accessed on 10/29/2016.

hardest of all things to realize! The Hispanic planning team would set up the tables, prepare the food, and receive and sit our guests for this get together. Seating would be done in a way where we would have an even amount of people from the different services seated with each other so they would enter into conversation. There would also a specific person – who would be bi-lingual – at each table with a mission to engage the people with questions about our joint mission in Cuba.

During the meal the pastoral staff would present a Power Point presentation and discuss our mission in Cuba, the purpose of the collected funds, travelling to Cuba with the caravan in March of 2016, and a few specific needs we would address on the ground.

Cuban Bishop Visit

In May of 2015 I traveled to Cuba with the idea that I might be able to convince the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba, Ricardo Pereira, to be with us with for a weekend during the time of our project. When I left Florida I was not even guaranteed an audience with the Bishop. I was hoping that through various channels I would be able to meet with him and be able to include the voice of a person of his stature to become a part of our journey together at the church. My meeting went better than expected, and after an hour together chatting about and the status of the Methodist Church in Cuba, I extended my invitation to Bishop Ricardo Pereira leaving open the dates to his availability. He eventually accepted our invitation and he set the date for his visit for December 10-14, 2015.

The Bishop would be preaching during our weekend revival services as well as the four Sunday morning services. The weekend evening services would be in Spanish and the Sunday morning services would all be interpreted to English. The committee on

hospitality was set up to meet the Bishop at the airport, bring him to the hotel, and provide transportation to and from church, meals, and shopping. There was great expectancy with his visit – flyers, radio announcements, and newspaper ads would run to get the church energized and to communicate the visit to the community.

Joint Trip to Cuba

“The mission trip to Cuba has been cancelled!” Those were the words of then senior pastor Wayne Williams in May of 2015 at an administrative council meeting. The conflict between the two of us had come to a head and he cancelled the trip that had taken months to coordinate. I think I challenged him because, in his words: I “would not follow his leadership.” We had hoped to build an atmosphere of team leadership that was essential for this merger to work. Those efforts came to a screeching halt at that announcement. This had been the reality of the merger after the first year: conflict due to divergent views on the way forward, finger pointing and loss of vision for the greater good. I had also been embroiled in conflict with some members of the previous leadership of the Hispanic church that had now merged to become the Hispanic ministry and I had a sense that they were fighting with me due to a loss of power. Some made life less enjoyable by going to the senior pastor and causing divisiveness through negative comments.

The joint mission trip in March of 2016 with representatives from both sectors of the church had now become part of the LAC planning committee’s vision for joining us at the hip. By this time, we had welcomed a new senior pastor, Gary Upleger and he brought a new sense of how leadership should work together as a team. The pastoral staff along with our assistant pastor Dr. Rad Orlandi was again united to do the work to which

it was called. The stage was set for the team to head to Cabezo, Cuba in order to spend a long overdue week with our sister church in the Holguin District. Our sister church had become part of the planning process via emails and they would provide suggestions for the best dates for our trip to Cuba. The Methodist Church in Cuba via the District Superintendent would also need to approve the trip. Our desire was to at least have a 50/50 split between the Anglo and Hispanic sectors of the church. After a two-year absence, we would be back on our way to Cuba and I for one had high expectations for our ride together.

Joint Preaching Schedule

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Latin word which means "spring." The forty days can represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan and/or a tithe or offering based on a tenth of the year. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. For the project, this would hopefully be a time to right some wrongs that had crept into our understanding and experience of our mosaic merger. This was a time that we were to choose to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others.

At the time, the pastoral staff at the church was comprised of two pastors and a provisional Deacon. Our hopes were that in the near future during the four services celebrated every Sunday no one would know exactly who would be preaching on any given Sunday at a particular service. The joint preaching schedule during Lent would be a preview at what that would look like.

We set the schedule, identified the themes and prayed together. The church – for the first time in over two years – would get to hear the preaching and teaching ministry of its full pastoral staff and we, collectively, would be able to get a sense of how the people would receive us. This would hopefully also show the church how the pastoral staff could work together for the good of the church as one body. This Lenten preaching series would allow the Assistant Pastor and me, the Associate Pastor, to preach twice during the first part of the season, something that had not happened at all during the last few years.

Shaking on the Train- The Transformative Power of our Journey

Project Methodology

We adopted the image of railroad tracks for the project's design. Sometimes railroad tracks divide and create distance between neighborhoods; other times, railroad tracks intersect and bring people together. We sought to identify the imaginary railroad tracks where our two founding congregations have at one time or another intersected on this journey and hoped that our four joint project activities would provide us with meeting points.

As we arrived at these stops, via our joint activities, we would provide opportunities to ask the church to speak openly about our experiences together – we would gather narratives and share them in the next chapter. These voices have come out of the woodwork to express narratives that during the last few years have only been hallway comments and conversations made in the shadows.

The Lay Advisory Committee had invited all those interested to discuss their narratives of the merger. In consultation with the LAC and based on these narratives we all gathered and designed a combination of settings for this project experience as

previously mentioned. Different members of our pastoral staff led these gatherings so as to offer a diversity of styles and perspectives. The LAC gathered narratives during each of these experiences and shared those as we evaluated our findings. We incorporated prayer into all of our activities and our agendas and set time limits except where the Spirit of God mandated otherwise.

Our research questions were: Where are we today in achieving our missional goals? How are we measuring our progress? A merger requires intense work; what happens when intensity fades? Sometimes key leaders may be at odds and not communicating – What then? Can we as individuals surrender our self-interests for the larger purposes of the reign of God? Interactive dialogue would be a key approach used to gather narratives during our sermon series, joint services, and community lunches. We planned to use this approach to assemble the narratives, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

We also incorporated the Florida Conference Missional Vital Signs, a tool that allowed us to track our weekly worship attendance, professions of faith, small group participation, missional participation and financial giving for our congregation. It is a tool designed to help congregations follow their progress on the goals that they set for each year.⁷

So, we are all on this train together and when we launched this project, the train literally left the station. During the journey we tried to discern if our project activities had provided us with meeting points in order to discern above all of the noise that the starting and stopping produces. The grinding and wear and tear of the wheels screeching on the tracks were a reminder that sparks continued to fly. Mergers, like trains, have

⁷ www.umc.org. *Vital Congregations: Vital Signs*. Accessed on 10/18/2016.

many moving parts and idiosyncrasies that at any given time may affect outcomes. In the next chapter we shall see how it all turned out.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAVELING FROM A TO BE!

Next Stops- Arriving Together at a Different Place

Life is a train ride – so grab your suitcases
So many people –so many places
Climb on board and come and see
What life unfolds in front of thee

People come aboard and sit for awhile
Others ride short distances, sit and smile
Each comes with a story, tale or lie
They wink or smirk as they pass on by

No one really knows what anyone's thinking
The cars hit the tracks going clink clink clinking
Some ride the rails to travel to and fro
The faster the engine – the quicker they go

Every passenger on board has a secret within
As time goes on by – the stories they deepen
We all come with baggage like the riders on the train
We share them and tell them with nothing to gain

Our lives are like the rails, trains and tracks
We all carry our baggage heavy on our backs
Friends come and go like trains in the station
Traveling back and forth across the nation

Take a short journey and travel on the rails
Make new contacts perhaps a friendship that sails
It's worth the ticket to make a new friend
If not for anything – the adventure you'll spend¹

¹ <http://www.voicesnet.com/allpoemsonauthor.aspx?memberid=55211>. Angel Marie Schmidt Poems. Accessed on 11/3/2016.

Field Code Changed

I have clearly understood that as a pastor, one of my main goals is to seek to understand the story of the congregation so that I may truly identify transformation within the ministry. Learning the story of the congregation and doing my best to insert myself into the story has been both a major goal and concern. The bridging of these stories and the connection of the people telling them bring us together and set the stage for engaging in a process by which we might be able to expand our life story. This story has immense power to produce transformation in and through us. Transformation comes about *in us* through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this transformation that is visible not only to ourselves, but to others as well. This needs to occur within us first before others might take notice and hopefully follow. Here then, is where transformation *through us* may take place.

We need to unearth these life stories of transformation and one way to see them is through the telling of the stories. Much like a scientist who observes silent narratives under a microscope and looks for things that cannot possibly be seen under the naked eye, I as a pastoral scientist look to discover motives, world views, and the practices of the church. From another insight, Drew University Narrative Theologian Dr. Carl Savage compares the process to his other passion of archaeology. As an archaeologist, he carefully cuts back layers of earth to find and identify those things that have been hidden away from us for centuries. Correct tools and the ability to utilize them are necessary so as not to ruin an excavation site. In order not to ruin the narratives, we knew we needed to be just as careful as an archaeologist would be as we collected information. I personally

identified with this notion because I am also a contractor/builder who receives plans and specifications from the architect who has thoroughly brought together all the various aspects of a structure and has created a picture of what this building should look like after its completion. In the case of the church, this is what I call the God picture.

Biographical narratives allow us to tell people who we are. We answer questions about our lives, our families, and we talk about things that have happened in our lives as a way of making sense of life in general. These narratives connect the pieces of our story to what has happened beforehand and whether or not things are the same or have changed – in other words – the stories create meaning.

One question that we need to ask is: “Who gets to tell these stories?” In addition, “Who is telling the story?” and, “In what way does the narrator tell the story?” My hope was that the narratives of transformation from the merger at First PSL would be gifted with the voice of the Spirit of God.

Elizabeth Barnes² writes, “The power of the Spirit is the power to interlace the Biblical narratives with humankind’s multitudinous narratives so that transformation occurs and a true story is told.”³

The way that people communicate their stories, even though the smallest of trivial comments, are like the small print and notes on architectural plans and

² Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va. Her research interests are divided between metaphysics, social philosophy, feminist philosophy, and ethics. She is particularly interested in the places where these topics overlap.

³ Elizabeth B. Barnes, *The Story of Discipleship Christ, Humanity, and Church in Narrative Perspective* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995) 9.

specifications that add significantly to the conceptualization of the building plans. In order to understand the total concept of what is being built we need to see and understand how the building should be put together. These broader comments are a means by which we can have a clearer vision of our purpose within the church. In order to tell a potentially truer story, we need to identify these narratives so that we can unearth – through the power of Holy listening – a more complete picture. If we fail to do so, we can derail our mission as a church.

When I speak to my particular context as a church merger, I understand that my role is to seek continually to connect the different cultural representations of the church and in so doing, by the power of the Holy Spirit, seek wholeness both for myself and for our church. This concept of speaking the cultural language has been used for years. Missionaries have taken this approach abroad as they immerse themselves in foreign cultures and learn the customs in order to be able to better communicate with the people. This shows a sign of deep respect and produces moments of laughter as we slaughter the languages and words of origin. So we seek to excavate these stories as we listen to those who wish to share them with us.

The Scope of What We Did and When We Did It

Here is how the project unfolded:

Evangelistic Event

The Cuban Bishop Ricardo Pereira had accepted our invitation to come and visit with us. We had a tight window to prepare this activity. The calendar of a Bishop in the United Methodist Church is usually filled a year or so in advance

so for Bishop Pereira to accept our invitation on such short notice was somewhat of a miracle in itself. There were various purposes for his visit. One was to open up conversations and bring about discussions about why it was we should “continue to support missions in Cuba when we had so much need here locally.” Finances at the local church had dwindled and some ministries were in for deep cuts or were even on the chopping block and leadership was considering everything. Leadership called together a church-wide planning committee for the bishop’s visit which combined the talents of both Anglo and Hispanic youth and adults. We planned newspaper and radio announcements, considered ways to raise funds for his airfare and hotel fees, scheduled meals and free time activities, home visits, and itineraries. The pastoral team also came together to plan services, coordinate language interpretation for services, include a mix of Hispanic flavors in services to evoke hospitality, and program some time for the pastors to meet with the Bishop during his visit.

The flyers first went out via email blasts and then we posted them on the walls of the church. We heard questions: “Is this just a special event at the Hispanic service?” “No,” we informed them, “This will be a church-wide event and the Bishop will be preaching at all six services during the weekend.” The services would be Friday and Saturday night in Spanish with English interpretation, and Sunday morning at the three scheduled services in English with Spanish interpretation.

The anticipation seemed to build as calls came in from around the state based on our social media announcement about the event. There was a buzz in the

air due to the visit, rarely seen at the Anglo part of the church. “This is not how we do church” said one congregant. “We usually know by Wednesday afternoon what the program is, who the speaker is, and come pretty comfortable for worship. This weekend we really don’t know what to expect.” The LAC spoke of this as something that was missing in the Anglo context of worship – the sense of expectancy – the understanding that at any given time God could show up and be something different and miraculous in our lives.

Ironically, with regard to the activities of this project, I was touched recently by an article by Bishops David Yemba, Sandra Steiner Ball and Ken Carter – the UMC Bishops heading the effort called *A Way Forward*– our commission tasked with finding a way forward for LGBTQ persons within the UMC. These Moderators of *A Way Forward* referenced Methodist theologian, Samuel Wells *A Nazareth Manifesto*, where Wells writes about the following:

what it means to be for and what it means to be with. To be for focuses on a problem to be solved, an issue to be understood, an obstacle to be overcome. To be with speaks instead of sharing, life together and relationship. The latter is deeply rooted in the Triune God, and the wonder of grace is that we are included in the very life of God, through our creation, salvation and missional purpose.⁴

Clearly we had “problems to be solved, issues to be understood, and obstacles to be overcome” and we chose to address these by coming together in relationship. Reconciling our understandings of how we do ministry was also a key component in Bishop Pereira’s Sunday morning sermon based on Matthew 1:23, entitled: *God is with us*. He started presenting that “God, independently of

⁴ Bishops David Yemba, Sandra Steiner Ball and Ken Carter. Commission on a Way Forward: Update from the Moderators. www.flumc.org. accessed on January 1, 2016.

our circumstances, is with us.” Be it in a capitalist country or a communist dictatorship like Cuba the important thing to know is that Emmanuel is with us. The Bishop focused on two main points in his sermon. First was that our way forward was to first seek reconciliation with one another, for we cannot expect results without it. He presented a story of a woman he felt was sent to spy on the church by the government who openly spoke of her Marxist tendencies at the church. In one instance the Bishop told her that “she needed more faith not to believe then what he needed to believe.” Four years into the relationship the woman came to Christ, with no job, role in government, or agendas but happier than ever. Secondly, he spoke mightily of the acts and wonders of God by bringing testimonies of the numerical growth, vibrant church atmosphere, professions of faith, and baptisms all across the church in Cuba, which has been growing for the last ten years at ten percent per year. He brought forth a testimony of a paralytic woman at one of the church-wide baptisms in Havana, Cuba. She came to the beach service telling everyone that she wanted to walk to her own baptism with no help...and she did! (The full interpreted sermon in online at www.pslfumc.com at the sermon link for Dec. 13, 2015)⁵ Bishop Pereira also spoke of the Cuba Florida Covenant called Methodists United in Prayer (MUIP) and the special relationship between these two Conferences. My take was that quality in relationships with God and with each other would produce quantity and that this was something we needed to nurture. A reconciling relationship with God and each other will produce results.

⁵ www.pslfumc.com/sermons.

Some in the congregation were not prepared for this version of the gospel of Christ. I heard from a friend who arrived late and had to sit in the rear of the sanctuary that glorious Sunday morning. The friend told about another who sat in the pew directly in front of him and mentioned: "Oh no, we are going to have to put up with this Spanish crap again today." Isolation from one another produces lingering and destructive division in the body of Christ and does not allow for us to confess with a broken heart "Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world."

The dam broke at the end of the sermon. I was the interpreter for the Bishop that morning as he eloquently broke down what he understood were barriers in the church movement. But one thing was missing – what I call the lost art of a preacher – the altar call. Given time restraints and cultural perspectives, the Bishop was a little shy to make the call for prayer...but I could not let it go. As the Bishop sat for a moment at the 8:00 a.m. service, I explained – in both Spanish and English – the importance of altar calls within a Hispanic context, and that is all the Bishop needed to jump to his feet and make the call. I was amazed by the lines of people coming for intercession and prayer and how as we broached the hour and fifteen minutes of worship, no one moved till the last amen. The Bishop needed no further encouragement during the other two services to minister with people directly after his message. The needs were many and the altar full, as people continue to spend time with God and the pastors at the altar. Of course, the 9:30 a.m. service ran well past the 11:00 a.m. hour when we would normally start

the contemporary service in the other building and our Deacon had to run to get this going. Overall this weekend was different, as the face of God is different.

I spent the better part of the morning of December 14th with the Bishop as we had breakfast, spoke of his impressions of his exhaustive preaching schedule, and of his sense about the state of our Church. He spoke to me of visiting various churches here in Florida and what he felt was a treasure full of opportunities for us to take advantage of. He told me “I have not felt the same freedom to preach in other churches as I have here in PSL” for “there is something in the environment (peoples hunger for the word, a sense of receptivity, and awareness) that I sense within the church.” He asked me to continue to “be receptive to these factors” as I continued my project here at the church.

Cuba Luncheon

Our church wide luncheon for the purpose of raising funds for our sister church in Cabezo, Cuba occurred on January 10, 2016.

I refer to the happenings of our joint luncheon for the purpose of raising funds for ministry in Cuba as places where I have seen transformation – miracles, if you will – by presenting as many facets as possible in order for the reader to better understand our story. There are many meeting places in Scripture where we intersect with God and God with us: mountains, temples, deserts, altars, tables, and even through animals. One of the more traditional images about where God intersects with us in the New Testament is at the dinner table. We meet and greet, sit for small talk, try to understand each other when something spills over, or

maybe someone misbehaves. We make new friends, we start new relationships, we pray, we eat.

Our joint lunch was an invitation to the Hispanic ministry to do all the above and to serve one another. It was an invitation for us to come together and focus on a few things. First, we wanted to focus on a common mission of supporting our sister church in Cuba. This came with the hope for the completion of construction of the facilities there which both groups from the church merger would work on together. Secondly, we desired to be a testimony to both the community and our local church as we gathered around these tables, hopefully, to reflect the image that with God and with each other, transformation will happen. Here is an example of what we heard: One person at one of the tables exclaimed; “I worship in the same church but do not understand the needs of the people worshipping in the pews next to me.” In listening to him express himself I recognized that separation has led us to this new deafness that echoes in the church today. It is a major concern toward restoring unity among us. We, as a society, are often in fear as minorities or “second class citizens” speak out courageously to various injustices or inequalities. In prayer we listen to God and seek to follow God’s voice but we also need to listen to each other to identify the God voice in others. This is a slow and sometimes lumbering process. Most of us are not good listeners but my gesture for my fellow man demands great effort and respect. Some stories take forever and others are heartbreaking but even these at one time or another relate narratives of the powerful arm of God “which is not short to save us”. (Isaiah 59:1 NIV)

Another Hispanic visitor who spoke to an Anglo member at the luncheon told me: “I shared and told my story, but I also listened as some told the story of their immigrant ancestors that went through the very same hardships.” “Truth be told,” he said: “the only thing that differentiates us is 100 years!”

The event was to be a fundraiser, and as such we charged ten dollars a plate with the hope of raising at least a thousand dollars for Cuba. The activity included a *PowerPoint Presentation* for our joint trip to Cuba in March 2017, a typical Cuban lunch with “arroz congri Cuban rice and beans), lechon (pork), maduros (ripe bananas), y ensalada (salad), accompanied by a few minutes to discuss the needs of our sister church in Cabezo.

The LAC and I distributed the tickets by equal amounts so as to have an equal number of Hispanic and Anglo members sit together at the tables. We purposely mixed generations and the tables were set with decorations and salads to start our evening. We set cards on the tables to help with our conversations and used name tags to identify each other. The Hispanic youth were the servers and the praise band helped us along the evening with song and dance typical for a festive Cuban afternoon. As is the case in life and in this activity, I saw people just hurrying around to complete their tasks and as I took care in hovering over some of the tables and over 100 guests at the event I noticed some rather strong conversations going on. They ranged from “my food is cold” to “where are you from” to “why is this important to you” to “why is our church not doing more of this.” One congregant cried over the testimony of another family that had been thrown out of their country for their religious beliefs. Because the Cuban

government had not allowed them to leave together, the family had endured over two years of separation before being reunited.

One of the goals for the luncheon was to raise at least \$1000 dollars for our sister church and boy did we hit that one out of the park! All in all, \$3,500 was raised that Sunday afternoon in large part due to donations of a bicycle, Sunday school material, a drum set, and finances to transport these donations to Cuba. The whisper of God to Marty's ear (mentioned in our introduction) happened on this day as she struggled to discern what God wanted her to do as she heard the narratives at our luncheon. Real transformation comes about as a combination of identifying God's will for our lives and the lives of those who are in need, and taking the responsibility to follow a course of action to meet those needs.

Joint trip to Cuba

At the very beginning of our project the difficulties had begun. The LAC took some weeks to finalize just who would accept my invitation to participate in this work. Discouragement set in after some would not even consider becoming part of our committee. As mentioned previously, there was one person invited to be part of the committee who, while graciously saying no to our request, later expressed to one of the committee members that he did not wish to become a "guinea pig" for the project. Yet another expressed that the project was not needed for, in her view, this project had the intention to "force change in her beloved church that had been doing church for the last fifty years and needed no adjustments." It was her view that the Hispanic ministry simply needed to "conform" to the church's way of doing things and "incorporate itself" as did

new members of the church. Over and over again – even at the outset of the merger – we tried to clarify the purpose of the merger, and yet our purpose seemed to be falling on deaf ears.

Furthermore, and in contrast to the tradition in our church, there was no lay leader to coordinate and lead our joint mission trip to Cuba. I thrust myself into this position in order to plan and implement the trip under the direction of the mission’s team all the while discerning who would be a good fit to take this on role after we got back.

The announcements and planning meetings started to take place to spark interest in those who would venture out to Cuba with us. We started our meetings the first Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. and got out our Cuba information packet (see addendum #1) with all the details, timelines, what to expect, and financial expectations. Those interested started out as a group of about twelve people and then dwindled down to our final group of seven that would travel

together for our March encounter with our sister church in Cuba and Pastors Blanca and Raciél Quintana. The dates we planned for the trip were March 10-17, 2016. We would fly from Miami to Holguin, Cuba via charter and stay at



Figure 23- Beer drinking donkey at Mirador de Mayabe, Cuba. 6

Villa Islazul Mirador de Mayabe, where we would experience, among other things, a beer drinking donkey in the hills of the country’s second largest province. This third generation donkey made a life out of drinking everyone’s dollar beers for free.

⁶ www.cubadebate.cu. Beer drinking Donkey. Accessed on 1/12/2017.

As we mentioned earlier, our previous trip had been cancelled by our then senior pastor. Even as we discussed the project during our Doctor of Ministry classes in the semesters previous to implementation, I was unsure that the project activities would even be possible to implement due to my relationship with the previous senior pastor. Things were different as a new atmosphere of open communication, sharing in ministry, and renewed cooperation was in the air. Pastor “GU” as he was known in seminary, sat down with me at lunch during the first few weeks of his appointment. One of the things he stressed to me was his not wanting to be the boss but preferring a system of roles and responsibilities where each person in the pastoral staff would lead. In the next months we saw how these roles of mutual cooperation produced symmetry that was not seen before during my time at the church. I felt renewed and empowered to lead and be lead as we shared the pulpit and distributed responsibilities for the good of the Church.

Some in the church also started to take notice and commented about how this “was the way it was meant to be” and “I’m so sorry you had to go through the situations of the past years”. My wife was overjoyed to see me go from being continually stressed out by the constant battles and conflicts to just being “normal Josías” again due to these changes in our ministry context. My pastor’s report to our annual charge conference at the end of 2016 referred to “a breath of fresh air” in our church and it was about leadership and lay feeling empowered to do ministry without feeling controlled. The Hispanic ministry also took note of the difference in the relationship among the pastoral staff and joked about the how Pastor Gary in just the first two months of his tenure had visited and shared with the ministry on more occasions that the previous pastor had in his four years there. In short, key factors had changed to see this project thrive. I would listen

to stories from my fellow pastors in my cohort going through some difficult times and noticing that if we had tried to institute this project even two semesters before the change of pastors, it may not have been possible.

I felt a breath of fresh air as we were able to plan and achieve our goals with such



Figure 24- The Final Seven.

freedom and openness. The final seven (as I refer to them) appear in the picture at the left with Pastor Raciél and Blanca. These were Pastor Josias Andujar, Youth Director Pam Psymchek, Local Port St. Lucie Pastor and Evangelist Israel

Martínez, Sandra McClure, writer Chuck Waldron, Gary Strickland, and Hernán Velázquez.

The group consisted of two from the Hispanic ministry, four from the Anglo ministry, and Pastor Israel Martínez, now an independent observer briefed on our project. We used the next seven days in Holguín, Cuba for sharing with each other, with our sister church and pastors, and with the local drivers and establishments. The District Superintendent in Holguín, Aramis Cosío, allowed us the use of his minivan and driver during our time there. This was a blessing in disguise as the average trip to and from our destinations was about forty-five minutes and the time allowed for much sharing and laughing during our time there. As many as ten to twelve people would sardine themselves together in that seven to eight passenger minivan. Apart from the occasional aches and pains produced by the potholes on the roads, we would laugh, cry, and share experiences. One of these experiences came from our youth leader, Pam. One evening,

Pastor Aramis asked us to preach at the Sunday service and I asked the group to accompany me. When the service started the worship team was singing a song called “Let it Rain.” The pastor decided to illustrate this vividly by bringing in a bucket of water with various glasses that he would then fill from the bucket and during the song he would walk up and down the aisle, throw the water up in the air, causing it to seem like rain water. Unfortunately for Pam, she had a front row aisle seat and BAM! She did not get rain, she got the glass full going up - not once, but twice! Now Pam had been on various youth missions trip in the past; the difference for her on this trip was that she was not leading it; so in her words she was here to “take it all in”...and gosh, did she ever!



Figure 25- What happened to Pam ⁷

Expect the unexpected is one of the constant terms we use when discussing trips to Cuba with the teams travelling there. The travelers were blown away by the level of worship and the fact that people travel for hours just to be there all day. Some were affected by what they called full energy worship and one said “It sparked me to seek more of that here at home.” Pam was taken aback by the people in seeing how little people had and yet were so happy. “You would think they are unhappy with so little and the opposite is real.” Coming back, she made a promise to herself to eliminate some of the distractions and have less on her plate. “My priorities are in need of change and will be different in seeing people in survival mode that are yet so happy. It made me wonder

⁷ www.pastorkyle.org. accessed on 12/15/2016.

why we worry about the little stuff.” A few weeks after we got back the group met at Sandra’s house discussing how we were affected by our trip and understanding our connection there. First PSL had helped build the building where that community worships and we were astounded how this 300 seat building is already too small. People would come and have to limit themselves to looking in from outside



Figure 26- Oasis de Bendicion in Cabezo, Cuba.

the windows. All in all, God allowed us to experience something new. This included the newness of seeing people walk for hours to church and fitting into the bus like sardines. For them, Church is their spirituality, entertainment and socialization. The needs of a few would be addressed further; one young person was in need of transportation to help him get to work in order to provide for his family and church. One of our volunteers, Chuck Waldron said: “I will provide that bike for this family.”

On another occasion as the group rode Bicitaxis on our day off as we shopped for



Figure 27- Cuba Bicitaxi.

souvenirs, one local taxi driver asked: Where are you from? And having listened to the question from the driver someone responded: I am from the United States. Silence ensued as the driver said, “That is my dream.” Our youth

director picked up on this and in our later conversations mentioned how we forget we live where people can only dream of living.

The team came back to the United States and were given an opportunity to address the church during Sunday worship regarding our experiences in Cuba. Chuck,

now seventy-nine and a prolific writer, had decided it was not too late to learn Spanish to better communicate both with us and the church in Cabezo. He had started to Facebook and email with some in Cuba.

Others identified with the hundreds of children within the community in Cuba who had basic and fundamental needs. These individuals began to search to find resources that would help fill these needs which included food, clothing, hygiene, basic medicine, and shoes. The boxes started to come in to the Church office and a few months later I felt like Moses when he asked the people for items to build the tabernacle.

So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more (Exodus 36:4-6 NIV)

Sandra, ironically, an Anglo member of our mission team, who had been praying for insight about how to get involved, would now take on the duties of coordinating trips and fundraising for our sister church and pastors. Because of her great passion for the missions, in addition, she would also assume my duties as Cuba mission's liaison for the Church mission's team. This decision was not taken on lightly as she had been struggling with this for a few months now but continued to feel the nudging of the Holy Spirit as she visited Cuba. On the next to last night at our hotel as we went around our prayer circle asking all to share their impressions, Sandra expressed her commitment to take on these duties as soon as the missions team met back home. Here is her narrative:

New as of two years to First United Methodist Church of PSL Florida, the opportunity to travel to Cuba as a member of our Missions Team presented its self in March 2016. Having a background in the Medical field, being a volunteer and tour leader, it was a no-brainer. I thought

what a great opportunity to visit Cuba and observe the locals and the mission work. our church has been involved in with the people of Cabezo.

Arriving to Holguin I immediately found the people of our sister church in Cabezo were already rich in their love for The Lord and walked with conviction as the Holy Spirit was with them daily.

This year I return to Cuba in March 2017 wearing a different hat... that of Coordinator for our Mission's Team. God had a plan for me that I was unaware of so my travel days of medical & volunteerism was alive. In March I plan to head up a wellness day for the membership of our sister church. I believe the Holy Spirit will be pulling on my heart strings as I share in the renewal of my own faith in Christ Jesus.

Eventually, I did present her to the committee that April and she was accepted unanimously.

In general, I now walked into meetings energized by the larger voice of those people who had gone with me to Cuba who now reverberated in church meetings. In years past, I felt as the lone voice in defending budgets and ministries as it related to missions but now, I was not alone. Now it was the people who had visited Cuba or had been at the other events in this project, who were the ones who would immediately voice their opinions or let their voice be heard on the subject of missions or ministry. For me it was comical to see some in meetings have a look of question marks on their faces as they needed to do a double take in wondering what was happening!

Joint Preaching Schedule for Lent

Pastor Gary Upleger, Deacon Radamee Orlandi and I were our speakers for our joint preaching schedule for Lent 2016. We three comprise our pastoral staff and shared the themes on "Being Grateful." The planning that went into this event was well worth the work as on each Sunday we each preached four sermons. The services were the regularly scheduled ones that met at the 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:00 a.m. English services. We moved the Hispanic service to 11:15 a.m. to allow for our speakers to arrive

in time for the proclamation. Additionally, the Hispanic service was interpreted from Spanish to English for our listeners. The program gave the Church the opportunity to listen to the heart of its pastoral staff and at the same time witness the pastoral staff all ministering communion to the church. We designed this to engender a renewed sense of unity within the church and to project an image of the pastoral staff working together to develop a meaningful collaboration.

The themes were “Refocus” (Pastor Josias Andujar), “Rejoice in the Lord” (Dr. Rad Orlandi), “The attitude of Gratitude” (Pastor Josias Andujar), “An endless Prayer” (Pastor Gary Upleger), “Because God Loved Us First” (Dr. Rad Orlandi), and “Looking for the Living” (Pastor Gary Upleger). The liturgy was a diverse service design so as to eliminate any overt notion of clergy competition.

During my time here at the local church it would have been my wish to reclaim the word “competition.” The word comes from Latin *competere* which means to seek, or to strive, together. This type of competition requires teamwork and mutual participation. Instead my sense is that – for some – it had been more of an individual contest to see who can stand out and attain certain personal goals without considering others. The joint preaching series at the church was designed to move forward beyond this notion.

We discovered that during the last few years the local executive council and planning committees had discussed exactly this – how to involve the pastoral staff – in preaching and the overall liturgy at all services, a practice that our then senior pastor had not engaged.

We also discovered that there had been discussions to ensure freedom to allow contributions from all sectors of the church. The executive teams at the church expressed

what they felt was a push from within the congregation to respect what Swinton and Mowat call *difference*.⁸ Swinton and Mowat entitle Chapter eight of their book on Practical Theology: *Participatory Research: Researching with Marginalized People*. In this chapter they reveal the importance of bringing together unheard voices to develop this “constructive amalgamation based on the recognition of the significance of everyone’s input.” Unknowingly, for the LAC, some of the very narratives that we were discussing had made their way to the Administrative Council and were not issues pertaining to the Hispanic ministry alone but also to other sectors of the church. I believe that, unknowingly, we were already on our way to bringing the history of our past into a conversation with the hope of realizing a “preferred future” by the sharing of our stories.

Evaluating the Project Results

Savage and Presnell describe the work of the evaluating team as follows:

We see a form of evaluation that consists of two distinct parts. One part is observing change. This first part is fairly straight forward; you compare the state of the context prior to a new ministry intervention and afterward. In a sense, this part of the evaluation is only a measurement process. Has there been change in activity, habits, stories told, etc.?

The second part is discerning transformation. The definition of transformation is “a marked change, as in appearance of character, usually for the better. The latter part of this definition is critical in this understanding of the purpose of evaluation – discerning transformation toward a preferred future.”⁹

The first thing that changed as we observed our project results in the ministry context was better and more open communication; this was one of the key elements we were missing in order to effectively tell stories about the merger and its results. First, we needed to come together to listen to each other, hence we

⁸ Swinton and Mowat., 218.

⁹ Savage and Presnell, 124.

structured joint activities in all that we planned, and while we found in people a great desire to be heard, we also overcame communication barriers which in the past had sometimes impeded our conversations. These barriers included, but were not limited to, language.

Secondly, we sought to find narratives from among individuals of the widest variety possible so we could detect how changes in local decisions would affect, say, the church in Cuba. It was the choice of the participant to decide if conversations could be made public and for me it was surprising that no one who decided to share with us was against sharing their narratives with others. I sensed those who participated felt empowered to share not only their voices but also their emotions with one another.

Third, the missional narratives were of great concern for me as I sought to sharpen our vision in the mission field. I saw within the conversations opposing focuses on hospitality. The Hispanic contingent that valued community and relationships wanted to be nurtured and to belong while the Anglo contingent focused more on expectations of order and status. It became clear that while First PSL was always a welcoming community, this hospitality was directed toward their own, and thus appeared very superficial. All of these can be used to measure whether or not today we are able to see change in activity, habits, and stories. As far as communication is concerned, we saw some superficial friendships blossom into real and deepening relationships. In other instances, we saw clear open communication replace situations where communication had been non-existent. In the joint activities we saw the sharing that would lend gifts and talents to this

project. I saw the shyness and awkwardness of some turn to joy and gladness as they shared and laughed over their personal experiences. In all, I can say that God moments as those described via the narratives of the project abounded.

Anxiety was certainly one of the issues that had built up over time due to the lack of communication and harmony at the church. Here is one conversation that Chuck W. and I had about project issues:

Interviewer: Tell me what it is you wanted to share.

Chuck: When I first came to First PSL I sensed much anxiety here but did not know why.

Interviewer: And you mentioned you decided to inquire as to why?

Chuck: Yes. I basically decided to get to know you better and get involved in the Cuba trip.

Interviewer: What did you learn?

Chuck: I discovered much distance between the people of the four services at First PSL. It seemed that we were under one roof and yet divided, I was one who was very tentative because it seemed to me I was being pushed into taking sides.”

Interviewer: How do you feel now?

Chuck: I’m so glad I got to know you and got involved in both the LAC and the joint activities. My life has been enriched and am looking forward to future activities. I am different now due to our interaction.

Narratives like this one seemed to come out of the woodwork as we dug deeper and deeper and inquired of those who had been silent for a great deal of the time when they participated in ministry. The narratives kept coming as I was given more responsibility at the Church and, reporting back to the senior pastor, began to oversee the missions and witness department. As I would share with the people in the committees, there was a relaxing of attitudes and people seemed to drop their guard to share their insights.

Revealed in a Functionalist Approach

According to Carl Savage and William Presnell

the functionalist evaluation might examine how the combining narratives of the context fit together pre- and post-project. This perspective seeks to discern how parts of a context might fit together differently now. It builds on the sense that if one component system changed, that change affects the whole. While this perspective can be used in a deterministic way, it also allows for the researcher to discern “unintended” consequences that may have emerged by the programmed initiatives.¹⁰

As seen above, before the project there seemed to be many quiet voices and yet there were also observing and inquiring minds within the congregation, at the District level, within New Church Development, including the local pastor, the District Superintendent, Conference leadership, and even local leadership. The issues outlined above had actually penetrated into the minds of many in the congregation – something of which we had been unaware during the project’s process. Many had arisen in conversations. Like Chuck – who had an experience that allowed him to see things differently – there were now narratives that allowed people to leave their polarized positions and view things from a different perspective.

I am also one of the persons who, without a doubt, has come out of this project changed; and I believe for the better. It is easy for me to become polarized when it comes to issues relating to race and cultural sensitivity. The joint lunch, conversations with others involved in the project, and the differing perspectives offered during those conversations have allowed me to better value the opinions of others and reflect about their various points of view. I tried my best to be

¹⁰ Savage and Presnell, 123.

empathetic toward the views offered as I shifted from pastor to researcher but did so with great difficulty as I had invested my life into this ministry for the last four years. I had been reprimanded, warned, marginalized, and rebuked during my tenure here and sometimes dreaded coming to work. And yet, some of the greatest times in ministry had been shared here, many tears had been shed, and many hurt feelings were still pulsing within my heart. I guess, in part, I was my own worst enemy. I came into the project hoping to see miraculous healings within the congregation and came out also needing healing in my own relationships. In accepting my faults and confronting my vulnerabilities I found the God of grace “whose power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) These examples can describe the unintended consequences produced by our functionalist evaluation but a deeper involvement for me was key as I struggled with my own weaknesses.

Revealed in a Structuralist Approach

There have been several unconscious patterns that ran through the DNA of the church and have shaped our context over the life of this project and now deserve attention. I mention this because change has occurred and in essence has changed our story. They include power and control, resistance to new worship styles, and a changing of the guard. Savage and Presnell describe this structuralist approach as one that:

looks for unconscious patterns that may shape the context. This may have remained unobserved during the development phases of the project, when narratives were being listened to and a project was being proposed, only to come to the fore as resistive elements to the changing story of the future of the context, team or researcher. The post project structure may instead be an emerging structure. New patterns arise and replace old ones, or new textures are applied to old patterns. By examining these, one can gain a

renewed sense of the identity of the context as it exists and perhaps gain insight toward unforeseen barriers to the emergence of a preferred story.¹¹

I have referred to these briefly and wish to discuss these in detail since they have come to our ears more clearly as narratives and hidden stories that have impacted our project.

Power and Control

Amazingly, some believe that they have the right to control what and when things happen by utilizing tactics such as telling others what to do and how to do it, using force to maintain power and control over others, or feeling their co-workers have no right to challenge their desire for power and control. These tactics and others like them are often used to isolate or humiliate others by pushing or shoving us away – or worse yet – feathering the fire of those who have a grudge by allowing them to



"This really is an innovative approach, but I'm afraid we can't consider it. It's never been done before."

Figure 28- Power and Control 12

continue with this type of violent behavior. One such person who held a lot of power was a person whom we will call "Juan." Juan is a fictitious name of a person who for many years was the power center of the Hispanic ministry. He was faithful, a generous donor, and very authoritative. When the merger came to pass I believe he was left with less of a voice than in years past. While still a voice in one of the Church's most important committees, he took out many of his frustrations out on me. There was a changing of the guard, so to speak, taking place and he did not take this well. Most things that did not meet his expectations were exaggerated and framed in a particular way so as to make me

¹¹ Savage and Presnell, 129.

¹² <https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/i/innovative.asp>. Accessed on 12/5/2016.

look bad. What aggravated this situation is that he had an ally in the then senior pastor who would allow these destructive conversations to continue.

I had the opportunity to discuss this with the senior pastor on one occasion and in his answer to my questions he decided to answer me with a story. He told me that in one of his previous appointments he had what he felt was someone not following his leadership (I assume that in the present story he was describing me). He went on about how he grew frustrated and aggravated by the situation and promised himself that this would never happen again. While he declared his backing for the Hispanic ministry, he was pretty sure that I was not the person to lead it. He felt that the District Superintendent had imposed his will to continue to have me appointed to our church. He now had a posse to watch every step I would take in order to restrict my movements.

One instance of this was a growing youth group that had needed direction. I would request funding through the conference to help by hiring a part time person, who could coordinate a calendar of events for meetings, and serve as a liaison with our Pastor and Parish Relations committee on the matter. The concept was shot down by the senior pastor because “this does not fit into the overall vision of the church.”

Today, things are much better among the pastoral team at First PSL. We are able to plan programs and bring them to fruition with fewer negative voices that previously would have predicted failure. Now we are at least willing to give them a try. With the change in the Senior Pastor to Pastor Gary there is a different attitude and his concept of teamwork has filtered down to me and the Hispanic ministry and has made a huge difference.

Resistance to New Worship Styles

In 2011, the average age of the ministry context was seventy-seven years old – and getting older. It was part of my vision and responsibility to grow the church and bring it into a new era. That meant, among other things, reaching out to the younger generations for a renewal and transformation of the ministry. One of the areas of focus for us was to provide a passionate worship style more in tune with what the younger generations expected. Consequently, we hired a new worship leader and created radio, internet, and newspaper announcements in order to reach out to newer and hopefully younger people. We progressively adjusted the liturgy in our worship services to meet the new priorities, and we provided a new 300 seat worship space for our services. Maneuvering through each and every one of these changes took time, endless communication through meetings, and constant adjustments. There were voices and narratives that would come from the differing perspectives about how they were affected by these changes that would cause both major and minor adjustments. While some of these changes occurred before our project there is no denying that this sense of resistance may have been an unconscious pattern flowing through the veins of the Hispanic ministry that was undergoing transformation. Remember, this was a group with an average age of seventy-seven, who, for the most part, had dedicated all of their lives to ministry within the Church. They were exhausted and because of this, their motivation was low. These golden agers had an



Figure 29- Conflicting Messages. 13

¹³ www.pinterest.com/hrkinslow1/you-know-youre-pentecostal-if/. Accessed on 12/17/2016.

unbreakable bond with each other and when my wife and I arrived as the new Hispanic pastors of the Church there was understandable resistance. For us to be included as an “hija o hijo” (daughter or son) and be incorporated by this group would take time and we expected no less in the scenario that would involve and incorporate the Hispanic ministry within the greater Church merger process.

In collecting narratives, we asked the question: “Who has been affected by these changes and how can we find common ground to come together?” We found this common ground by combining elements of both traditional and contemporary worship styles within our services. We incorporated both traditional hymns along with contemporary hymns that seem more attractive to the younger generation. Much of this was done in response to alleviating the stress and anxiety produced by change. Since the ministry was older they tended to resist change. I knew that if change were to take place, it needed to start through us. This sense of feeling excluded at the church was one of the main issues that would be brought up during our discussions with the Hispanic ministry. So, what can we do as a ministry to avoid this rubbing of on us? These new patterns started to come about with my asking one thing of the ministry: I would like you to help me reach your kids and grandkids. Well, for grandparents, it’s really impossible to say no to this! In the end we invited the two groups to the table and found the voices of the older generation that included the older guard of the church who observed, commented and participated in the process of change. The conversations were both loving and brutally honest. The voices of the elderly would otherwise be silent and marginalized if not for the project but now they were grateful to be included in the conversation about how to go forward and effect change. It was important to effect change within the

Hispanic ministry in order to bring change to the greater church. The change needed to start from within.

As an example, the older generation asked: Can our voices be considered as

"THE FACT THAT I'M SILENT
DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE
NOTHING TO SAY."

Figure 30- Quote from Jonathan
Carroll. 14

golden agers who enjoy a more traditional form of worship as we move forward? Yes, and the LAC thanks you for your voice! "I want to sing from the hymnbook but it would be of great joy to see my children and

grandchildren in worship" these were the words of Ianes, a sixty-year-old member of the Hispanic ministry and key player in the hospitality team. Her family is now the largest family within the Hispanic ministry, numerically and generationally. And yet there were others who would not bend, not adjust, who were unwavering in their ways, who preferred to die metaphorically rather than accept a new direction that would more effectively reach out to a new generation. One such person was someone we will call "M." M was stubborn and rigid in his ways and would fight us at every turn of our project by questioning the purpose of our work. Since M was a results person, it was difficult for him to grasp the concept of ongoing evaluation without clear results. It was M though, that after experiencing each of the three activities in which he participated (he did not travel with us on the joint missions trip to Cuba) who spoke of the "surprise of experiencing God's presence" in spectacular fashion. Even though I was not always sure of his intentions, at times I was positive that it was a positive thing for the LAC and me to stop and meditate on stories like that of M which reveal a before and after aspect. It is narratives like these allow us to look back and at the same time to dream ahead.

¹⁴ <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/516309>. Accessed 12/19/2016.

Some Straw for Bricks

Practical theologian Stephen Pattison argues that:

people who wish to engage in creative theological reflection might see themselves as being engaged in a three-way “conversation” or dialogue between their own ideas, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions; the beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation which is being considered.¹⁵

So we come to this three-way intersection of exploring, reflecting, and responding. These are crossroads that constantly intersect as we listen for the voices and narratives that will together allow us to continue our train ride toward new beginnings and see how the scenery of our story continues to take on new forms. I would ask two questions to better define my reflections. First, did the project help the community see and grapple with what was, what is and what can or might be? Here we sought to ask people about what they saw in the past, what they are seeing now that may or may not be different, and how they envision what the future will look like. And secondly, to what degree does the project equip the community to reflect on God’s story intersecting with its corporate and individual stories?¹⁶ Here we sought to see where it was that God was involved; we wanted to hear the God stories or where it was during the project activities that we had the conviction that the Holy Spirit had somehow moved amongst us and in one way or another shifted our hearts.

¹⁵ Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 135.

¹⁶ David L. Jones, “Assessing Self and Ecclesial Contexts through Family Systems Constructs: Why it is so Critically important to Doctor of Ministry Education.” (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Doctor of Ministry Education, San Francisco, California, April 17-19 2008), 44.

As a contractor/builder, I enjoy the Old Testament stories of the architecture of the Jewish Temple and in particular that of the wash basin, called the laver that appears squarely in the center of the movable sanctuary. Scripture describes this laver as a bronze basin filled with water. It is the only piece of furniture in the Temple that has no specific measurements attributed to it. It sits right in front of the entrance to the sanctuary or holy of holies. Its purpose is for the Levites to wash their hands and feet before entering the Holy of Holies.

Much like this project, as we come to this wash basin made of bronze we discover that the reflection of our story is opaque due to the mirror image bouncing off the bronze. Many in the LAC including this researcher looked at what was and what is and saw that we have not been at our very best. One said: "If we had only been as intentional from the outset of the merger as we are being now (during the project) we would probably be closer to this preferred outcome we are inquiring about."

Evaluation Revealed in Three Way Conversations

Self

My wife and I are second generation preachers from a Pentecostal heritage. We have always sought to discern what God has in store for us and we seek this insight through spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayer. This project has deepened this intentional practice and has broadened our approach to include inviting a community to seek, recognize, and intentionally take part in these spiritual practices to discern the will of God. As such, we pray together to allow us as a team to discuss what God is whispering in our hearts. Many times we find ourselves to be in spiritual alignment with what God is saying to us. This project has deepened our conviction to praying together to

discern the voice of God in our lives. I discovered along the journey of this project that I have been involved, all along in a process of renewal. I am a renewed pastor and the Hispanic ministry is now a few years older. Since 2014 the average age of the members has dropped to be thirty years younger. What used to appear as all white hair in the pews (except of course those who were pharmaceutical blondes) is now a variation of hair color that includes natural black or brown. Some golden agers remain, but have now different roles. Youth and children roam the hallways and are involved with the worship teams. And Pastor Josias? Well, he just takes it all in, smiles at the work of God, and preaches on.

We have also been blessed with the model of seeking consensus through narratives as an avenue for reaching decisions. During this project we saw this model in action and it produced good baby steps for our project. This model of consensus works a lot better than an authoritative decision model. Diversity of views are respected, and since there are no final decisions we simply agree to continue to discern with no real end in sight.

This model fits well with my entrepreneurial spirit which Forbes magazine describes as a mindset:

It's an attitude and approach to thinking that actively seeks out change, rather than waiting to adapt to change. It's a mindset that embraces critical questioning, innovation, service and continuous improvement.¹⁷

Approaching this situation where we felt empowered, motivated, and capable was a given for me.¹⁸ The challenge was how to bring the LAC along for the ride and achieve fluidity

¹⁷ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/10/22/how-to-keep-your-entrepreneurial-spirit-alive-as-the-company-you-work-for-grows/#42aadcbf1928>. Accessed on 1/14/2017.

¹⁸ Ibid. Quote from Sara Sutton Fell. CEO, FlexJobs.

with the project. While discussing the project activities it was Pastor Gary Upleger, while speaking of his pastoral experience, who made a remark that the LAC decided to accept as one of our goals. Gary said “I have always found it best to ask God’s direction, plan, set goals and get out of the way.” So this is the direction we took. We prayed together, planned our activities, and got out of the way!

Context

The goals, objectives, and priorities were pretty clear since inception of this project. They had been defined early on in the Church merger. Both congregations were to come together to reach out to form a new congregation and to reach out to the community. Our mission and vision was to “shine the light of God’s love” and to be able to do it effectively in two languages. Although these were part of our objectives, the purpose of this merger was not to have a bigger Church or to have more members. Our purpose was to reach out and present Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

While this purpose was clear for most of us, the characteristics of the working environment at the Church were far from ready to take on this merger. Much like a family prepares a room for a new member of the family or a bird prepares a nest for a newborn, our congregation could have easily produced a stillborn child. One of the Hispanic leaders who had been a part of a congregation in Orlando in years past observed that, like our merger, he went through many of the same roadblocks likened our merger to a “child in the womb” of the larger Anglo congregation. His language invoked the need for nurture and care. We struggled those first few years against racial barriers that inhibited us from achieving our initial goals and perspectives.

The task ahead was then one of preparing specific activities to knock on the door of these barriers and to produce an ongoing conversation from all sides. We were under no illusions that during the next six months we would sprint to a complete transformation of our fears, anxieties, issues, or complexities.

While the Hispanic ministry was located in the building, we felt unwanted and as second hand add-ons with little or no voice. This was not the desired situation for the people that came to form part of the greater church at First PSL. This feeling was one that lingered on within the narratives we heard from the Hispanic ministry during the project. It was one that kept many from getting involved in places in leadership and the joint activities and also residual infighting among themselves - all of these undesired potential cancers within us. The desired reality was one of unity and mutual respect.

Christian Tradition Reflected in

United Methodist Denomination

The United Methodist Church has traditionally been a white, upper middle class denomination. They are the second largest evangelical denomination in the United States. But as many mainline historical churches, they have been in decline for the last forty years. Statistics show that if the current decline prevails, the UMC will cease to exist in the next fifty years.

This spirit of holiness in love and discipline of grace and unity with which the UMC was formed hold inherent value in the Church today and yet, there are these pockets where people often struggle to live this out in their lives. These pockets of not living out our full potential are, in part, what is producing this decline.

Seeing this decline, the UMC has set out since the 1980's to reach out to minorities through strategic plans such as the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry.

The vision of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry is based on the experience of the Holy Spirit's power on the day of Pentecost, of a "Church for all the Nations, where all can hear the mighty works of God in their own tongue" (Acts 2:8 NIV).¹⁹

The declaration goes on to say that:

We must eradicate racism and cultural chauvinism from our perspectives and rejoice in the future God is opening to us.²⁰

This future that God is opening up to us is God's gift to the Church and must be viewed and received as such. Anyone walking in the Spirit of God needs to embrace the intent of God That intent has not ever and will never change and that is that being in "Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5 NIV)

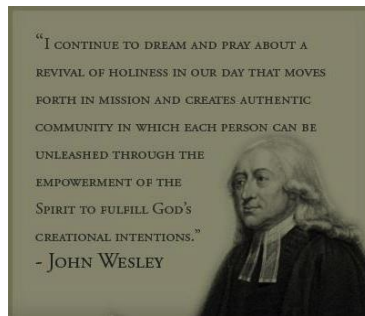


Figure 31- Quote from John Wesley, founder of Methodism. ²¹

A Preferred Future- Our Journey Ahead

So we travel back to the beginning of God's plan for the Church. From Babylon to Pentecost to today where we, according to the Bishop of the Florida Conference "have lost the home court advantage." In the 2016 Will Smith movie *Concussion* that dealt with

¹⁹ Umcmission.org. National Plan for Hispanic/ Latino Ministry. accessed on 12/21/ 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/5136987046777913/>.

the damage to the human brain as the result of playing professional football, there is a line in the film that is a threat issued to Smith. The physician in the movie, who was taking on the *National Football League*, was told: “You’re going to war with a corporation that owns a day of the week ... the same day that church used to own.” We have lost the home court advantage because we as a church have lost our way. Amazingly, the issues continue to be the same and even more amazingly, God continues to show up and shed light on Godly plans and purposes. In Babylon and Pentecost, the Spirit of God showed up with tongues of confusion and clarity and in our project we saw the Spirit of communication allow us to work within God’s purpose. The miracles of the drums, of our joint activities, of structural and functionalist changes, the miracles of Pam getting showered with water, Sandra taking the leadership position, and Chuck W., at the start and the conclusion of this paper. My own miracles of transformation and those of the ministry in listening to each other and coming together as a more unified voice in our church meetings. Each one of these on its own represents only a small flicker of light in the darkness but coming together have become like our original church lighthouse that signaled to others the possibilities that can happen when we come together as one body and still reach out to others in the community.

I look to the challenges ahead as we travel into uncharted territory as we face issues such as the Hispanics incorporating more fully into the larger congregation, financial commitments from the Conference, budget cuts and the impact of all of this on the pastoral needs of the Church. Instead of approaching these discussions with fear and trepidation, I now look forward to the search and discovery in these meetings for in a paraphrase of the words of the late Martin Luther King Jr, I have been to the mountaintop

and have seen God show up in our discussions and project activities. I no longer fear the future but continue to have hope for it.



EPILOGUE
THE VOICE OF GOD

Ever since I was a young boy sitting in Sunday School class I have wondered what God's voice sounded like. Is it a huge roar, I wondered? Would it be accompanied by an enormous rush of the wind and the trumpets of angels? I had read Bible passages about God speaking, and about those people who had actually heard God's voice.

I grew up, finished grade and high school, headed off to college, and then began work. I quit wondering so much but the question remained, lurking in the shadows. What does God's voice sound like?

Someone told me that to tackle an important decision, he began with a regimen of prayer, hoping to hear what side of the decision God was on. He said he didn't get an answer and eventually made his own decision. So, was the voice of God a silence?

Another person told me that when she faced a serious medical decision, she did the same thing, that regimen of prayer. Finally, she said she felt – if not heard – the direction she should take. She believed the word of God came to her while praying.

I have my own conversations with God without expecting any answers. For me, it's a chance to give my daily report about the things I'm getting right, the things I'm doing wrong, and that gray area, those things I simply can't understand. Oh, I've asked for guidance and help, like everyone, but mostly my conversations are those daily reports.

For the story at hand, I wasn't expecting anything. I wasn't looking for an answer. No, I experienced only a gentle nudge, a quiet nudge that almost seemed to carry the weight of marching orders.

I apologize for the long opening, but I needed to provide background for what would be my transforming experience. It took me seventy-eight years to hear that voice. Indeed, it wasn't accompanied by trumpets or a mighty wind. It was barely a whisper. I was sitting in a pew listening to announcements and honestly not paying attention. As a writer, from time to time, I'm given to wool-gathering, sometimes it's called daydreaming. But it was from that place that I heard it.

“If anyone is interested in joining a mission to visit our sister church in Cuba . . .”

The words came from the pulpit ... or did they? Without a doubt, I knew that I wanted to join the mission. It wasn't a choice. Over the past year, I've thought about that voice as I looked back at how that transforming moment would have curious links to further events.

First, I shared what I heard with my wife Suzanne and her sister Marty, unsure if they would laugh. They did not. In fact, the three of us went to a dinner where there was a presentation on what to expect. We were listening to Pastor Josias talking about the difficulty of getting a new drum set for the church in Cabezo. He went on to explain how the old one was disintegrating with age and climate. The problem, he said, was money and he told everyone how much it would cost.

Marty, my lovely sister-in-law, leaned over. “I hear the voice too,” she said. At that point I didn't realize that he had decided to pay for the drums!

Transforming? Not only for me, but it rippled out to someone sitting next to me. Amazing, isn't it?

Later, I told her about the experience of carrying the boxes of drum parts through the Miami airport, and loading them onto a van for the trip to the church in Cabezo.

What a treasured moment, standing in that rural Cuban church, hearing the congregation gasp as we unveiled the drum set. On impulse, I asked for the microphone and told them the story and that it had been on the first anniversary of Marty's husband's death. As a response they offered up support in prayer. When I got home, Marty said she had felt an overwhelming sense of peace and warmth on that day, convinced it was from that congregation.

Little did she know that a deaf man at the church in Cabezo had been praying for a set of drums so he could contribute to the worship service.

Transforming? No question.

Coincidence? I don't believe in that word.

I said it took me seventy-eight years to finally hear the voice of God. I think I may have been too busy to listen.

Chuck W.

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APPENDIX 1

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND GRACES

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Ken Hemphill defines a spiritual gift as “an individual manifestation of grace from the Father that enables you to serve Him and thus play a vital role in His plan for the redemption of the world.” Peter Wagner defines a spiritual gift as “a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God’s grace for use within the context of the Body.”

I like to use this definition:

A spiritual gift is an expression of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers which empowers them to serve the body of Christ, the church.

Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:9-11 contain representative lists of gifts and roles God has given to the church. A definition of these gifts follows.

- **Leadership**—Leadership aids the body by leading and directing members to accomplish the goals and purposes of the church. Leadership motivates people to work together in unity toward common goals (Rom. 12:8; Hebrews 13:7).
- **Administration**—Persons with the gift of administration lead the body by steering others to remain on task. Administration enables the body to organize

according to God-given purposes and long-term goals (1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 15:12-21).

- **Teaching**—Teaching is instructing members in the truths and doctrines of God’s Word for the purposes of building up, unifying, and maturing the body (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7; Eph. 4:11; Hebrews 5:12-14).
- **Knowledge**—The gift of knowledge manifests itself in teaching and training in discipleship. It is the God-given ability to learn, know, and explain the precious truths of God’s Word. A word of knowledge is a Spirit-revealed truth (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 3:14-19).
- **Wisdom**—Wisdom is the gift that discerns the work of the Holy Spirit in the body and applies His teachings and actions to the needs of the body (1 Cor. 12:28; James 3:13-17).
- **Prophecy**—The gift of prophecy is proclaiming the Word of God boldly. This builds up the body and leads to conviction of sin. Prophecy manifests itself in preaching and teaching (1 Cor. 12:10; Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 14:1-5).
- **Discernment**—Discernment aids the body by recognizing the true intentions of those within or related to the body. Discernment tests the message and actions of others for the protection and well-being of the body (1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 5:3-6).
- **Exhortation**—Possessors of this gift encourage members to be involved in and enthusiastic about the work of the Lord. Members with this gift are good counselors and motivate others to service. Exhortation exhibits itself in preaching, teaching, and ministry (Rom. 12:8; Acts 11:23-24).

- **Shepherding**—The gift of shepherding is manifested in persons who look out for the spiritual welfare of others. Although pastors, like shepherds, do care for members of the church, this gift is not limited to a pastor or staff member (Eph. 4:11; Luke 2:8).
- **Faith**—Faith trusts God to work beyond the human capabilities of the people. Believers with this gift encourage others to trust in God in the face of apparently insurmountable odds (1 Cor. 12:9; Heb. 1:1).
- **Evangelism**—God gifts his church with evangelists to lead others to Christ effectively and enthusiastically. This gift builds up the body by adding new members to its fellowship (Eph. 4:11; Acts 8:26-40).
- **Apostleship**—The church sends apostles from the body to plant churches or be missionaries. Apostles motivate the body to look beyond its walls in order to carry out the Great Commission (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 14:21-23).
- **Service/Helps**—Those with the gift of service/helps recognize practical needs in the body and joyfully give assistance to meeting those needs. Christians with this gift do not mind working behind the scenes (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7; Acts 6:2-4).
- **Mercy**—Cheerful acts of compassion characterize those with the gift of mercy. Persons with this gift aid the body by empathizing with hurting members. They keep the body healthy and unified by keeping others aware of the needs within the church (Rom. 12:8; Lk. 10:30-37).

- **Giving**—Members with the gift of giving give freely and joyfully to the work and mission of the body. Cheerfulness and liberality are characteristics of individuals with this gift (Rom. 12:8; II Cor. 8:1-5).

- **Hospitality**—Those with this gift have the ability to make visitors, guests, and strangers feel at ease. They often use their home to entertain guests. Persons with this gift integrate new members into the body (1 Pet. 4:9; Gen. 18:1-15).

God has gifted you with an expression of His Holy Spirit to support His vision and mission of the church. It is a worldwide vision to reach all people with the gospel of Christ. As a servant leader, God desires that you know how He has gifted you. This will lead you to where He would have you serve as part of His vision and mission for the church.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS SURVEY

DIRECTIONS

This is not a test, so there are no wrong answers. The Spiritual Gifts Survey consists of 80 statements. Some items reflect concrete actions; other items are descriptive traits; and still others are statements of belief. • Select the one response you feel best characterizes yourself and place that number in the blank provided. Record your answer in the blank beside each item. • Do not spend too much time on any one item. Remember, it is not a test. Usually your immediate response is best. • Please give an answer for each item. Do not skip any items. • Do not ask others how they are answering or how they think you should answer. • Work at your own pace.

Your response choices are:

- 5—Highly characteristic of me/definitely true for me
 4—Most of the time this would describe me/be true for me
 3—Frequently characteristic of me/true for me—about 50 percent of the time
 2—Occasionally characteristic of me/true for me—about 25 percent of the time
 1—Not at all characteristic of me/definitely untrue for me
- _____ 1. I have the ability to organize ideas, resources, time, and people effectively.
- _____ 2. I am willing to study and prepare for the task of teaching.
- _____ 3. I am able to relate the truths of God to specific situations.
- _____ 4. I have a God-given ability to help others grow in their faith.
- _____ 5. I possess a special ability to communicate the truth of salvation.
- _____ 6. I have the ability to make critical decisions when necessary.
- _____ 7. I am sensitive to the hurts of people.
- _____ 8. I experience joy in meeting needs through sharing possessions.
- _____ 9. I enjoy studying.
- _____ 10. I have delivered God's message of warning and judgment.
- _____ 11. I am able to sense the true motivation of persons and movements.
- _____ 12. I have a special ability to trust God in difficult situations.
- _____ 13. I have a strong desire to contribute to the establishment of new churches.
- _____ 14. I take action to meet physical and practical needs rather than merely talking about or planning to help.
- _____ 15. I enjoy entertaining guests in my home.
- _____ 16. I can adapt my guidance to fit the maturity of those working with me.
- _____ 17. I can delegate and assign meaningful work.
- _____ 18. I have an ability and desire to teach.
- _____ 19. I am usually able to analyze a situation correctly.
- _____ 20. I have a natural tendency to encourage others.
- _____ 21. I am willing to take the initiative in helping other Christians grow in their faith.
- _____ 22. I have an acute awareness of the emotions of other people, such as loneliness, pain, fear, and anger.
- _____ 23. I am a cheerful giver.
- _____ 24. I spend time digging into facts.
- _____ 25. I feel that I have a message from God to deliver to others.
- _____ 26. I can recognize when a person is genuine/honest.
- _____ 27. I am a person of vision (a clear mental portrait of a preferable future given by God). I am able to communicate vision in such a way that others commit to making the vision a reality.
- _____ 28. I am willing to yield to God's will rather than question and waver.
- _____ 29. I would like to be more active in getting the gospel to people in other lands.
- _____ 30. It makes me happy to do things for people in need.
- _____ 31. I am successful in getting a group to do its work joyfully.
- _____ 32. I am able to make strangers feel at ease.
- _____ 33. I have the ability to plan learning approaches.

- _____ 34. I can identify those who need encouragement.
- _____ 35. I have trained Christians to be more obedient disciples of Christ.
- _____ 36. I am willing to do whatever it takes to see others come to Christ.
- _____ 37. I am attracted to people who are hurting.
- _____ 38. I am a generous giver.
- _____ 39. I am able to discover new truths.
- _____ 40. I have spiritual insights from Scripture concerning issues and people that compel me to speak out.
- _____ 41. I can sense when a person is acting in accord with God's will.
- _____ 42. I can trust in God even when things look dark.
- _____ 43. I can determine where God wants a group to go and help it get there.
- _____ 44. I have a strong desire to take the gospel to places where it has never been heard.
- _____ 45. I enjoy reaching out to new people in my church and community.
- _____ 46. I am sensitive to the needs of people.
- _____ 47. I have been able to make effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group.
- _____ 48. I often am consulted when fellow Christians are struggling to make difficult decisions.
- _____ 49. I think about how I can comfort and encourage others in my congregation.
- _____ 50. I am able to give spiritual direction to others.
- _____ 51. I am able to present the gospel to lost persons in such a way that they accept the Lord and His salvation.
- _____ 52. I possess an unusual capacity to understand the feelings of those in distress.
- _____ 53. I have a strong sense of stewardship based on the recognition that God owns all things.
- _____ 54. I have delivered to other person's messages that have come directly from God.
- _____ 55. I can sense when a person is acting under God's leadership.
- _____ 56. I try to be in God's will continually and be available for His use.
- _____ 57. I feel that I should take the gospel to people who have different beliefs from me.
- _____ 58. I have an acute awareness of the physical needs of others.
- _____ 59. I am skilled in setting forth positive and precise steps of action.
- _____ 60. I like to meet visitors at church and make them feel welcome.
- _____ 61. I explain Scripture in such a way that others understand it.
- _____ 62. I can usually see spiritual solutions to problems.
- _____ 63. I welcome opportunities to help people who need comfort, consolation, encouragement, and counseling.
- _____ 64. I feel at ease in sharing Christ with nonbelievers.
- _____ 65. I can influence others to perform to their highest God-given potential.
- _____ 66. I recognize the signs of stress and distress in others.
- _____ 67. I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries.

- _____ 68. I can organize facts into meaningful relationships.
- _____ 69. God gives me messages to deliver to His people.
- _____ 70. I am able to sense whether people are being honest when they tell of their religious experiences.
- _____ 71. I enjoy presenting the gospel to persons of other cultures and backgrounds.
- _____ 72. I enjoy doing little things that help people.
- _____ 73. I can give a clear, uncomplicated presentation.
- _____ 74. I have been able to apply biblical truth to the specific needs of my church.
- _____ 75. God has used me to encourage others to live Christ-like lives.
- _____ 76. I have sensed the need to help other people become more effective in their ministries.
- _____ 77. I like to talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him.
- _____ 78. I have the ability to make strangers feel comfortable in my home.
- _____ 79. I have a wide range of study resources and know how to secure information.
- _____ 80. I feel assured that a situation will change for the glory of God even when the situation seems impossible.

SCORING YOUR SURVEY

Follow these directions to figure your score for each spiritual gift.

1. Place in each box your numerical response (1-5) to the item number which is indicated below the box.

2. For each gift, add the numbers in the boxes and put the total in the TOTAL box.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|--------------|
| LEADERSHIP | <u>ITEM 6</u> | † | <u>ITEM 16</u> | † | <u>ITEM 27</u> | † | <u>ITEM 43</u> | † | <u>ITEM 65</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| ADMINISTRATION | <u>ITEM 1</u> | † | <u>ITEM 17</u> | † | <u>ITEM 31</u> | † | <u>ITEM 47</u> | † | <u>ITEM 59</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| TEACHING | <u>ITEM 2</u> | † | <u>ITEM 18</u> | † | <u>ITEM 33</u> | † | <u>ITEM 61</u> | † | <u>ITEM 73</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| KNOWLEDGE | <u>ITEM 9</u> | † | <u>ITEM 24</u> | † | <u>ITEM 39</u> | † | <u>ITEM 68</u> | † | <u>ITEM 79</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| WISDOM | <u>ITEM 3</u> | † | <u>ITEM 19</u> | † | <u>ITEM 48</u> | † | <u>ITEM 62</u> | † | <u>ITEM 74</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| PROPHECY | <u>ITEM 10</u> | † | <u>ITEM 25</u> | † | <u>ITEM 40</u> | † | <u>ITEM 54</u> | † | <u>ITEM 69</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| DISCERNMENT | <u>ITEM 11</u> | † | <u>ITEM 26</u> | † | <u>ITEM 41</u> | † | <u>ITEM 55</u> | † | <u>ITEM 70</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| EXHORTATION | <u>ITEM 20</u> | † | <u>ITEM 34</u> | † | <u>ITEM 49</u> | † | <u>ITEM 63</u> | † | <u>ITEM 75</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| SHEPHERDING | <u>ITEM 4</u> | † | <u>ITEM 21</u> | † | <u>ITEM 35</u> | † | <u>ITEM 50</u> | † | <u>ITEM 76</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| FAITH | <u>ITEM 12</u> | † | <u>ITEM 28</u> | † | <u>ITEM 42</u> | † | <u>ITEM 56</u> | † | <u>ITEM 80</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| EVANGELISM | <u>ITEM 5</u> | † | <u>ITEM 36</u> | † | <u>ITEM 51</u> | † | <u>ITEM 64</u> | † | <u>ITEM 77</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| APOSTLESHIP | <u>ITEM 13</u> | † | <u>ITEM 29</u> | † | <u>ITEM 44</u> | † | <u>ITEM 57</u> | † | <u>ITEM 71</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| SERVICE/HELPS | <u>ITEM 14</u> | † | <u>ITEM 30</u> | † | <u>ITEM 46</u> | † | <u>ITEM 58</u> | † | <u>ITEM 72</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| MERCY | <u>ITEM 7</u> | † | <u>ITEM 22</u> | † | <u>ITEM 37</u> | † | <u>ITEM 52</u> | † | <u>ITEM 66</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| GIVING | <u>ITEM 8</u> | † | <u>ITEM 23</u> | † | <u>ITEM 38</u> | † | <u>ITEM 53</u> | † | <u>ITEM 67</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |
| HOSPITALITY | <u>ITEM 15</u> | † | <u>ITEM 32</u> | † | <u>ITEM 45</u> | † | <u>ITEM 60</u> | † | <u>ITEM 78</u> | = | <u>TOTAL</u> |

GRAPHING YOUR PROFILE

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|--|--|--|
| 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | LEADERSHIP | ADMINISTRATION | TEACHING | KNOWLEDGE | WISDOM | PROPHECY | DISCERNMENT | EXHORTATION | SHEPHERDING | FAITH | EVANGELISM | APOSTLESHIP | SERVICE/ HELPS | MERCY | GIVING | HOSPITALITY | | | |

1. For each gift place a mark across the bar at the point that corresponds to your TOTAL for that gift.
2. For each gift shade the bar below the mark that you have drawn.
3. The resultant graph gives a picture of your gifts. Gifts for which the bars are tall are the ones in which you appear to be strongest. Gifts for which the bars are very short are the ones in which you appear not to be strong.

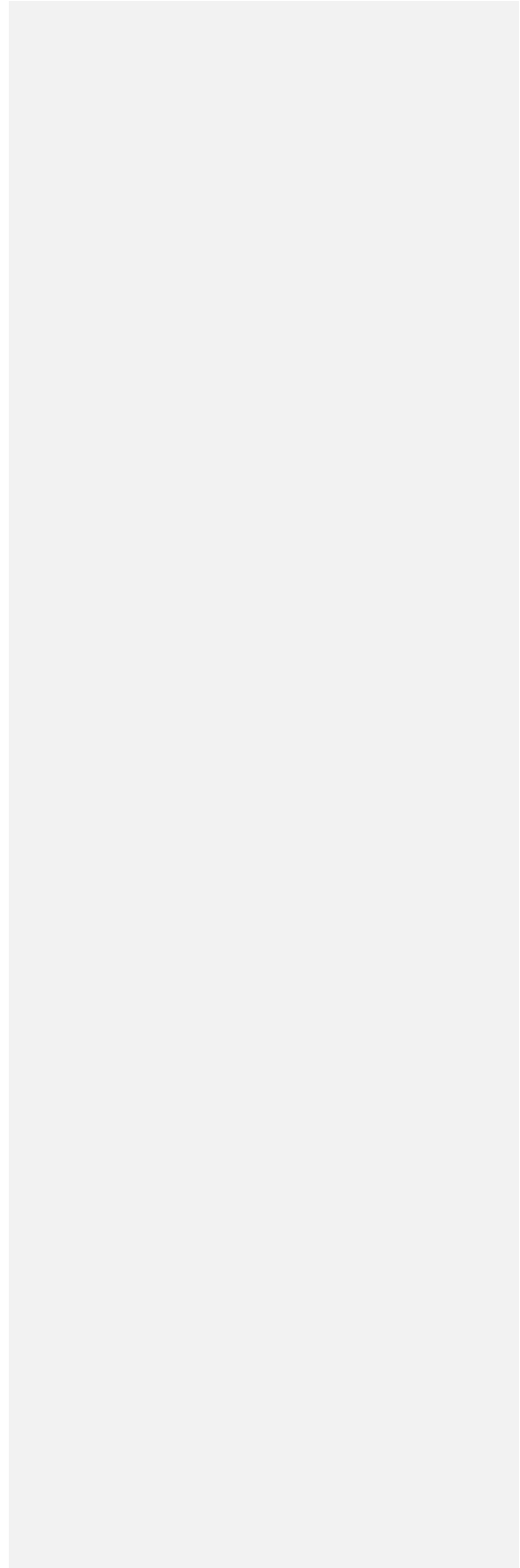
Now that you have completed the survey, thoughtfully answer the following questions.

The gifts I have begun to discover in my life are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- After prayer and worship, I am beginning to sense that God wants me to use my spiritual gifts to serve Christ's body by _____.
- I am not sure yet how God wants me to use my gifts to serve others. But I am committed to prayer and worship, seeking wisdom and opportunities to use the gifts I have received from God.

Ask God to help you know how He has gifted you for service and how you can begin to use this gift in ministry to others.



APPENDIX 2

“The Attitude of Gratitude”
March 6, 2016
8:00 & 11:00 Worship

GATHERING

WELCOME, COMMUNITY LIFE & GREETING

CHIMING OF THE HOUR

PRELUDE: “Cast Your Burden Upon the Lord” Mendelssohn

(Please be in an attitude of prayer as you prepare yourself for worship.)

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Come, let us celebrate the wondrous gifts that God has given us.

P: Throughout all our lives, God has blessed us with love and hope.

L: Praise be to God who provides for us.

**P: May our hearts be truly grateful, and may we show our gratitude by the
Ways in which we live and care for others.**

L: Hallelujah!

P: Amen.

***PROCESSIONAL HYMN** “Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed” UMH 359

INVITATION TO HOLY COMMUNION UMH 12

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty and merciful God, we confess that we are not always the people you have created us to be. We have often turned from you and your ways out of fear and misunderstanding. These thoughts and actions have been hurtful, not only to others, but to ourselves as well. Forgive us Lord, and help us not to shrink from that self-knowledge which moves us closer to you and one another. Teach us the gentleness of your ways and give us the courage to put our trust in your guiding power, which leads us into the freedom of your kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen.

SILENT PRAYER OF CONFESSION

ABSOLUTION

Pastor: Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God’s love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

ALL: Glory be to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

MORNING PRAYER /LORD’S PRAYER

MUSICAL PRAYER RESPONSE “Take Time to Be Holy” UMH 395 vs. 1

OFFERTORY

8:00 "What Wondrous Love is This?"
Chancel Choir

11:00 "His Name is Wonderful"
Bob Cachine, Saxophonist

OFFERING /*DOXOLOGY

UMH 95

SCRIPTURE**Philippians 1:3-6**

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

SKIT

"More Coke"

THE MESSAGE

"The Attitude of Gratitude"
Pastor Josias Andujar

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

L The Lord be with you.

P *And also with you.*

L Lift up your hearts.

P *We lift them up to the Lord.*

L Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

P *It is right to give Him thanks and praise.*

L Blessed are you, Lord our God.....
we join in the song of unending praise, saying:

(Choir will sing at 8:00 – congregation is invited to sing along – UMH 21)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

L Truly holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.....

Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forever.

ALL: Amen.

SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

***HYMN OF DEDICATION** "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me" UMH 361

***BENEDICTIONAL RESPONSE** "God Be with You till We Meet Again"
UMH 673 vs 1

***POSTLUDE**

*** Indicates that we are to stand to praise God**

Go Forth and Let Your Light Shine

Senior Pastor: Rev. Gary Upleger

Worship Leader: Dr. Rad Orlandi

Director of Music: Shirley Goodell

The flowers on the Altar are given by Karol Johnson & family
in loving memory of Clain Johnson and in honor of Tom Daley,
Jimmy Mills & Phyllis Tucker who share Clain's March 9th birthday.

Greeters

8:00 Rubie Manwarren & Helen Fraser
11:00 Doug & Fran Peterson

Acolytes

Brianna Christopher
Benjeana Dantilus

Nursery Care Available - You can trust your infants and preschoolers to the care of our nursery attendants. We have beepers so parents can be called out of worship if necessary. Nursery is available at all services for infants 0-5.

Office Hours

Monday – Thursday
8:30a – 4:30p
Friday
8:30a – 12:00p

Sunday Morning Worship

8:00a Traditional Worship
9:30a OASIS Contemporary Worship
11:00a Traditional Worship
11:00a Hispanic Bilingual Worship

“The Attitude of Gratitude”

March 6, 2016

9:30 Oasis Worship

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREETING

SONGS OF PRAISE & WORSHIP

“Beautiful One”

“Give Thanks”

CHILDREN'S CHAT

PRAYER TIME

COMMUNION

OFFERING

"My Story"

BIBLE READING

Philippians 1:3-6

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

SKIT

"More Coke"

MESSAGE

"The Attitude of Gratitude"

Pastor Josias Andujar

CLOSING SONG OF WORSHIP

"Lifesong"

WORDS TO LEAVE BY

GOING OUT

PRAISE TEAM

Go Forth and Let Your Light Shine