

STRENGTHENING SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN  
MT. ZION AME CHURCH OF PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY  
TO INCLUDE COMMUNITY MISSIONAL GOALS AND READINESS

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of Drew University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree,  
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Adviser: Rev. Dr. Kevin D. Miller

Rev. Wilbur Golden Carmon, Sr.

Drew University

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## ABSTRACT

### STRENGTHENING SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN MT. ZION AME CHURCH OF PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY TO INCLUDE COMMUNITY MISSIONAL GOALS AND READINESS

by Rev Wilbur Golden Carmon Sr.

I pursued doctoral studies in Congregational Growth and Community Development, at Drew Theological Seminary, to further discern God's vision for Mt Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church of Plainfield, New Jersey. My research has shown me that since its founding in 1892, God's vision for our congregation remains intertwined with God's vision for Plainfield. My studies have also helped to see that given our denominational tradition, ensuring missional readiness will require recasting our approach to ministry—especially considering Plainfield's rich history, but challenging current socio-economic climate.

As a pastor in our city for nearly twelve years, I have observed that residents today are bound to Plainfield's history. Perhaps the best example of this emerged in 1967, when racial tensions from the Newark riots spilled over to Plainfield, causing rapid changes. The city saw looting, rioting and demonstrations against police. These tensions were quelled in ten days, but the resulting stigma remains today. Many businesses and affluent residents moved to neighboring, better protected suburban communities. Plainfield rapidly became home to a decimated commercial environment and mostly low-income residents. Efforts to revive Plainfield have been challenged by socio-economic

inequity, low performing schools, gang violence and other depressive factors. However, as a diverse city of 49,500, Plainfield remains part of the vibrant New York City region. It is an inexpensive commuter hub, with quality bus and railway services, affordable housing, and has a growing spirit of revival.

Given this environment, my professional project focused on seeking a new ministry approach to foster community missional goals, and Mt Zion's readiness to pursue them. Our team discovered the need to engender ongoing spiritual growth for what I refer to as Great Commission missional readiness. Thus we conducted a Transformation Worship Event to share the framework we crafted and entitled: 'Our Personal Journey with Christ' (see Appendices D and E). Our scope included the Mt. Zion Church family, and we turned a typical worship service into a transformation teaching event. This framework, and its companion biblical foundation, grew out of our discovery over five work sessions that Mt Zion's primary focus must be to ensure personal readiness to 'make disciplines' in our evolving community. And our subsequent focus must evolve into enhancing our ministry goals to extend Christian benevolence beyond Mt Zion's walls, targeting emerging community needs.

## DEDICATION

*"Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish  
in the presence of His glory with rejoicing ..." Jude 24*

To my wife, Rev. Dr. Mattie Ard-Carmon, for her love, and true partnership in ministry

To our children, Shanel, Andrea, Wilbur II, and Robyn, for the Christian adults they are

To my parents, Wilbur Jesse and Ada Roland Carmon, and my matriarchal grandmother,  
Siddy Roland, for their gifts of integrity, 'grit' and The Faith

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Brother Gerald Johnson and Sister Roberta Simpson

Brother Cliff Jones and Sister Lisa Spicer

Brother Vince Parks and Brother Rodney Taylor

Finally, to my colleagues in the 2014-to-2017 Congregational Growth and Community Development Cohort for a stimulating, inspiring and transformative journey together!

## CHAPTER ONE

### MY PERSONAL JOURNEY WITH CHRIST

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

*Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)*

My doctoral research at the Theological Seminary at Drew University has revealed to me a fundamental, but perhaps obvious, discovery. The modern theologian Stanley Grenz alludes to the personal nature of this discovery when he notes that God’s grace for salvation is both a personal and community endeavor. Salvation, he says, never occurs in isolation. God’s purpose is not simply personal, individual salvation, but also to establish “one new humanity” or community consisting of reconciled people<sup>1</sup> (Ephesians 2:14-19; note—all biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version). In this way, all who embrace Christ as their Lord, and God’s finished work of salvation through Christ on the cross, engage in a personal journey with Christ. Somewhere between birth and death, regardless of how or when it is discovered, one’s personal decision to receive Christ initiates this journey. Grenz further suggests that God’s corporate agent in every local community for nurturing this all important personal decision, and preparing converts for their missional journey, is the church of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 601-602.



The Church, God's covenant people,<sup>2</sup> not only has a divine mission to facilitate this salvific event amongst unbelievers (Matthew 28:18-19a), but it also has a divine mission to nurture their salvific missional journey with Christ (Matthew 28:19b-20). Thus my doctoral studies and research have helped me to see that our personal journey with Christ is one of lifelong spiritual formation—from unbeliever to Christian disciple (1 Peter 2:1-10). It is also one of spiritual transformation—from disciple to Christian evangelist or witness for Christ (Acts 1:8). This spiritual formation process for me began at age six. It derived directly from a family legacy of intentional Christian practices, and commitment to community Christian service.

After several years of stress and crisis from which their marriage never recovered, my parents permanently separated. My mother decided shortly afterwards to relocate our family of seven (five boys and two girls) to her hometown of Aurora, North Carolina (NC). In the mid-1960's this was a courageous decision for a middle-age African American woman to make—to escape the growing crime-festered streets of Portsmouth, Virginia, for the rural bible-belt of eastern North Carolina. Today I would loosely characterize us as a transplanted 'refugee-like' family, badly in need of God's missional grace from Christ's local church. Mother eventually settled us in the nearby sleepy town of Washington, where she found a job as a middle-school home economics teacher. This was a job she would do with excellence for nearly thirty-years.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 604-608.

Another major decision she made was to proactively rekindle her personal journey with Christ by planting our family in Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church of Washington, NC. Our grandmother, who raised eleven children and who was a strong Christian witness, became mother's personal (disciple making) mentor and evangelist on her rekindled journey with Christ. Mother would later share with me that it was grandmother's non-judgmental love and kindness, and her unshakeable belief and faith, that helped her chart the right course for our family.

We experienced very difficult times during the initial years of our relocation however. Mother struggled with finding stable housing, moving us four times in seven years. As a family of seven growing children, mother also struggled with providing suitable clothing and enough food. We all struggled with the emotional challenges that came with a single parent-led household, with children ranging in age from four-to-fifteen years old. Were it not for grandmother's Christian witness, guidance, and support the outcome for our family would have been very different. Were it not for mother's faithfulness, integrity, and intentionality to her own spiritual formation, I am certain our family would not have earned 6-Bachelor's degrees, 6-Masters, and 1-PhD. These achievements have been but a few of God's many blessings that came in the fullness time for our transplanted, refuge-like family.

This type of personal journey with Christ has been our family's matriarchal Christian tradition that I witnessed and experienced. I was raised-in it the first thirty-four years of my life (mother passed away in 1989). A key principle of this tradition was that Church attendance and participation are not optional. Consequently, mother ensured that

we were in Sunday church school and worship each week. These routine events were supplemented by our attendance at special worship events such as annual revival services, and quarterly Sunday afternoon services at her family's home church—St Paul AME Zion Church of Aurora, which is about twenty-miles southeast of Washington. Mother also required us to actively participate in our church's youth ministries such as youth choir, ushers, and denominational conferences.

Another key principle of this tradition was that Christians should have an abiding respect, more accurately fear, of God. This was reinforced in our daily lives, by repetitious choices that forged our common behavior. Such choices included adults favoring corporeal punishment, when we consistently violated one of God's ten commandments—especially if this violation was considered egregious. These choices also included practices that many would largely consider superstitious today, such as turning off lights and everyone sitting quietly during thunder storms, out of respect for God's awesome and mighty works.

Still another key principle of our family's matriarchal Christian tradition was respect for others, as well as engaging in Christian works for our family and community—which we considered, by and large, to be our extended family. The implicit core notion that everyone in our community embraced was that “today it might be my neighbor in need, but tomorrow it might be me!” During the difficult years following our relocation, many family members and friends shared with us clothing, food, and other welcomed necessities. And as the Lord blessed us to gradually do better, I observed mother sharing clothing and food, shelter and encouragement with other families in need.

I also observed that this Christian benevolence was typically done quietly, and in a manner that allowed those in need to maintain their dignity and self-respect.

Yet another key principle was the expectation of Christian excellence, integrity and honor. Mother modelled these traits in her work ethic, as did most African American adults in our community, regardless of their socio-economic status. By so doing she earned the reputation among her students as tough, but fair. She also enjoyed the respect of her peers and superiors as a plain-spoken woman of integrity. Thus she expected each of us to exhibit these same values in terms of our very best efforts in school, and the manner in which we conducted ourselves in our community. Mother's classic admonition to us was "don't mess-up my good name!" Mother and grandmother were not just strong Christian disciples, they established an enduring legacy as Christian disciple-makers. These were some of the key principles, and many others like them, that they practiced and modelled in their daily lives.

Like many young adults I attended college far from home (the bus ride from Washington, NC, to Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, was fifteen hours). There I began an eight-year hiatus from active Church participation. I would respond to mother's inquiries about this by explaining the time consuming nature of my engineering studies, or the challenges of finding a church nearby to regularly attend. In turn, she would respond sweetly, but firmly, "that's not the way I raised you!" The truth is that I felt I needed a break. In hindsight I strayed from the Christ's church, but not from my personal journey with Christ. I had an active personal prayer life—especially during exam time. I regularly read scripture—especially the wisdom passages of Proverbs, which I requested

and mother gladly provided. I avoided people and situations that seemed detrimental to the good life I wanted to live. Yet I believe now that I strayed because I wanted to live a little. I wanted to enjoy college life without feeling guilty about it in church on Sunday morning. Despite my hiatus from church life, God continued to bless me with very successful undergraduate and graduate academic years, and a great start to my business career. Such is the grace of God!

I sensed however that for all my personal prayer time, and for all my personal bible study time, something big was missing. My hiatus grew untenable as I came to realize, after marrying and having our first child, that I was missing Christ's church. The more real and difficult my personal life became, the hungrier I became for Christ's church and God's grace. The more drama my unwise and bad decisions spawned, the more desperate I became for Christ's word and God's wisdom. The more unclear my future seemed, the more proactive I became about my personal journey with Christ. In retrospect, I came to realize that I had missed eight-years of the portion of God's grace that only comes through the sacraments of Christ's church. I had missed eight-years of Christ's fellowship that only comes through regularly gathering with Christian saints. I had missed eight-years of God's anointing for community service that only comes through active participation in the church's missional work. I had missed eight-precious years of spiritual formation, of being forged into a Christian disciple, in a manner which only Christ's church is empowered to do (Matthew 28:19-20). In other words, I had missed a lot!

Consequently, I rededicated my life to Christ in March of 1980, and I planted my family in Christ's church. When I shared this with mother, both of us became uncontrollably overjoyed and tearful over God's answer to her prayers—her prodigal son had come back home to Christ's church. For the remaining nine years of her life, mother became my evangelist witness, and one of my spiritual mentors, just as grandmother had been for her. My hiatus from Christ's church sparked in me a yearning for the things of God. I cannot adequately explain this rekindling apart from an acute awareness of how far God had brought our family, by his grace. I aggressively embraced again the Faith, the Church, and rekindled my personal journey with Christ.

As I reflected on my discipleship training as a child—training that forged me into a believer-in Christ, I concluded that my only option was to draw near to Christ (Psalm 78:28 and James 4:8). If I wanted a meaningful life for my family and myself, I felt I must embrace the Christian life that mother and grandmother modeled. For the next twenty years, the North Stelton AMEC of Piscataway, NJ forged me progressively into a Christian disciple “fit for the Master's use.” I journeyed with Christ from rededicated believer to committed church member; then on to trained and engaged church disciple—serving in a variety of lay ministry roles; then on to church evangelist and mentor for new members; and ultimately on to Christian witness and pastor in March of 2001. As residual benefits, God blessed me and my family far beyond all that I could have asked or imagined (Ephesian 3:20). This God did as I proactively embraced personal responsibility for my journey with Christ.

Viewing my personal journey through the lens of my doctoral studies and research, it seems clear to me now that mother, and my new church home (North Selton AMEC), persistently urged me to embrace Church attendance and participation as God's fulcrum of grace (i.e., strength in my weakness, 2 Corinthians 12:9). They also encouraged me to patiently and proactively embrace discipleship development. Through our family's matriarchal Christian tradition, I learned the importance of what I understand now as daily regimentation and praxis of Christian tenets. Such tenets are taught by Christ's church, and we are expected to be self-motivated in pursuing our own spiritual formation process—which is our personal journey with Christ. Said differently, I have discovered on my journey that through the biblical teachings and missional work of Christ's church, Christian disciples are not instantaneously born (salvific rebirth notwithstanding), Christian disciples are progressively made!

The initial emphasis of my professional project was on developing a new missional ministry approach for addressing community needs. However, after completing two work sessions (see the chapter on Ministry Project), my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and I concluded that we were putting the "cart before the horse." As we each shared our personal journeys, what emerged was that few church members seem to be consciously aware of their personal journey with Christ. Nor do they seem to understand the implications of their journey on their personal readiness for Mt Zion's missional ministry. And perhaps even fewer members proactively engage in personal spiritual formation apart from attending worship, and occasionally bible study. The conundrum

that surfaced was, how can church members effectively pursue local missions if members are not consistently engaging in personal spiritual formation?

Thus given this discovery, my LAC recommended that we shift our emphasis to developing a new missional framework to help members ensure their personal readiness for addressing community needs. This represented a shift from our traditional internally focused ministry activities, to an emphasis on recommitting our congregation to ‘making disciples’. For my LAC and me this meant crafting a new missional framework that members might use to assess the current status of their personal journey with Christ. We further concluded that members should also be able to use such a framework to ensure personal readiness to pursue Great Commission ministry, in the expanding variety of existing and emerging needs, in Mt Zion’s mission field.



## CHAPTER TWO

### MT ZION'S MISSION FIELD: PLAINFIELD IN UNION COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

*“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”*

*Matthew 16:18 (NRSV)*

I reviewed my research on Plainfield's history and current socio-economic environment with my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) during our first work session. Since most of them are Plainfield natives, I was pleased to discover that they agreed with my findings. They shared additional antidotal insights pertaining to our community, and to Mt Zion, from their personal experiences growing up. Together we concluded that to understand the Great Commission opportunity for expanding God's kingdom in Plainfield, the rich history of what is today Union County must be well understood.

During my fourteen years of pastoral ministry, I have observed that citizens today are tightly coupled to over 400-years of Union County history. This seems especially the case for African Americans. This observation suggests that a careful examination of this history is required to craft a credible missional vision for our congregation—Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) of Plainfield. This examination is especially required if such a vision is to break what theologians Ed Stetzer and David Putman call missional codes.<sup>1</sup> Carlyle F Stewart amplifies this viewpoint by noting that

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 216-219.

particularly for African American church growth, such a credible vision must have prophetic passion, conviction and investment. Stewart defines prophetic ministry as: “The process of calling God's people into an awareness of God's saving, liberating, and redemptive acts so as to compel the radical participation of individuals and communities in spiritual, social, and personal transformation.”<sup>2</sup> Stewart makes practical this definition by noting that the prophetic grounding of Christ’s earthly ministry was that people ran to tell others how he loved and healed them. Stewart also cautions that the appeal of community-based outreach, as the embodiment of prophetic ministry, resides in programs offered outside of the church that effectively address real issues. As will be seen from the brief history provided below, these are important perspectives for crafting a credible and sustainable Great Commission vision for Mt. Zion in our local community. Stetzer and Putman go on to suggest that deeper perspective can be gained from asking several probing questions. The answers to these questions could shed tremendous light on Union County and Plainfield as historical mission fields. Included are questions such as: What brought people here in the first place? Who moved in and when? Who moved out and when? How have things changed over time? What have historically been the leading commercial industries?<sup>3</sup> Thus a brief history is offered in an attempt to answer some of these questions, and to highlight several of the key historical trends that have shaped the current Mt Zion ministry missions field.

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<sup>2</sup> Carlyle F. Stewart, *African American Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 22, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Stetzer and Putman, 216-219.

## **A Brief History of Union County and Plainfield, New Jersey**

Like so many New Jersey towns, Plainfield's history is inseparably intertwined with America's history. The Lenni-Lenape Indian Nation (the Tribe), also called the Delaware Indian Nation, claimed as their home most of what we now call Delaware, New Jersey, and significant portions of eastern Pennsylvania, southern New York and Connecticut.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the arrival of British colonists (the Settlers) in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, this Tribe depended on this region's inland waterways and proximity to the sea for their survival. When the Settlers arrived in the 'new world,' they identified this as a prime settlement region due to its natural beauty, abundance of fertile fields, and accessibility to natural resources and raw materials. The Settlers took advantage of the Tribe's well established complex system of crisscrossed trails to eventually form major colonial highways for travel and trade.

After purchasing large acreage of land from the Tribe in 1664, the Settlers founded the first permanent New Jersey settlement called Elizabethtown, which was named in honor of the Queen of England. As more Settlers arrived they incorporated new towns within this region's boundaries that included: Springfield (1793), Westfield (1794), Rahway (1804), and Union (1808). This region ultimately became what is now Essex and Union Counties. The rapid railroad construction, expansion within this region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the creation of townships such as Plainfield—which was created in 1847, but actually settled in 1684, and officially became a part of Union County in

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Dalton, *The Lenape of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Ontario* (New York, NY: The Library of Native Americans, 2004), 1-50.

1878. Plainfield eventually became known as ‘The Queen City’ (also named in honor of the Queen of England), and grew rapidly into a bustling urban and commercial hub. It became an epicenter for extreme wealth. Plainfield also included large Jewish and upper-class European communities. As such, Plainfield became a major commuter hub-city for travelers bound for New York City, just twenty-four miles northeast.

### **Union County and African Americans**

From the very beginning in 1664, European Settlers depended upon a substantial African slave labor force to work their plantations. Slaves were used to clear and maintain mostly moderate land-grant farms of 100-to-200 acres. Slaves served as household cooks, laundresses, nurses maids, nannies, and seamstresses. A significant number of slaves also worked as craftsmen in such skilled trades as bricklayers, blacksmiths, carriage makers, coopers, clock-makers, tailors, silversmiths, and paper-makers.<sup>5</sup> The Gradual Emancipation Act, led by then Governor Joseph Bloomfield—then president of New Jersey's Abolition Society—provided for the freedom of every slave child born after July 4, 1804. Unfortunately, the same law required that female children were obligated to serve their mother's slave owner until age 21. Male children however were obligated until age 25. Ultimately it took the Civil War, the enactment of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments, and the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment—which New Jersey was the last northern state to approve—to bring an end to the institution of slavery in

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<sup>5</sup> Ethel M. Washington, *Union County Black Americans* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2004), 7-8.

America, and in New Jersey. Following this however, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned racial discrimination laws that systematically denied Union County (and U.S.) African Americans political rights, adequate education, economic opportunities, and equal access to public places and facilities. This set the stage and tone for many decades of civil rights struggles and protest movements to achieve some measure of parity in all segments of African American life.

### **The Church's Mission in Union County**

Perhaps Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi says it best by noting that “Missions is about cultural encounters, about the interplay between cultures, and cultural encounters are about relationships...and Missiology is intrinsically cross-cultural.”<sup>6</sup> In conjunction with European settlement and expansion, the Church's initial mission in Union county appears to have been communitarian. This means that it was not focused on evangelizing the indigenous Indian population, nor the enslaved African labor force. It was not focused on building cross-cultural relationships as Cardoza-Orlandi suggests. Instead its focus seems to have been on ensuring the spiritual well-being of the European Settlers in a foreign land—a kind of imported ‘religious product’—in whatever denominational form the specific Settler community preferred (Anglican, Episcopalian, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Dutch Reform, etc.).

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<sup>6</sup> Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission-An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 89-90.

Having undergone acculturation since the colonial period, African Americans embraced what eventually emerged as, and would become, the “Black Church.” It evolved as the primary religious, education, social, and cultural outlet for its congregations and the larger community. Clergy followers of the tenets of Philadelphia's Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Boston's Thomas Paul, founder of the African Baptist Church; and New York's Samuel Cornish, founder of the Colored Presbyterian Church, formed the leadership base of black political and cultural activism. After the 1870-to-1910 ‘Great Migration’ period to the north, there were over 5,353 African Americans in Union County. By 1940 this number swelled to 17,859. And according to the U.S. Census, this number reached an all-time high of 108,593 in 2000. At that time, the largest African American population resided in primarily six of the twenty-one Union County townships. These were Plainfield (29,500), Elizabeth (24,090), Roselle (10,917), Union (10,752), and Rahway (7,173).<sup>7</sup>

### **The Church and Disciple Readiness**

The biblical scholar, Douglas Hare, argues that in Mark, and by extension in Matthew, most of Christ's public ministry was close to Galilee.<sup>8</sup> The turning point leading to Christ's ministry in and around Jerusalem, Hare suggests, was Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27-30, Matthew 16:13-21). This central

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<sup>7</sup> Washington, page 9.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas R A. Hare, *Interpretation-Matthew: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 187.

passage of the Peter's confession account thus separates the Galilean ministry from the passion story. Hare suggests that it also focuses on Christ's preparation of the disciples for what is to come. In Mark, this central passage is punctuated by three passion declarations (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34), followed by narratives that present Christ's disciples as incapable of understanding his announcements. Ultimately this prompts teachings on what it means to follow Christ, essentially helping them to understand that 'the way of Christian discipleship' is in fact 'the way of the cross.' In chapter 18, Matthew extends Mark's treatment by transmuting Christ's teaching about discipleship into a long discourse on church life. In my view this represents the basic disciple readiness process that progressively occurs through spiritual formation and personal development (see my personal journey with Christ in Chapter One).

Hare suggests that Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus begins this process by establishing Peter's primal leadership role among all disciples. This is done through the fundamental question in Matthew 16:13: "Who do people say that I [Jesus] am?", for which every person, in every generation, must be spiritually led to provide the exclusive personal answer in Matthew 16:16: "You are the Messiah [the Christ], the Son of the Living God!" Hare helps us to see that this confessional event provides each nascent believer the means to express their faith, and ostensibly in the process begin their personal discipleship journey with Christ. Matthew has Peter to be the first, and the only one of his peers to make this confession in this setting. This allows Christ to confirm the inspired source of this divine disclosure (Matthew 16:17). It also allows Christ to confer a special blessing upon Peter as an initial step to establishing his new leadership role.

Traditional Protestant doctrine views Peter's divinely inspired declaration as itself the personified spiritual foundation of Christ's church (i.e., *petros* in Greek). This means that Matthew especially wants new believers and disciples-in-training to understand that this is the confessional foundation on which Christ has built his church (Matthew 16:18). Matthew also wants them to understand that Christ has established Peter's faithful confession, not just as one stone among many in this spiritual foundation of the church—which is to say that the confessional faith of the apostles, prophets, and laity collectively constitute the church's foundation. Instead, Matthew wants believers to embrace Christ's elevation of Peter, and his primal inspired confession, ostensibly as now his gatekeeper—having given the model confession for ALL to emulate—through which all humanity must ultimately pass if we are to choose to pursue a personal journey with Christ (Matthew 16:19).<sup>9</sup>

Hare goes on to note that Christ's church (or *ekklesia* in the Greek) can be viewed as the building of living humanity (1 Peter 2:1-10), continually built in each generation on the sure foundation of a collection of divinely inspired confessions. It is a new type of congregation, albeit similar to the Mosaic 'church in the wilderness,' but built on a new and better covenant. And it has been empowered by the infusion of God's Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Matthew conveys to his readers that by Christ entrusting Peter with the spiritual 'keys of the Kingdom,' the evil real world issues (or 'gates of Hades') will not be allowed to prevail against the work of Christ's church. Thus the congregation of the

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<sup>9</sup> Hale, 188-190.



new covenant will persist throughout all coming generations, despite all the calculated efforts of the powers of darkness to deter it from its mission. Hare suggests this means that the gates of Hades, or death—that is, the destructive socio-economics issues that plague our local communities for example—will always strive to hold in its prison all who have entered its gates. However, the mission of Christ’s church is to victoriously storm the gates and rescue those—regardless of how they were seduced to enter—who choose to embrace their personal journey and destiny with Christ.

In short, while Matthew’s Christ invests the power to ‘bind and loose’ in Peter as his surrogate, it is also promised to every generation of disciples who follow Christ (Matthew 16:15-17). Thus Christ’s keys, empowered by the Holy Spirit to unlock the gates of Hades, are vested in each generation of new covenant ministry leaders and lay disciples committed to local missional ministry. As Hale notes, while Peter was given supreme authority in the areas of teaching, disciple, and ensuring disciple readiness, as Christ’s church continues to expand, this authority must always be exercised in each generation through local church missional ministry—for Peter’s removal by death did not alter this necessity, nor its potency.<sup>10</sup>

### **The *Ekklesia*’s Mission Field in Plainfield Today**

Grenz extends our understanding of Hare’s insights on Christ’s church and disciple readiness in Union County and Plainfield by positing several key points I shared

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<sup>10</sup> Hale, 191-193.

in Chapter One. He notes that while the triune God is seeking the salvation of all humanity, “salvation, though it is an act of the Holy Spirit for individuals, it never occurs in isolation.”<sup>11</sup> As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the church’s historical mission in Union County was communitarian. It was a sort of imported euro-centric denominational product suited to the cultural background of specific Settler communities, with minor missional interest for indigenous Native Americans, or transplanted African Americans. Yet Grenz suggests that God’s purpose abroad, as well as in Union County and Plainfield, has always been to establish ‘one new humanity’ consisting of a reconciled people. Christ’s church, as God’s new covenant people, are then a ‘called-out (from the world) people,’ sharing in God’s salvation, whose mission in Union County and Plainfield is to beckon others to the same calling. No longer, Grenz argues, is God’s covenant community based on membership in a specific ethno-denominational group, as for example God’s old covenant nation of Israel was. Today if the church is to be Christ’s church in Plainfield, all its peoples must be embraced: “from every tribe and language, every people and nation” into God’s new covenant community (Rev. 5:9).<sup>12</sup>

For the Plainfield community, alignment with this mission has been a difficult challenge, especially in recent history. It seems clear from my doctoral research that most local Plainfield Christian churches have had to grapple with resisting the temptation of cultivating primarily internally focused ministries. This is largely due the pressures

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<sup>11</sup> Grenz, 601-602.

<sup>12</sup> Grenz, 607-608.

stemming from the rapid changes that occurred following the racial tensions of the late 1960's. In July 1967, the Newark riots spilled over to other communities such as Elizabeth and Plainfield. The days that followed saw looting, rioting and large scale demonstrations against police, fire and other public safety personnel. And though with the engagement of U.S. National Guard these tensions were quelled in less than ten days, the stigma associated with this civil unrest and property destruction remains with Plainfield to this day. This led to many residences and businesses moving to neighboring, highly protected (“Mayberry-like”) suburban communities. This left only small pockets of wealthy residences (also highly protected) on the outskirts of town. In essence since 1967, Plainfield entered a period of decline, with the majority of the city becoming low-income residents, and a decimated commercial environment. Secular political efforts, often in partnership with religious missional efforts, to revive Plainfield have been challenged, even resisted, by extreme socio-economic inequity, low performing schools, widespread gang violence and a variety of other depressive factors.

Today however, Plainfield is a diverse city of about 49,500 residents, that remains a part of the vibrant New York City metropolitan region. It is a major Union County urban center, and a cost-friendly transportation hub that maintains a quality regional bus and railway system for commuters. Plainfield also remains the home of small businesses in industries such as printing, the manufacture of chemicals, clothing, electronic equipment and vehicle parts. Unfortunately, these business are unable to attract highly skilled, highly educated residents. And the current majority of low-income residents struggle with several challenging issues that it seems clear requires significant

consideration in any credible Mt Zion missional vision, and disciple readiness framework, for the Plainfield community. In addition to those mentioned above, challenges that must shape such a vision, and inform how Christian disciple readiness is ensured, include rising cost of living due to neighboring affluent communities within a seven-mile radius; as well as, inequities and limited access to vital goods and services, such as healthcare and education.<sup>13</sup>

### **Mt. Zion's Ministry in Plainfield**

Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) of Plainfield, was established in 1892, on the 500-block of West 4<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>14</sup> Having heard of Bishop Richard Allen's and the AMEC's struggles and victories, a strong Christian African American woman named Sister Elizabeth Jackson, and other like-minded friends, prayerfully sought God's vision for an AMEC in Plainfield. They desired to be a part of the AMEC ministry because they believed that it satisfied their needs for Christian worship, as well as their desire for community and social activism. After the assignment of the first pastor in 1893, Mt. Zion grew rapidly for over 108-years.

Given Plainfield's historical and social changes delineated above, establishing a credible missional code breaking vision for growth has been extremely difficult. This seemed especially true after my discussions with long-standing Mt. Zion members, many

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<sup>13</sup> Hope Community Action Partnership, Inc., *Plainfield, NJ Community Assessment 2001-2011* (Hoboken, NJ, 2012), 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Bishop Frank C. Cummings, *The First Episcopal District's Historical Review of 200 Years of African Methodism* (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1987), 358.

of whom have served for over fifty years. Most have also lived in Plainfield all their lives, and from their youth have continued the domestic careers of their parents in the remnant well-to-do Plainfield sub-communities, such as Sleepy-Hollow. These members and their families have labored prior to my arrival under the ministry of thirty-two pastors since 1892—few of whom stayed longer than three-years. Specifically, since 2001 Mt. Zion has experienced several challenges to expansion. This included three pastoral changes from 2001-to-2005—with my appointment in 2005 being the third. These pastoral changes for the ‘itinerant-oriented’ AMEC ministry were not unusual. However, a Great Commission missional vision must not only be credible in the historical context of our members and other citizens, it must also be sustainable, and it must be able to transcend the ‘pastor-of-record’.

From my doctoral studies, I believe that such a vision for Mt. Zion must focus on God's divine interests, and Christ's sovereign instructions to his church. Christ's instructions were to make new Christian disciples in the fulfillment of the Great Commission—that is to say, ensure spiritual formation and disciple readiness for local community missions (Matthew 28:16-20). In contrast his instructions do not include recruiting new members to simply fill our pews. In my view, this means that a credible vision for growth must be authentic in how it inspires current members to transition from the historical ‘Mt. Zion way’ of doing local ministry—implicitly assimilated from the past and encapsulated in the phrase: “we have always done things this way.” Instead such a vision must evolve into a newly posited ‘Mt. Zion way’ of doing ministry—explicitly developed for coming generations, that can be encapsulated in the phrase: “we need to do

things differently because God is doing a new thing.” Given our congregation’s historical context, a credible Great Commission missional vision must be authentic in how it connects with our local community. And as Mt. Zion’s missional ministry yields results, we must proactively promote what we are doing, and enthusiastically ‘tell our ministry story’ in our local community.

Another challenge to growth that must be addressed is our need for sufficient funding to effectively drive strategies necessary to support such a vision. My doctoral work confirms for me that any credible Mt. Zion missional code breaking strategy for which there is no incremental local budget, or that is not quickly self-funding, will not work. And such a strategy that does not target the needs of specific local groups, or that does not address specific local socio-economic ministry issues, will not work.

Yet another challenge to growth is having a pool of appropriately skilled Christian Disciples. My doctoral work revealed that any such strategy for which we are unable to identify and train disciples to proactively embrace the leadership role, will not work. This is because we must be more intentional in assessing the gifts of our members. We must persuade members that using their gifts for God's glory and plans, is their reasonable service as Christian disciples and God's servants (Romans 12:1-2). Perhaps most important of all, the core of any new approach to ministry must inspire members to motivate themselves to embrace Mt. Zion’s spiritual formation programs. These programs in turn must have as their goal to transform members to disciples, and to ensure disciple readiness to pursue missional ministry opportunities in Plainfield.

## **Survey Results and Implications for Missional Ministry**

For the reasons above, Mt. Zion members were asked to complete a brief survey to begin the process of assessing their readiness for local missional ministry as part of my professional project (see survey and results in Appendices G). The same survey was given twice to my LAC team during our first and final work sessions (see survey and results in Appendices F). This was done to assess their understanding of basic Christian doctrine, and its implications for local ministry. The survey was given twice to my LAC to assess any change in their understanding over the course of the project (the LAC survey results will be discussed in later chapters).

The survey was given to Mt Zion during our Transformation Worship Event on Sunday April 10<sup>th</sup>. This was done prior to sharing the new missional ministry framework our team crafted for Mt Zion and entitled: ‘Our Personal Journey with Christ’ (see Appendices D and E, which are discussed in later chapters). The surveys for both the LAC and the congregation consisted of four sections, each with five questions. These sections included, Section 1: ‘How do you see God and a Life with Jesus Christ?’ Section 2: ‘The Christian Church—It’s Message and Mission!’ And, Section 3: ‘The Christian Church—It’s Mandate and Motivation!’ However, Section 4 for my LAC team was entitled: ‘The Doctor of Ministry Candidate Evaluation;’ but for the congregation it was entitled: ‘Where are you on Your Personal Journey with Christ?’

The Mt. Zion congregational surveys offer several insights which are germane to the discussion above on member-to-disciple development, and disciple-readiness for local missional ministry. To start with, nearly 80% of the members that responded to Section 1

seemed to have a firm knowledge of basic theology. However, they struggled with understanding whether the Holy Trinity are all one, or are they all equal. According to AMEC doctrine, the tenet of ‘oneness’ grounds our faith in the unity of the Holy Trinity. On the other hand, AMEC doctrine avoids the tenet of ‘equality’ which suggests separate equivalency of the Holy Trinity.<sup>15</sup> Grenz brings insight to this point by noting that Christians are to affirm the one-ness and three-ness, the unity and diversity, of the triune nature of God.<sup>16</sup> This is to say that AME Christians are monotheists who staunchly believe in the one and only divine essence of the one God which is confessed by the biblical faith community at large. It is also to say that we affirm the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as deity, sharing together in, and together constituting, the one and only divine essence. The one God, therefore, is not an undifferentiated, solitary oneness, but subsists in a multiplicity—the three members of the Trinity. We believe that our triune God is differentiated, and manifests diversity (not equality) within unity. Indeed, God has chosen to reveal this eternal, diverse yet unified, divine nature to us in the form of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our triune God has done so (Genesis 1 and 2; John 3:16-21, Revelation 22) for the purpose of humanity experiencing God’s diverse agency. This means for example, experiencing God’s love and grace (the Father), God’s mercy and salvation (the Son), God’s authority and power (Holy Spirit) throughout all generations in the fulfillment of God’s will. The significance of misunderstanding this on Mt. Zion’s

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<sup>15</sup> AME Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church* (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 2014), 14-20.

<sup>16</sup> Grenz, 85-88.



part, and perhaps for other mainline denominational congregants, cannot be understated. This misunderstanding of the nature of the triune God can effectively mute Mt. Zion's understanding of the divine strength that comes only in the unity of the diverse gifts God has invested in Mt. Zion's members. It can covertly obviate the need among some members for ensuring their personal readiness for missional opportunities (e.g., why prepare if my gifts will not be valued or appreciated). It can also diminish Mt. Zion's overall effectiveness to pursue possible missional ministry goals—for unlike for the triune God, the sum of our collective personal gifts, would thus be unlikely to result in the divine multiplicatively empowered synergy of the whole.

In Sections 2 and 3 of the survey, the congregation seems to clearly understand Christ's mission and mandate in our community, responding over 90% and 94% correctly to the respective section. They also agreed with my LAC team on the primarily socio-economic issues that must be considered in shaping a new missional vision, and establishing future ministry goals, for Mt. Zion. These included providing food, clothing, and shelter for the poor in Plainfield (82% agreed); fighting for social justice, jobs, and economic empowerment for Plainfield's middle and lower class (67% agreed); and, Christ-oriented (or spiritually-oriented) solutions to the problem of drugs, gangs, and spiritual decline in Plainfield (37% agreed). Unfortunately, while 95% Mt Zion members embrace Christ as God's Messiah and their Savior, and over 85% regularly attend Sunday worship, fewer than 31% regularly attend one of our three bible studies during the week. As my LAC and I discussed these results during our work sessions, we concluded that any Christ-oriented solutions and missional goals for the challenging issues mentioned

above would have to begin with ensuring Mt. Zion member readiness to exercise self-motivated, personally sustained efforts. In Section 4 of our survey, fewer than 50% of our members responded that they have an active prayer life that extends to praying for others, and sharing the Gospel with lost souls on a weekly basis. As we further discussed these results, questions were raised as to member commitment to, and/or availability for, local missional ministry. Instead, we concluded that members seem to have mostly ad hoc engagement in internally focused ministry activity. Thus through these discussions we gained a heightened awareness of the need for member readiness. And we were also reminded of Christ's counsel of his original disciples concerning the challenging, demonically inspired issues that they would face in their missional ministry: "[These kind] can only come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:25-29, Matthew 17:14-21).

Taken together this means that Mt. Zion's future growth itself must be viewed as a journey, and not an instantaneous transformation. Stewart concludes that growth is a function of a church's on-going impact in their local community through programs that strongly resonate with its members. However, through my professional project my LAC and I discovered that the precursor to achieving such impact is the readiness of a church and its members to effectively deliver such ministry programs. We also discovered that a major aspect of Mt. Zion's growth journey must be to focus on our collective membership-to-discipleship transformation journey. Secondly, we must ensure that there are sufficient resources to pursue community programs on our internal-to-external transformation journey.

In short, Plainfield continues to be a tremendous Christian mission opportunity for Mt. Zion. Although the riots of the late-1960's have tarnished its luster, she remains the 'Queen City' of Union County. Plainfield's historical tale of two cities: 'the haves and have-nots', 'the wealthy and the workers', looms large over its communities and citizens to this day. As population growth shifts to an increasing Latino/Hispanic segment, the city continues to reflect its strong divergence in nearly all socioeconomic categories. I believe this means that God continues to have prophetic plans for growing his kingdom, and doing his divine work in Plainfield. I also believe that Mt. Zion continues to have divine opportunities to be co-laborers with Christ, and the Holy Spirit in church growth and expanding God's kingdom in Plainfield and Union county.<sup>17</sup>

Mt. Zion must however make some fundamental changes in the way Christian ministry and community missions are done in Plainfield and Union County. For example, we must enhance our basic ministry areas. This includes addressing our community's weekly need for prophetic worship and music by transforming our worship program and choir selections. It includes enhancing our approach to Christian hospitality and usher ministries. We must also help to address our community's weekly need for prophetic pastoral care and education.<sup>18</sup> Mt. Zion must undergo an internal metamorphosis that makes skilled Christian disciples out of pew dwellers. We must help deliver our members' hearts and minds from suffocating legacy attitudes and habits.<sup>19</sup> For without

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<sup>17</sup> Cardoza-Orlandi, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, 55-56, 95-96, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (NY, NY, HarperCollins, 2009), 50-54.

such a credible and sustainable Great Commission vision for growth, grounded in the future needs of our community, Mt. Zion could become like too many other mainline congregations. We will struggle with avoiding decline. Or worst, we will ultimately face demise. The good news is that as will be seen from my project results, we believe we have crafted an effective transformation framework, and we have begun to recalibrate Mt. Zion's transformation journey to be more consistent with Christ's missional mandate.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REVIEW: MT. ZION'S MISSIONAL MANDATE

*“‘This,’ [Jesus] said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”*

*Acts 1:1-8 (NRSV)*

As has been discussed, Mt. Zion’s missional theology is grounded in the missional history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC). Mt. Zion’s missional journey is also inextricably connected to the socio-economic history of Plainfield and Union County. Since its inception in 1787, the theological thrust of missions by the AMEC has been: “To minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people.”<sup>1</sup> The AMEC founders envisioned this occurring across geographies and generations by Christ’s mandate to local churches to: “seek out and save the lost, serve the needy, as well as encouraging all members to become involved in all aspects of church training.” It should be noted that pursuant to this theological missional mandate, the AMEC experienced hyper-expansion over its first 200 years—expanding to 19 Episcopal Districts, and over 3.5m Christian disciples worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> AME Church Discipline, 10.

Perhaps the obvious question is: What brought about this rapid expansion? In our Historical Statement, it says that the AMEC was filled with “serious people of color.”<sup>2</sup> Who were these 'serious' Christian disciples? This statement goes on to say, that they were episcopal leaders with strong vision and great energy. They were clergy with shepherds' hearts and prophetic preaching voices. They were also apparently lay-disciples with an unrelenting spirit of Christian missions, and an unwavering commitment to the health, growth and well-being of their local church.<sup>3</sup> Working together for over 200 years, these Christian disciples were determined to make the AMEC a place of spiritual refuge and social empowerment for all peoples, especially peoples of color worldwide.

Arguably Stetzer and Putman would characterize African Methodism in this stage of expansion as more of a “missional church movement” rather than a “denominational system.”<sup>4</sup> This is because the AMEC trained, sent, and supported apostolic pastors through an itinerancy system to serve these new local churches. By leveraging tools like our Discipline, the AMEC offered a proven ministry framework for new local church pastors and leaders to confidently follow. The AMEC also used events like their Annual Conferences to celebrate the accomplishments of what Stetzer and Putman call “apostolic heroes and congregations” as inspiration examples for other newly planted churches and pastors to follow.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the AMEC's early history began with breaking the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Stetzer and Putman, 174-179.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 176.

missional code as its early episcopal leaders seemed to intuitively understand that their mission was to support local AME Churches in fulfilling Christ's Great Commission.

However, since 1987 apart from modest growth in Africa, India and the Caribbean, AMEC growth, like most mainline historic denominations, has been stagnant. Certainly the sobering question is: Why? I would suggest at least three reasons that require careful consideration. First, we seem to have elected and consecrated a generation of episcopal leaders whose vision has been more focused on church management, instead of seeking God's new vision for our future. Secondly, we seem to have appointed a generation of clergy who too often have seen ministry as a secular job, rather than a divine calling. Thirdly, we seem to have raised a generation of lay-disciples who too often have viewed their local church as their own social club—for just their family and friends—rather than God's divine instrument for missional ministry. In other words, it seems that episcopal leaders who think that they are managers, clergy who think they have a 9-to-5 job, lay-disciples who think that ministry is only about fellowship within the four-walls has been a formula for AMEC stagnation, and even decline since 1987.

Stetzer and Putman would accurately suggest that, like so many other mainline denominations, the AMEC has drifted significantly from its missional code in favor of denominationalism. In other words, subordinating the original missional thrust of fulfilling Christ's Great Commission through local AME churches, in favor of a gradual but growing focus on sustaining and supporting the denomination as our primary

theological thrust.<sup>6</sup> The irony is that if our goal were to reach the moon, it would only take a small degree of uncorrected drift to miss it entirely. In my view, since 1987 we seem to have drifted so far into what I call ‘episcopal fixation,’ that the weightier elements required for missional growth have been delegated to local AME churches. Stetzer and Putman delineates these elements as critical factors such as, relevant demographic research, training and equipping true apostolic leaders, and strategic planning and financial resources to support it—just to name a few.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, most local churches are barely equipped to handle such weighty elements. Increasingly for local churches, like Mt. Zion, success is defined by swelling pews and expanding budgets as indicators of their ability to support growing denominational requirements. However, Stetzer and Putman note that local church success is more accurately described as the results of missional planting process that make more Christian disciples. As an example, for Mt. Zion this might mean that an outreach ministry focused on making disciples among Plainfield's growing unchurched Hispanic-Latino population. However, while this might satisfy Christ, it would not likely be deemed denominationally successful without corresponding membership and budgetary growth.

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<sup>6</sup> Stetzer and Putman, 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 177-179.



## **Towards Understanding the Theology of Mission**

In *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Mission*, Gerald Anderson defines the theology of mission as, “concerned with the basic presuppositions and underlying principles which determine, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the motives, methods strategy and goals of the Christian world mission.”<sup>8</sup> The theological scholar, Charles Van Engen, suggests that this is the “tripartite nature of Theology of Mission.”<sup>9</sup> By this he means that it is a multi-disciplinary, as well as an interdisciplinary enterprise concerned with three major areas. The first major area is biblical and theological presuppositions, and values. The second major area is the application of these presuppositions and values to the church’s mandated ministry mission by Christ. The third major area is the socio-economic context in which the activities engendered by these presuppositions and values are carried out, in particular times and places.

For Van Engen, theology is itself intrinsically theology of mission because at its core, theology of mission requires reflection about God. It also seeks to understand God’s intentions and purposes. Theology of mission seeks to understand God’s use of human instruments and institutions to achieve God’s goals and mission, in God’s world. He goes on to also suggest that because of its commitment to remain faithful to God’s intentions, perspectives, and purposes, the theology of mission has a fundamental concern for the relationship of the bible to missions. It attempts to allow Scripture not only to provide the

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, editor. *The Theology of Christian Mission* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 954.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Van Engen, *What Is Theology of Mission* (Teologia y Cultura-1, [www.teologos.com.ar](http://www.teologos.com.ar), article published August 2004), 45.

basic motivations for missions, but also to question and shape, guide and evaluate the actual missionary enterprise in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Van Engen further defines the theology of mission in terms of the missional, or ostensibly socio-economic community environment, or context in which a local church finds itself and its mission. Theology of mission draws its incarnational nature from the ministry of Christ. To be authentic it must always be viewed as transpiring in a specific point of time (i.e., in world history), and in a specific place of locale (i.e., in world geography). Because of this, Van Engen notes the importance of studying the social sciences—such as sociology, anthropology, economics, urbanology, psychology, world religions, etc. The missional theologian can leverage these disciplines to understand the specific context in which one is called to engage in their theology of missions. Such multi-disciplinary study helps to reveal the local context in terms of a hermeneutic of reality in which ministry mission is to take place. Such inter-disciplinary study also helps to give voice to the human cries, highlight the individual human faces, give meaning to the personal human stories, quantify the immediate human needs, and give expression to the suppressed communal hopes of the peoples in whose contexts the missional theologian has been called to serve.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, Van Engel also defines the theology of mission in terms of praxis. In his view, its requirement for inter-disciplinary study, as well as honest

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

reflection on God’s mission, must never become a substitute for deliberate missional ministry action and participation. Essentially Van Engel firmly suggests that if one’s theology of mission does not emanate into informed action, then that missional theologian is merely a “resounding gong or clanging cymbal” (1Corinthians 13:1). Yet he also reminds the missional theologian that if their actions—local missional services in their local context—do not transform their reflection, they have pursued merely great ideas that ultimately will prove to be irrelevant and perhaps even destructive, or counter-productive to their local context.<sup>12</sup>

Thus for my professional project, my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and I thought it was important to start by discussing our personal understanding of Christian missional service. We also wanted to determine our collective understanding of local church (Mt. Zion) missional ministry. This included developing a common understanding of Christian missions and evangelism as the adoption of the posture and thinking, the behaviors and practices required by the Great Commission. The reason for this is to engage others, outside of the local church with the gospel message, and to help relieve human suffering. We also discussed spiritual transformation as a fundamental alteration of Mt. Zion’s spiritual credo resulting from the willful embrace of external theology—meaning external to Mt. Zion’s existing ministry credo and praxis—that leads to a new or enhanced Mt. Zion ministry credo and praxis.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 47.

Based on our personal journeys' with Christ, my LAC and I discussed the need to motivate members to personally embrace proactive spiritual formation as an intentional Christian practice. The goal of such practices is the development of spiritual maturity, leading to ever increasing Christ-likeness. Such intentional practices should include prayer, the study of scripture, fasting, simplicity, solitude, confession, and worship. We also determined the need for Mt. Zion members to renew their commitment to Christian service as a purposeful response of our regenerated souls to the Lordship of Christ.<sup>13</sup> This personal response should be a voluntary and hearty subjection of ourselves, as Christ's church, to his dominion, and carrying out his revealed will—consistent with full obedience to God (Proverbs 3:6; John 15:1-7).

The biblical scholar mentioned earlier, Douglas Hare, refers to the focus of Matthew in a similar way. Hare sees Matthew as an 'evangelist' whose gospel message is precious to each generation because of its fusion of gospel and ethics, of faith and morality.<sup>14</sup> This means that accepting Christ, as one's Lord and Savior, is not all that is required of a Christian. Hare suggests that Jesus warns in his Sermon on the Mount that: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (7:21). When compared with the Great Commission, Hare helps us to see the absence of Christ mentioning 'preach the gospel' in this text. Nor does he even demand faith as a precondition of baptism. Hare concludes

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Pink, *On Christian Service*: [http://www.gracegems.org/Pink/christian\\_service.htm](http://www.gracegems.org/Pink/christian_service.htm), 1947

<sup>14</sup> Hare, 1-2.

from this that Matthew assumes these activities as integral parts of the salvific-baptism nurturing process. However, Matthew—the evangelist—cannot take for granted that Christian converts will take seriously the moral imperatives of Christ.

This is why Christ commands his disciples in each generation to, “..., [teach converts] to observe everything that I commanded you.” (28:19-20). Through his Gospel, Matthew wants to convince each generation of converts that for their faith in Christ to be genuine, it must be demonstrated in daily conformance to Christian living. Hare also suggests that this points to a nurturing community—ostensibly with the church as its center—extending to all other areas of the community’s life. As mentioned earlier, Matthew wants each generation to embrace Christ’s promise of divine empowerment as validation of their mandate to “Go therefore...[to] all nations...” And he wants each congregation to embrace Christ’s promise of divine personal presence as validation of their mission to “...make disciples”.<sup>15</sup> In other words, in the process of making Christian disciples, Matthew wants congregations to ensure that converts embrace the notion that Christian faith and Christian ethics are two sides of the same coin, or the coin is counterfeit.<sup>16</sup>

The writer of Mark however asserts his work as a gospel from the outset: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The biblical scholar, Lamar Williamson, notes that in contrast to Matthew, Mark’s gospel presupposes that the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 334-335.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 2.

best way to bear witness to the coming of God’s Kingdom, and to challenge converts to be faithful disciples, is to tell the story of Christ.<sup>17</sup> And while most biblical scholars reject Mark 16:9-20 as being part of the original text, Williamson notes that it is true to the message of Mark’s gospel, and is still a valid witness to the faith of the church today. This is because the risen Christ’s reproach of his unbelieving disciples is consistent with other parts of Mark (i.e., 4:40; 9:19), and is relevant to the church in all generations. This unbelief exists in our local communities often from the lack of their personal experiences with the risen Christ. And it often exists from the skepticism local communities have toward our churches because of how poorly some Christians conduct their lives.

Though Christ continues to rebuke the errant discharge of his divine affairs, he also continues to entrust his saving message to hard-hearted messengers too often found in his local churches. Williamson goes on to note that the risen Christ does not wait for his faithless church to get its house in order before announcing the gospel to others. This means that by the very act of obedience to Christ’s command, “Go...preach...” (v.15), even faithless disciples in each generation become believers—for “those who believe” (v.17a) are those who go forth and preach everywhere (v.20). Faith is thus born in the act of obedience. And faith is confirmed in the course of the mission. Furthermore the miraculous signs promised in vv.17-18 may be considered as tangible confirmation given

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<sup>17</sup> Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Interpretation-Mark: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 1-2.

by Christ to those who faithfully subject themselves to costly, self-denying preaching and sharing of the gospel in our world today.<sup>18</sup>

In *The Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* the theologian, Christopher Sugden, extended our (my LAC and I) understanding of this view by defining the theology of mission in terms of its fundamental challenge. Missions, he describes, presents Christian disciples and the church with the challenge of developing a theology forged in the midst of obedient action for the sake of the gospel so as to bring together the apostolic faith and the suffering of the oppressed. This challenge is also to reconcile the personal and social, the private and public; and, justification by faith and struggle for peace—all, with divine justice. It must embrace the commitment to Christian action empowered the Holy Spirit in the midst of the crises facing the modern world.<sup>19</sup>

Sugden goes on to suggest that the theology of mission is the product of the interface of the questions of obedience to the Scriptures, with relevance to the local community context. It is the healthy tension of bringing the questions from the context of mission to the Scriptures, and to address the questions of Scripture to the context. Because of this, it is not enough to have a Christian theology of mission founded on the Scriptures, and then teach God's people his truth. Theology of mission must also answer the question of why we even share the gospel with others. Sugden notes that we do so of course because it is God's will—for all peoples are lost without Christ. God's kingdom

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<sup>18</sup> Williamson, 288.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Sugden. *The Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers LTD, 1997), 377-383.

has arrived, and is still yet to come. God's purpose is to bring all things into harmony with Christ as the head, and his purpose of course is to reconcile people to himself, and one another to all creation. Theology of mission seeks to collate these fundamentals together, as well as assign priority between them.

Sugden highlights that the theology of mission must also answer the question of to whom are we to address the gospel. This means that the missional theologian must inquire as to whether all people are the same as far as the gospel is concerned. To be sure, all people are plagued with sin and need to trust Christ for salvation and deliverance our sin—rich and poor, white and non-white, all nationalities and cultures (Romans 3:23). Yet given this, missional ministry must necessarily address engagement on a personal level, and must be reflective of a one's individuality and distinctive context of people. Missional ministry must also address the question of what is the good news that needs to be shared, as well as how should this good news affirm or challenge aspects of a person's existing culture and religious tradition. And though the Gospel is described in the New Testament as good news for the poor, most missional theologians argue that the good news should mean the same for everyone. Yet, Christ for example often addressed the sick in a vastly different way than he addressed the Pharisees.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the book of Acts brings our understanding of the theology of mission to a crescendo for all local churches like Mt. Zion. Acts describes the divine triune actions of the Holy Spirit, through Christ's church (i.e., his Christian disciples or soldiers), on

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 377-378.



behalf of God-the Father's intentional vision (John 3:16-21). The biblical scholar, William Willimon, notes that Acts expresses these actions through coherent stories that ostensibly reveal invariant truth. This truth is relevant to peoples of all cultures, regardless of their station in life.<sup>21</sup> For Willimon, local churches like Mt. Zion, exist today as did the first Christian church because of the dialogue between a loquacious God who refuses to be silent, and a community of Christian believers who tries to listen. As believers listen to and share the stories in Acts, something divine happens within where they achieve confluence with the stories that all peoples are trying to write for our own lives. The stories in Acts not only mean something, they also do something—they actually make sense to the listener. Peoples in all local contexts, listening to stories in the book of Acts, begin to discern an active presence behind the storyline that gives coherence and meaning to the real actor's lives. For example, it was not just blind fate that Saul of Tarsus happened to be on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). The believers were not gathered in the upper room at Pentecost just by chance (Acts 2:1-4). And the Roman gentiles Cornelius, his family, and his friends were not gathered together in his home just by chance (Acts 10).

Willimon also suggests that the stories in Acts depict the nature of God, as well as reveal God's divine promise and reward, to usher in a new heaven and new earth for Christian disciples (Revelation 21:1). The world in Acts is not just the sober description of what is, that is to say, not just the local contextual reality that Sugden emphasizes

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<sup>21</sup> William H Willimon. *Interpretation-Acts: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 1-2.

missional theologians must understand. Instead, Acts also reveals an evocative portrayal of what, by God's divine work, shall be—ostensibly a poetic presentation of an alternative world to a given local context, such as Plainfield, in which people might find themselves. For every person, today's world, their world, is a world where God is busy making good on his divine promises. Thus the future is never completely closed, finished, nor fixed. God has been faithful in past history, and will be faithful also in future history (Acts 1:6-7). The missional theologian must also understand that the triune presence evident in the stories of Acts stubbornly refuses to keep quiet and accept the unfit world of peoples today, such as the people of Plainfield, as an unalterable given. What is God's goal for Christian disciples—maturing missional theologians—in telling these stories today? It is to provide contextual listeners, unbelievers such as those in Plainfield, the opportunity to embrace the life stories in Acts to become their personal life stories. Willimon suggests also that when this change happens in the manner in which God intends, the contextual unbelieving listener (e.g., Saul of Tarsus), becomes a converted believer (e.g., Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles). They can no longer think of their life's story apart from its confluence with their journey with Christ, “for in Him, we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).<sup>22</sup>

For Willimon the importance of this change cannot be overstated since it means unbelievers transition to living in a world where God not only makes promises, God also actually keeps his promises. The sin-filled conditioning of a person's old world is

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

invariably refracted through the distorted lens of their own deceit and alienation.

However, like the peoples in the stories of Acts, it becomes personal (Acts 8:26-39, the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch's conversion). New converts, in our local communities like Plainfield, can be changed by the witness of such promises being fulfilled in the believer's own personal journey with Christ. No longer are unbelievers frightened by the nonsensical, seemingly random and sometimes destructive occurrences that happen in their lives. No longer do unbelievers need to comfort themselves by made-up stories—often made-up by themselves—in order to get by on a false sense of hope and security. The triune God's actions which missional theologians—maturing Christian disciples—must share through the book of Acts provide stories of divinely coherent and dependable, divinely secure and hope-filled promises that enable unbelievers to become believers. And it provides these converts the confidence to truthfully tell their own stories. In doing so, new converts begin to see their world as God sees it, that is to say, as it really is. And new converts begin to see their world as a place where God's promises can always make a difference in their local context, and especially in their personal lives.

As described in the chapter on my professional project, my LAC and I focused on establishing a common understanding of these triune actions of God in our world today. Essentially our discussions turned into theological tutorials on basic Christian theology. As seen in Figure 1 at the end of this chapter, this included 'chalk-talk' in layman's terms on the sovereign relationship and roles of the triune God (i.e., Triune Theology and Pneumatology); God's divine purpose in creating the world and humanity (i.e., Christology, Anthropology, Theodicy); and, Christ's church and its mission as his agent

to enact God's prophetic plans in our world (i.e., Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology). After over six-hours of providing insight on my LAC's many questions, I was surprised that these discussions generated so much enthusiastic interest. And after using our first two work sessions to do these impromptu tutorials I became frustrated. This was because I assumed that my LAC, and most mainline congregants, had a basic understanding of these doctrines (much like basic math). I was wrong!

Additionally, my original Doctor of Ministry Prospectus topic was: 'Strengthening Spiritual Formation in Small Groups to Include Goals on Local Community Missions.' However, after discussions with my LAC and my professional project advisor prior to our third work session, I discovered that before engaging in 'Local Community Missions,' there is a step that Mt. Zion members—and likely most mainline denominational congregants—must take. This step is to ensure their personal readiness for local community missions. Essentially my LAC helped me to see that most members have some measure of spiritual formation from the AMEC's catechistic teachings. They likely received these teachings in church school during their youth, by engaging in existing church missional activities, and from regularly attending worship services (see my personal account in Chapter One). However, my LAC explained that few members are conscious of the consistent triune actions in their personal lives. Nor are they aware that the goal of these triune God's actions has been spiritual transformation—that is to say for example, to transform converts from being Saul of Tarsus, to ultimately becoming Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles. Thus my LAC recommended, with my Advisor's agreement, that we focus our remaining three work sessions on crafting a missional

framework that defines this transformation journey, and inspires personal motivation to pursue it (see Figure 2 at the end of this chapter for our initial draft). My LAC also recommended that we do a ‘Transformation Worship Event’ to help us validate and refine our framework. They recommended that we use this also as a kickoff event to inspire members to begin embracing their transformation journey with Christ—ensuring their personal spiritual readiness to effectively engage in Mt. Zion’s emerging missional vision, goals, and ministry.

Willimon would suggest that such a spiritual transformation framework must be predicated upon Scriptures. He notes that the purpose of the book of Acts, like the rest of Scripture, is to effect spiritual formation of Christian disciples. This means that the stories in Acts, with their encapsulated triune actions, are tools for any local church not only to make Christian disciples, but also to equip them for contextual missional ministry. This grounded capability, separates the use of Acts—and indeed all Scripture—as a proven praxis tool. And this capability keeps it from being considered merely a theological or philosophical tool simply for intellectual pursuits. The stories in Acts, Willimon contends, not only depict divine triune actions, they not only render a new divine world reality, they also render a new divine way of living (i.e., our personal journey with Christ). As discussed earlier, the stories in Acts do this through a process of spiritual transformation of Christian disciples serving contextually in their local church. Given who God is, and given the way God’s world is, the journey of personal transformation only begins to make sense as we consistently pursue it. On our journey however the question that continually brings spiritual growth as we personally answer it

is: What kind of Christian character is required to make it through this life, and receive the rewards that God promises throughout Scripture, only for faithful living (2 Timothy 4:6-8)? In essence, as we answer this question along the way, like the disciples in the stories of Acts, our step-wise transformation journey evolves into our Christian witness. More importantly, it becomes part of the on-going witness and lineage of triune action active through Christ's church.<sup>23</sup>

### **Rekindling Missional Expansion—Local AME Churches**

Based on this understanding of the theology of mission, I updated my thesis title to “Strengthening Spiritual Formation in Mt. Zion AME Church of Plainfield, New Jersey to Include Community Missional Goals and Readiness.” And our focus shifted to crafting a new missional ministry framework as my LAC and I focused on what we deemed was the theological question before the AME Church, and by extension local AME Churches today: How do we rekindle rapid missional expansion? After all, there is no shortage of people, regardless of their nationality, who need healing and deliverance, salvation and the gift of eternal life—available only through Christ. For Christ reminds his church in Matthew 9:37 that, “the harvest [in the cities where our local churches are planted, and their surrounding communities], is plenteous but the laborers are few.” From Stetzer and Putman insights discussed earlier, given the rapid demographic and population shifts occurring (Plainfield's Hispanic/Latino population has grown over 50%

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

since 2000), we must ask ourselves what effective missional strategies can we use to add new Christian disciples daily to the church, as the AMEC experienced its first 200 years?

Given the tight theological and praxis linkage between our denomination and our local churches, perhaps the most encouraging news is that God is raising a new generation of episcopal leaders who are seeking his missional vision for the AMEC. God is also raising a new generation of clergy who are seeking his fresh anointing to fulfill their calling in our local churches. And God is raising a new generation of lay-disciples who are seeking his divine anointing and power to fulfill the Great Commission. This suggests a great opportunity for theological recalibration with the AMEC's original missional vision—realignment from episcopal to Great Commission fixation. Also in my view the AMEC's former theological thrust in local churches, like Mt. Zion, seems more needed today than in 1787. This is because social and economic problems are greater today. The political and military issues are greater today. And the personal and family concerns are greater today. I conclude that God gave birth to the AMEC as a gift to assist the world in addressing the egregious problems, issues and concerns of 1787. Likewise, I conclude that God intends for the AMEC to similarly impact today's world through local churches, like Mt. Zion, proactively embracing Great Commission missional ministry in our respective community mission fields.

This perspective informed my LAC and me as we continued our focus on the Matthew 28 and Mark 16 texts discussed earlier. We used the remaining three work sessions to remind ourselves of Christ's fundamental meaning and message for Mt. Zion, and indeed all local churches. For Christ confirms in these text that he is physically alive

(resurrected), and he reminds his disciples of his constant love. Notwithstanding these reminders, we also conceptualized disciples as soldiers of Christ in the Pauline sense of Ephesians 6:10-17 to reflect the constant discipline Christ expects of us. Christ goes on to remind his disciples of his support for them to the end of the age. Christ further validates for them that only he has all power and authority in heaven and earth to achieve God's will in every generation. Essentially Christ makes it clear that he alone is Lord! And based on these emphatic declarations, Christ then empowers and commands his disciples (i.e., in the soldier sense) to make new disciples—in all nations, in each generation.

In our work sessions we also passionately discussed the question: How are we—as disciples, and as Christ's church called Mt. Zion—to fulfill Christ's Great Commission in Plainfield? Given the earlier biblical discussion, we concluded that we are to make disciples by first ensuring that we, ourselves, are believers, with strong and unwavering faith in God (Mark 16:12-14). Second, we agreed that to make disciples we must also become witnesses (or evangelists) available to do miracles—laying hands on the sick, and casting out demons, all in Christ's name—ostensibly not only to provide healing and deliverance, but also to seize the attention of unbelievers (Mark 16:15-18). Third, we concluded that to make disciples we must grow even more spiritually to offer unbelievers God's free gift of salvation, and baptizing those who accept it in the name of the Holy Trinity (Matthew 28:19). Fourth, we determined that to make disciples we must also train others to become witnesses by compelling them to follow God's laws, to release their prayer language for spiritual power, and to use this power to serve their community (Mark 16:16-17). Fifth, we concluded that to make new disciples in Plainfield, we must



constantly reassure new converts (new soldiers) that because Christ sits on the right-hand of God-the Father, he will empower us to ultimately become Christ's ambassadors walking in his divine power (Mark 16:19-20).

These discussions helped our project team to discern that in order to fulfill Christ's Great Commission, and to build a new missional ministry framework for Mt Zion, then we needed to start by asking ourselves some tough questions. This included questions like: What have been Mt Zion's greatest evangelism weaknesses, especially in receiving new converts? What percentage of Mt Zion disciples are prepared and willing to be evangelists? What should be Mt. Zion's ongoing evangelistic vision and goals for our local community? What are the social and cultural groups with ministry needs, and can Mt. Zion address them? How should we reach-out to the unchurched and unsaved, and is Mt. Zion ready for them to come?

In order to craft a credible Great Commission missional vision, we determined that we needed to understand the AMEC's historical theological linkages-to, and their impact-on Mt. Zion. Thus, we focused on the Acts 1 and 1Peter 2 texts to also remind ourselves of Christ's fundamental motivation and mandate for Mt. Zion, and all local churches. In these texts, Christ commands his disciples to tarry in their local churches until they are anointed or baptized, in the process of spiritual formation, by God's Holy Spirit. He teaches them that this empowerment is required for them to be witnesses (or evangelists). Christ then warns his disciples not to be distracted by this world's news and rumors. He also motivates them with the promise that he will return again from heaven

one day. Christ thus mandates that all his disciples in each generation are to complete God's will for their lives as witnesses (or evangelists) empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

My LAC and I further discussed the meaning of evangelism and the 'evangelism imperative' for local churches.<sup>24</sup> We defined the former as disciples (i.e., again we conceptualized them as disciplined soldiers of Christ) employing Christ's authority and God's anointing to reach, reclaim, and reconcile lost souls to Christ. We discussed this as uniting new converts with the local church, training them to become disciples, and inspiring them to embrace their responsibility for doing evangelism—meaning from membership-to-discipleship, then from discipleship-to-evangelism. We concluded that evangelism is more than just witnessing our love for God because of our personal testimony. Evangelism is also our ability and responsibility, calling and commitment, to share the whole gospel and its miracle working power, with the unsaved and unchurched. More importantly, we realized that Mt. Zion is also called to challenge new converts to fully embrace their salvation, through their own personal faithful journey with Christ.

Finally, the time for every local church to do evangelism is now. We concluded that the need for the kind of biblically-based evangelism described above is not some secondary ministry initiative, it must become an imperative for Mt. Zion and for all local churches. Research estimates a steady decline of 1% per year in active Christian disciples, over the past four generations since 1946.<sup>25</sup> And those surveyed also reported

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<sup>24</sup> Rev. Dr. Erika D. Crawford, *The Work of Evangelism--Handout* (Philadelphia, PA: First Episcopal District Planning Meeting Workshop, June 2013), 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 3-5.

that the primary reasons they stop attending church today are that they think differently than their parents' generation. Their faith is no longer tied to the church. And they no longer consider Sunday a sacred (holy) day. Thus the decline in church attendance coupled with the absence of evangelism has resulted in a death spiral for many local churches. No evangelism means no new disciples. This in turn leads to a shortage of resources and financial support. Which leads to a shortage of local community ministries and programs. Ultimately and unfortunately this results in the decline of a local church.

Consequently, for my professional project described in the next chapter, we challenged ourselves to complete three assignments to establish a solid biblical grounding for our project work sessions. Our pre-assignment was to study the passages of scripture discussed earlier in this chapter—Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:1-20; Acts 1:1-8; and 1Peter 2:1-11. Next we reflected on a small booklet written by Pastor David Platt entitled: “Follow Me.”<sup>26</sup> The final assignment was to review the cultural and socio-economic history that I provided my LAC of Plainfield and Union County.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David Platt, *Follow Me: What did Jesus Really Mean?* (Carol Stream, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), v.-vii.

<sup>27</sup> Hope Community Action Partnership, Inc., *Plainfield, NJ Community Assessment 2001-2011* (Hoboken, NJ, 2012), 9-12 (general), 25-26, 45-51 (low income), 40-44 (youth), 52-55 (seniors).

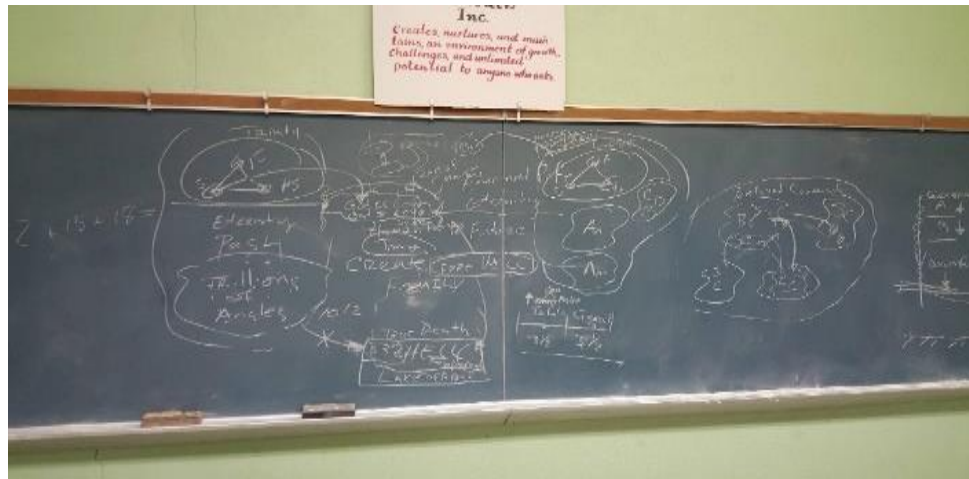


Figure 1: 'Chalk Talk' with my LAC on basic Christian theology

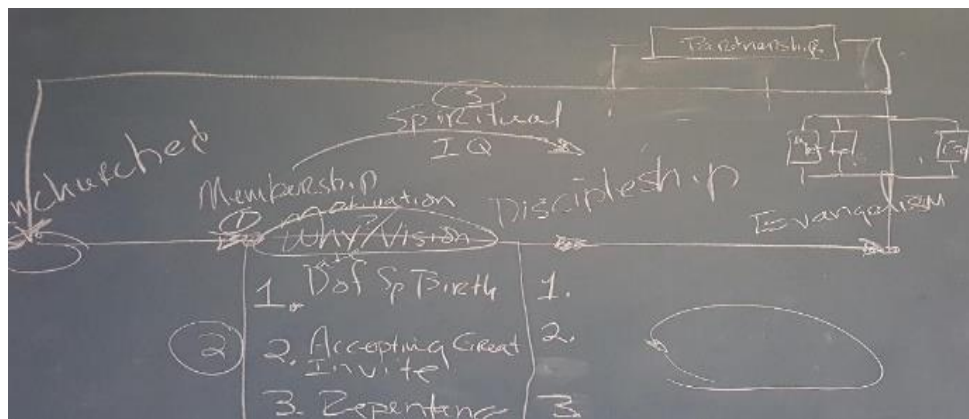


Figure 2: 'Chalk Talk' with my LAC on Our Personal Journey with Christ

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MINISTRY PROJECT: TOWARDS A NEW MT ZION MISSIONAL FRAMEWORK

*“Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*

*1 Peter 2:1-3 (NRSV)*

For my professional project, my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and I ultimately embraced as our task to craft a new ministry approach to support repositioning Mt. Zion for missional expansion in Plainfield, New Jersey. As discussed in previous chapters, the criteria we hoped to achieve included the need for this new approach to embody a local contextualization of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-20). We concluded in our work sessions that it should start with current members embracing their personal transformation journey—from being church members to becoming Christian disciples. Important also was the need for this new approach to be resilient enough to account for Plainfield’s historic changes, as well as adapt to Plainfield's emerging socio-economic climate.<sup>1</sup> We determined that it should be flexible enough to allow for Mt. Zion’s engagement in community needs effecting diverse population groups.<sup>2</sup>

Our task was also to ensure that this new approach yielded a workable framework for instilling repeatable Christian discipleship “behavioral traits”. We viewed this as key

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<sup>1</sup> Cardoza-Orlandi, 41-45.

<sup>2</sup> Stetzer and Putman, 153-169, 174-179.

to ensuring Mt. Zion's readiness for missional opportunities.<sup>3</sup> In essence we felt that it must inspire nascent members to value their personal growth as Christian disciples, as well as embrace their responsibility to help lead missional ministry initiatives.<sup>4</sup> It should require minimal funding for sustained expansion results, while having strong appeal to attract new converts.<sup>5</sup> Finally, we felt this new approach should have an abiding spiritual appeal that strengthen members in their desire to be self-driven—better yet, Christ-driven—concerning missional ministry goals as a constructive visible image to Plainfield that reflects Christ as the Light of our local contextual world.<sup>6</sup> Discovering such a new missional ministry approach for Mt. Zion was the aspirational goal of my professional project. Designing a workable framework, through which we might begin implementing such an approach, was my project team's challenge. Deploying such a framework, in a measureable event through which our team might assess its viability and effectiveness, led us to perhaps an obvious epiphany, and to uncover some promising insights.

### **Project Logistics**

My Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) consisted of eight persons—seven members, one non-member (see Appendix A). They were selected because of their self-motivation

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<sup>3</sup> Bass, 71-217 (i.e., the author's 10 signposts).

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Christensen, with Carl Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 39-48).

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, 115-121, 124-140.

<sup>6</sup> William D. Watley, *God Wants You to Grow! How to Live Beyond Your Limitations* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 57-67.

to share the gospel, their strong personal testimony, and their commitment to Mt. Zion's growth. I observed over time that they each reflect the spirit of witnessing and evangelism already active in their lives. To ensure that our team was well grounded in project logistics, I shared with them the project title and background; scope and evaluation criteria; metrics and timeline. We met for five working sessions after Sunday Worship on January 31<sup>st</sup>, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and March 6<sup>th</sup> (I provided a light meal for each session). Our two-hour work sessions, typically turned into three-hour sessions because of the team's strong interests, and our passionate discussions. Each team member was given a small spiral notebook to record any comments or questions they might have about the project. I also asked them to record any insights or ideas between work sessions that they felt might be useful in crafting our new approach. We conducted a 'Transformation Worship Event' with the entire congregation, on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, followed by an overall review and prep session with my LAC on Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>. Finally, my LAC participated enthusiastically in my Advisor's formal Site Visit on Saturday April 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 3:00pm-to-5:30pm.

### **Work Sessions—Initial Discussions**

Using the Project Handbook I prepared for my team (see Appendix A), I provided a detailed review of the key project elements. This included having them complete the initial LAC survey to assess their understanding of biblical principles, Christ's Great Commission, and the AMEC missional ministry (see Appendix F for LAC surveys and results). Based on my doctoral research over the past two years, I shared with them my

views on the strategic importance of the project and expected results on Mt. Zion's future. I reiterated the importance for each of them to openly share their views based on their personal passion for community missions and evangelism, and their experience in supporting discipleship development and membership expansion.

I led a robust discussion on the biblical foundation and definitions based on the scriptures provided in our Project Handbook (see Appendix A). For two sessions and over six-hours, we carefully examined the message and meaning of Christ's Great Commission for the world, and our local community context. We passionately discussed the importance of Christ's Great Commission. This included Christ's imperative to make disciples, and to ensure their readiness for missional service in Plainfield. I contrasted this imperative with the tendency for local churches, such as Mt. Zion, to focus internally on expanding church membership and budgets. In each session, we discussed the need to craft a new approach to ministry to address Christ's imperative. We also worked on crafting a repeatable framework that might inspire members to fully embrace their personal journey from membership-to-discipleship, from discipleship-to-evangelism, from evangelism-to-witnessing as Christ's voice, calling unbelievers and the unchurched into God's kingdom.

Frankly during the second work session I struggled with what seemed to me to be our limited progress. Our discussions sparked passionate personal testimonies from each of my LAC. They also triggered many rudimentary questions about the Christian faith, as well as wide-ranging comments on the need for Christian community service. My LAC however seemed more interested in an 'A-to-Z' tutorial on Christianity—understanding



its biblical foundation and theological praxis (see Figures 1 and 2 in chapter three)—rather than developing goals and plans for local community missional service. As session leader, my desire was for our project team to focus on how our congregation should be transforming our approach to Great Commission missional ministry. It seemed however that we were ‘wasting’ precious project work time on what I assumed most members already knew. I especially assumed this for my LAC team, since most of them grew-up under the spiritual formation process of Mt. Zion. However, as I stated in the previous chapter, my perception that we were wasting time was very wrong!

The biblical scholar, Pheme Perkins, in his expository of 1 Peter suggests that such congregational, and indeed personal, transformation occurs when church members journey beyond the conversion and baptism of their past, towards the full experience of salvation as God’s holy people in their future (1 Peter 2:9-10).<sup>7</sup> He goes on to note that 1 Peter exhorts Christians to avoid complacent membership (i.e., ‘I have arrived’), but rather continually live out the holiness received at their baptism (i.e., ‘I must continue to grow in Christ’). 1 Peter does this by reminding believers of their life before becoming a Christian, of their conversion and initiation into Christ’s church, and of the future that awaits them (1 Peter 1:13-17). For Perkins this implies that asking Christians today to plot their secular life journey in the world, and their faith journey with Christ, along parallel time lines reveals a comparison that is much more personal and convergent, than formal and distinct. He further suggests the 1 Peter employs a technique by which

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<sup>7</sup> Pheme Perkins, *Interpretation-1&2 Peter, James and Jude: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 22.

Christians today can reuse in each generation to evaluate their personal faith journey with Christ. This is to say that motivating oneself to embrace one's daily journey with Christ, becomes more palatable as one remembers Christ's deliverance of their life from their sin, and his call on their life to salvation. Our journey with Christ also becomes more palatable as one maintains Christ's divine vision for their future, and his blessed rewards they are to share, as Christ's church, in the world to come.<sup>8</sup>

So important is this transformation journey, that the writer of 1 Peter wants congregants to understand that Christ, through his church, provides nourishing milk (basic teaching) to help new believers convert from the evils ways of their past lives (1 Peter 2:2). This 'pure, spiritual' divine milk is required to help new members transition to Christ's new way of life, and is the foundational instruction on which strong doctrine is built (1 Peter 2:2).<sup>9</sup>

### **Our Discovery**

After sharing my concerns about my perception of our limited progress, my LAC enthusiastically shared their views. They first noted that few, if any Mt. Zion members—or those of any other Church for that matter—have a clear understanding of their own journey with Christ, nor the church's Great Commission mission. They felt that this lack of understanding, ostensibly missing among most mainline congregants, was especially

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 41-43.

lacking in the overall missional ministry context in which Christ expects each of us to be engaged. Because of this, my LAC's view was that most members are only self-motivated to express their Christian witness in the form of regular church attendance, and occasional participation in church programs (but only if asked to do so). This insight and our review of 1 Peter helped us to see that Christians must be adequately formed and forged on their journey with Christ in order to ensure their readiness for missional ministry. Essentially, only after developing strong affinity themselves for the sweet taste on their journey with Christ, can maturing Christians help those trapped in the world of sin (as we ALL were, Romans 3:23) to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (1Peter 2:3).

My LAC thus recommended deferring our focus on a 'community ministry outreach event' as an assessment of any new approach to missional ministry we might develop. Instead they insisted that it was more important that we craft a 'Transformation Worship Event' to assess our new framework to be crafted for missional readiness of members. They felt that such an event should be focused on helping members to understand their personal journey with Christ as fundamental preparation for their readiness to engage in Great Commission missional ministry. My LAC concluded that to Mt. Zion members must be inspired to proactively embrace their journey from membership-to-discipleship, and ultimately from discipleship-to-evangelism (see Figure 3 at the end of this section). Essentially in our final framework, developed from Figures 1 and 2 shared in chapter three, members must first develop a different understanding of what their journey is, and how to pursue it. I discovered from my LAC's insights that

focusing on member readiness is a necessary precursor. It is just as critical as members actually doing Great Commission missional ministry in Plainfield and Union County.

As a team we also concluded that by its very nature, focusing on member readiness, through their proactive embrace and pursuit of their personal journey with Christ, requires any local Church to shift its primary focus from addressing internal member needs (currently about 85% of our focus), to addressing local community needs (currently about 15% of focus). As discussed previously, I conclude from my research that this is the spiritual transformation that Mt. Zion, and other local AME Churches, must pursue. I also conclude that this is the cultural recalibration and missional realignment that the AMEC, and other mainline denominations, must pursue.

### **Adjusted Project Focus**

Prior to our team's third work session, I completed a checkpoint with my advisor, Rev. Dr. Kevin Miller, to review my LAC's insights and recommendations. I also discussed my view of the implications for my professional project. Given our discoveries, Dr. Miller advised that Mt. Zion must continue to discover and deal with its 'why' of doing ministry. He shared that while we may know 'what' we are doing, i.e., weekly Christian ministry activities, do we really know 'why' we are doing them? And we must understand that Mt. Zion's 'why' might be very different than some other church.

Additionally, Dr. Miller noted that Mt. Zion must ensure that there are bridges between our historic ministry thrust (the 'what' discussed in previous chapters) and the local community missional and evangelistic ministry we aspire to do (the new 'why').

For example, the bridges between the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of church membership, Christian discipleship, and Christian evangelism. He also suggested that my LAC team must ask some basic questions to ensure the “Transformation Worship Event” is effective and measurable, especially since it would be a Sunday worship service with the entire Mt. Zion congregation. This should include questions like: How do you (pastor, ministers, LAC) preserve the authentic worship experience, while allowing the Holy Spirit to motivate the journey from membership-to-discipleship? Do you tailor an emphasis on specific spiritual transformation program elements, such as praise songs, invocation prayer, offerings, preaching while de-emphasizing lesser program elements such as announcements, and pastor's remarks? What will make this Sunday worship event different and unique from say, a Saturday workshop event? How can this worship service help members understand what it means to be a Christian disciple or evangelist? And how can this service also be used to help you (pastor, ministers, LAC) begin to ‘disciple’, i.e., act as a catalyst that sparks spiritual transformation across Mt. Zion’s membership?

### **Work Sessions—Remaining Discussions**

I reviewed Dr. Miller’s feedback with my LAC team, and we used it as guidance in our next three work sessions. Using the Project Handbook again, I led additional discussions on the motivation and mandate of Christ’s Great Commission for Mt. Zion. These were deeper discussions on Christ’s vision for Christian evangelism of unbelievers in Plainfield and Union County. This included a lively and lengthy discussion of Christ’s promise of signs and miracles for the empowerment and validation of a Christian’s

witness to needy people in our world. Given Dr. Miller's point about the 'what' and the 'why' of local church ministry, we contrasted this view of empowered Christian witnesses with most local church's view of static church membership.

My LAC also emphasized the importance of each Mt. Zion member's personal testimony, by sharing the witness of Christ in their own personal lives. Needless to say that these were precious moments during our sessions, and there were no dry eyes. Experiencing this as a team, we came away with several important insights. First, we concluded that on one's journey from membership-to-discipleship, and ultimately discipleship-to-evangelism, each Mt. Zion member must gain clarity on what God has done for them. This becomes their personal testimony on their journey with Christ. Second, we determined that members must also become confident enough to share their testimony with others, and in open settings. We viewed this as important because unbelievers seem to always seek the value, meaning, and results of the Christian walk in the life of a believer. Essentially unbelievers want to know if the Christian journey has benefits, and is it working for believers who have already chosen to journey with Christ.

Third, based on Dr. Miller's point about bridging our past with where we aspire to go, we concluded that members must get in touch with how faith in God, and their relationship with Christ, has already been transforming them into Christian disciples. Our hope was that by developing a new approach to ministry and its companion framework, members might begin to see that their testimony not only transforms, it also reveals God's changes to the arc of their entire life journey. Fourth, our team felt strongly that members must grow to understand that testimonies are not about competition (e.g.,

someone's personal tragedy versus someone's inability to pay one's bills). Nor are they about the equality of what God has done for one person versus another. Instead, as the stories of Acts convey all personal testimonies are different, yet all testimonies should be considered equivalent in their ability to resonate with some unbelievers. Fifth, we concluded that in sharing their testimony, members must also learn not to overly embellish it. This is because we concluded that one's personal testimony has its own divine energy—which is solely empowered by the Holy Spirit, to divinely engage unbelievers.

My LAC and I also selected factors that we felt must be core to any new ministry approach that is to encourage Mt. Zion members to embrace their discipleship journey. For example, any new framework must have universal appeal. It must also establish an environment where members embrace growing in their desire to evangelize for God's kingdom. My LAC felt however that a pastor or minister sternly telling members 'what to do' would be least effective. Instead they noted that we need a 'self-evaluation' tool, whereby members can honestly assess where they are on their journey, and chart their course for higher levels of readiness for Great Commission ministry. Finally, my LAC recommended again that we should first do a "Transformation Worship Event" with the entire congregation. They felt that this would set the stage and provide new knowledge about one's journey with Christ, and one's initial motivation to pursue it. They also felt that, after a period of review and reflection on the results of this event, we should consider doing a post-project "Transformation Evangelism Workshop Event" focused on training specific existing Mt. Zion ministries members—for example, Class Leader,

Steward Board, and Trustee Board ministries. Any member would be welcome to attend, but our focus would be on those members whose ministries will be leading the Mt. Zion missional ministry transformation process.

Grenz rightly argues that Christian outreach is not just about the proclamation of the gospel, and the proactive presence of the Holy Spirit's missional ministry through Christ's church in the world.<sup>10</sup> He insightfully points out that a key goal of evangelism is to make disciples instead of making converts, because this is Christ's mandate to his church (Matthew 28:19-20).<sup>11</sup> For Grenz this means that Christ, during his earthly missional ministry, was never just satisfied with a person's mere conversional confession. Christ also always called for a person's commitment to enduring the cost of discipleship that inevitably comes from embracing their personal journey with him (Luke 14:25-33).

By extension, Grenz notes that as we pursue our journey with Christ, both as congregants and as congregations, we do so progressively in accordance with the principles of God's kingdom. On our journey our desire is to experience in the present the final reality that will come at the end of history—namely a full reconciliation of the local communities, albeit with their ever-present socio-economic challenges, where we have been called to serve. Thus the Holy Spirit's missional ministry, manifested through Christ's church, compels us to motivate ourselves to progressively become mature Christians. And in doing so, the Holy Spirit's missional ministry also calls us to compel

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<sup>10</sup> Grenz, 653-655.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 656-657.



unbelievers in our local communities to join us by pursuing their own personal journeys with Christ. My doctoral research, and professional project work session discussions, crystalized by this perspective, gave my LAC and I the appropriate insight to craft the final version of our new missional ministry framework which we entitled: “Our Personal Journey with Christ” (see Figure 3, and Appendix D).

From the diagram, Step #1 on this journey is to become a believer in Christ (John 3:16-21; Romans 10:9-10). While perhaps quite obvious to those raised in Christian nations, like America, we discussed in our work session how too many people become satisfied with characterizing themselves as “basically a good person” or its twin characterization, “I’m not a bad person”. Unfortunately, these much lauded personal characterizations fail to account for the fallen, sinful nature of all humanity (Romans 3:23). And too often these comfortable personal characterizing covertly entrap people securely in the status of unbelievers. In his booklet, “Follow Me?”, David Platt notes classically that our personal sin problem is not isolated to one or two instances. Instead, it goes to the very core of who we are and makes us utterly unable to turn to God on our own. In this sense all peoples are dead (to God) in our sin.<sup>12</sup> Acutely aware of our problem, God in his grace authored salvation through Christ and his church, to remove our blinding veil by giving us a choice to repent and follow Christ. When we choose a personal journey through life with Christ, as we discovered in our discussion of 1 Peter, we break with our old ways and embrace God’s new way of living.

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<sup>12</sup> Platt, 5-6, 35.

My LAC and I identified Step #2 on this journey as becoming a church member and active follower of Christ. Too often new converts, clinging to old ways in a social media world, succumb to errant behavior. As such, some new converts inconsistently participate in God's appointed means of grace—found only in Christ's church. As we learned from 1 Peter also, this behavior can cause new converts to miss their much needed weekly allocation of spiritual milk and stunt their spiritual growth—for only “those planted in the house of the Lord, flourish in the courts of our God” (Psalm 92:13). Platt goes on to note that being a church member means much more than standing next to someone and singing some songs in weekly worship. Instead it means we are responsible for supporting each other in our individual, and collective growth into mature disciples (i.e., soldiers) of Christ.<sup>13</sup> This means sharing God's love and kindness with each other in Christian fellowship, especially in our times of need (Ephesians 4:1-6). It means studying God's word and praying with each other that we might grow in wisdom and favor. It means celebrating God's victories and anticipating his miracles as we face demonic challenges in our personal lives and local community. And it means holding each other accountable as we serve Christ's church together on personal journeys with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:9).

Step #3 on this journey is to become a church disciple and servant of Christ. The salient point my LAC and I wanted to communicate from our own experiences was that church members are distinct and different than church disciples. As we discussed this

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 37-41.

point in detail we concluded that for this critical step, too often some believers are content to remain in a self-imposed holding pattern (depicted by the loosely-connected orange persons in Figure 3). They are unwilling to put forth the effort required to become mature Christian disciples (depicted by the well-connected blue persons in Figure 3). We also concluded that the former mostly function as ‘Christian babies’ who constantly require attention, cuddling, and as we were reminded:

For though by this time they ought to be teachers, they need someone to teach them again the basic elements of the oracles of God. They need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for mature [Christians], for those whose faculties have been trained by practice (Hebrews 5:11-14).

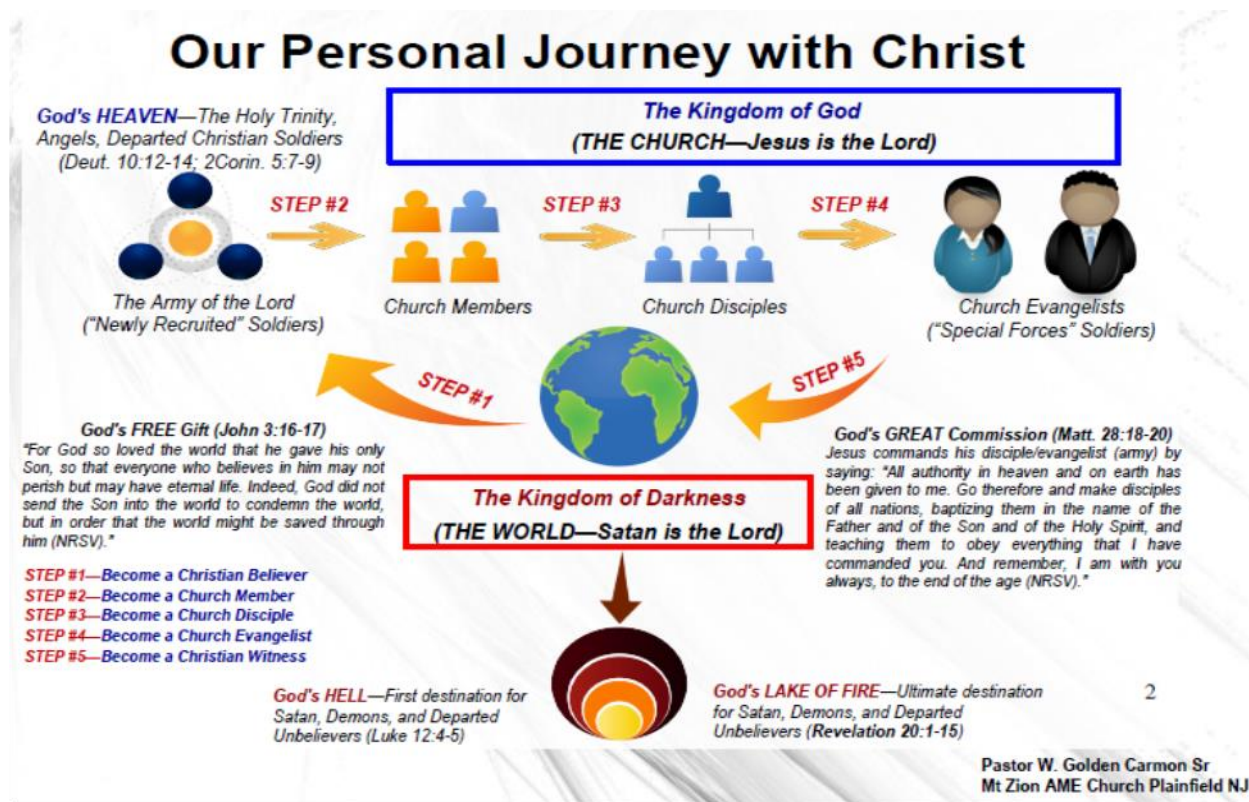
My LAC and I agreed that regardless of tenure in the church, this new framework must provide a means for members to self-assess their status on their personal journey with Christ. Additionally, a couple of important (again, perhaps obvious) discoveries were that in the absence of a maturing spiritual constitution and potent prayer life, members will be mostly unfit for missional ministry (John 15:1-4). And in the absence of a healthy command of biblical truth, and evidence of its manifestation in their personal lives members will be unfit for the Master’s use (John 8:31-31; 1 Timothy 2:18). From my doctoral research it seems clear that marshalling the personal commitment and consistent effort to transition from Step #2-to-Step #3 appears to be the most significant challenge for members, and by extension, the mainline denominational congregations which they comprise.

We designed Step #4 and Step #5 to convey the concept that as a pool of maturing disciples become available, they can be given ‘advanced discipleship’ training, much like

secular military special forces. This training would include the skill to effectively release God's deliverance power according to Scriptures like Mark 16:15-18 and John 14:12, much like the original disciples in the stories of Acts. It would include specialized training on spiritually tearing down satanic strongholds and their temporal counterparts (Ephesians 6:10)—such as socio-economic issues that plague cities like Plainfield (see Chapter Two). We also determined that Christian disciples who discipline themselves to master Step #4 over time have matured enough to become church evangelist (Acts 1:4-8; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). Christian disciples who mature in effectively sharing God's love abroad, compel souls to receive salvation, and make new disciples (John 20:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21) have matured even further to become witnesses and ambassadors for Christ. Platt gave us additional insight on these last two steps by confirming again Grenz's point that to be a mature disciple of Christ is in the end, to make disciples. Platt reminded us that this has been true since the first century when Christ first invited men and women to follow him. And God's design for the 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples is exactly the same. Christ continues to call his disciples to make disciples, who in turn are called to make more disciples, until Christ's gospel penetrates every peoples, every community, and every nation!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 46-48.



**Figure 3:** Finalized Design of New Missional Ministry Readiness Framework

### Transformation Event—Preparation

In preparation for our event, my LAC and I agreed to give each Mt. Zion member a copy of David Platt's booklet.<sup>15</sup> Our first distribution was on Sunday December 22<sup>nd</sup>, prior to our project kickoff date, and again on February 21<sup>st</sup>. During my Pastoral Remarks on each of those dates, I asked members to study it thoroughly by the end of March, and to use our weekly bible studies to discuss any questions they might have. I also used my Pastoral Remarks on two Sundays (March 27<sup>th</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup>), prior to our event to

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 1-53.

describe my professional project. I shared its potential impact and value to Mt. Zion's future. I outlined the event format and my expectations relative to member preparation and participation. Over 125 booklets were distributed, and over the three months between January through March, I observed that members had questions in our weekly bible studies similar to those of my LAC concerning fundamental Christian doctrine—especially as it applies to their lives and world affairs. From these observations, my LAC and I concluded that our new missional framework also needed to incorporate a systematic means for basic self-directed study in addition to the steps described above.

#### **Transformation Event—Prep Sermon**

Prior to our Transformation Worship Event, my LAC recommended that I deliver a sermon to set the stage. They felt that the objective of this 'Prep Sermon' should be to share the essence of our work session discussions on what I call: God's heaven and God's hell. The team passionately felt that few members, and perhaps by extension few mainline congregates in general, understand their covenant relationship with the Holy Trinity. My LAC felt that members do not understand the biblical reality of Heaven and Hell. Members, they also argued, do not understand the eternal blessings and desirous destination (i.e., heaven) of a life journeyed with Christ and his church. In contrast, neither do members truly understand the eternal torment and undesirous destination (i.e., hell) of a life journeyed with Satan and his world.

Admittedly I was unsure if I could distill over six hours of intense work session discussions (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 in chapter three), down to a thirty minute Sunday

sermon on Heaven and Hell. During the twenty hours that I prepared my manuscript (see Appendix B), I realized that beginning my own personal journey with Christ was about a personal choice to believe in Christ (see Chapter One). For me, and I believe for most other people, it was not about choosing an eternal destination (to which I initially could not relate). Clearly Scriptures reveal that both choices are intertwined (John 3:16-21; 20:30-31), however they are not equivalent choices. Consequently, to highlight this I honed my sermon focus into the title: “From Unbeliever to Believer in Jesus Christ!” Using the disciple Thomas’ three years of intimate ministry service with Christ, and the divine integrity of Christ’s ministry, I argued that Thomas should not have needed more evidence to become a believer in the resurrected Christ (John 20:24-29).

By extension I also argued that our life experiences with Christ, through his grace-filled interventions, should likewise be sufficient for every person to choose to begin their personal journey with Christ. I believe this should be the case for all people, regardless of their station in life, or the circumstances in which they find themselves. As we encounter Christ through his witness in our personal lives, and through the revelation of his preached word, we are compelled to choose if we will complete our life’s journey with Christ, or the ruler of this world (Luke 10:18; John 16:11). In turn our personal choice then ultimately determines our eternal destination. Essentially, most people want Heaven as their final destination, however too few people seem willing or motivated to journey there with Christ. This choice is of course required to get into Heaven (John 14:1-6). Mt Zion’s response to this April 3<sup>rd</sup> prep sermon was very positive, including emails and texts the following week!

### **Transformation Event—Worship Service**

For our event, we crafted several artifacts for our new missional approach and framework. These materials were crafted based on the discoveries made during our work sessions. They included: The Sunday Worship Program (see Appendix C); a four-page presentation handout entitled: “Our Personal Journal with Christ” (see Appendix D), and a companion handout delineating basic bible verses (see Appendix E). Taken together we designed these artifacts as tools to assist members in systematic self-directed study of basic biblical principles. We also designed a companion survey to assist members, and my LAC, in assessing their basic knowledge of Great Commission missional ministry (see Appendix G). As I mentioned before, my LAC took this survey in our first and final work sessions to assess their overall growth (see Appendix F).

Given Dr. Miller’s feedback, we tailored the April 10<sup>th</sup> worship event program to ensure there would be at least one-hour for the transformation expository portion (see Appendix C). Essentially we removed the Ministry Highlights, which are listed weekly on the front of the program. We also removed the Pastoral Remarks and Sermonic Hymn as well. These changes allowed us to effectively blend our traditional worship (the old and familiar ‘what’), with the planned self-assessment survey and transformation tutorial (the new and unfamiliar ‘why’).

I began the event with distributing the personal assessment survey (see Appendix G). Members completed it by circling their responses as I read each question aloud to ensure they had a common understanding. This survey process took about fifteen-minutes, and to my surprise everyone was completely engrossed in answering the



questions. After collecting the responses, the “Our Personal Journey with Christ” presentation (see Appendix D) was distributed, along with the handout containing selected companion scriptures (see Appendix E). My LAC recommended that we distribute the presentation after the members completed the self-assessment survey to avoid distracting them from providing candid responses.

I led the tutorial portion by first reminding members of the individual and collective value of my professional project. I shared an overview of our personal journey in the context of choices Christ expects us to make. I shared the consequences of those choices in the context of eternal life versus eternal damnation, and some basic implications for our everyday life. Lastly, I shared the level of preparation in which Christ expects us to engage in order to ensure our readiness for his Great Commission assignments. Effectively, I distilled these principles into five steps, which my LAC and I felt during our work sessions were the most critical to ensuring Great Commission missional personal readiness for community ministry. I asked my staff ministers (who were NOT a part of my LAC), to read aloud the companion scriptures, as I expounded upon each step. I also asked my LAC to act as observers, noting their perceptions of our congregation’s level of interest and reactions as I discussed each step. Finally, I asked my LAC to join me in one-on-one interaction with our congregants after the worship service to gather raw feedback, and to gauge overall effectiveness. The feedback was very positive. In fact, members indicated that this tutorial was badly needed, as well as their strong desire for more such training.

Though I have served as Mt. Zion's Pastor for over eleven years, personally I was nervous about doing this worship event. This is because I was unsure how our congregation would receive the changes to our traditional worship service. I was also unsure how they would respond to our team's proposed new missional readiness and community ministry framework. However, I was pleased to observe how energized our congregation was when we walked through each step of the tutorial. My LAC concluded that this was due to several reasons. First, they felt our congregation was energized because I had set their expectations with overview comments during my Pastoral Remarks for the four Sundays prior to our event. Secondly, my LAC felt that the prep sermon that they recommended that I deliver the prior Sunday (April 3<sup>rd</sup>) really set the stage. As I discussed earlier, it was entitled: "From Unbeliever to Believer in Jesus Christ" and it was designed to encourage members to seriously reflect on their personal journey, starting with reminiscing on when they took the first step. Finally, my LAC felt that since I consistently challenged members from January-to-March to study Platt's booklet entitled: "Follow Me" they were receptive to the principles shared in the April 10<sup>th</sup> Transformation Worship Event on.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION: FUTURE MISSIONAL MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS FOR MT ZION

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

*John 3:16-17 (NRSV)*

My doctoral studies in Congregational Growth and Community Development, and my professional project have led to some key insights. The first is that spiritual formation for congregants is fundamental to local church transformation. If spiritual formation is to be effective, it must be embraced as an intentional journey by each member. If spiritual formation is to produce strong disciples, local churches must ensure the teaching of sound Christian doctrine. Local churches must also ensure the establishment of ministry praxis that encourages members to consistently use what they learn in missional service. As discussed earlier, upon arriving at this insight, my LAC and I crafted a new Mt. Zion missional framework which we entitled: “Our Personal Journey with Christ” (see Figure 3 and Appendix D). We evaluated this new framework during an actual Mt. Zion worship service training event. The verbal feedback was very positive, and the congregational survey results were very encouraging (see Appendix G).

Perhaps the most encouraging feedback for our new missional ministry framework however was revealed in my LAC survey results (see Appendix F). My LAC’s initial survey responses during our first work session, on January 31<sup>st</sup>, were better

on SECTION 1 (by 9-points), SECTION 2 (by 8-points), and SECTION 3 (by 2-points) than the congregation's responses during our Transformation Worship Event, on April 10<sup>th</sup>. This suggested to me that while my LAC struggled with questions of basic Christian doctrine, their understanding was better than most members. I also observed that lacking better understanding of these core principles has not stopped my LAC, nor other members, from actively engaging in existing Mt. Zion ministries.

Most interesting however was that after retaking the same survey on March 16<sup>th</sup>, my LAC responded 11-points higher for SECTION 1 on: How Do You See God and Life with Jesus Christ; 14-points higher for SECTION 3 on: The Christian Church: It's Mandate and Motivation; but 4-points lower for SECTION 2 on: The Christian Church: It's Mission and Message. These results strongly suggested to me that consistently teaching Christian doctrine, with a strong emphasis on the theological implications for God's missional vision and goals for a local church, is critical to the process of intentional discipleship spiritual formation. And given my LAC's insatiable interest in basic doctrine during our work sessions, these results also validated the strong need for the framework we ultimately crafted (see Figure 3).

Another insight culled from my doctoral research is that the pace of congregational transformation, is largely determined by the collective pace of personal spiritual formation of our congregants. A congregation full of new converts, regardless of how long they have been members, is akin to a nursery full of new babes. It is exciting to see pews filled, but it is difficult to lead them in pursuing missional ministry. They must first be taught and encouraged to serve Christ's church, as self-motivated and loyal

disciples. Then they must be trained and inspired to serve their local community as an extension of Christ. Like the transition from newborn babe to full-fledged adulthood, the transition from church member (new convert) to church disciple (ambassador for Christ) is a long and arduous journey. It takes time and commitment, patience and perseverance, self-discipline and self-motivation. There are no shortcuts to becoming a Christian disciple, and there is no rapid process for Christ's church to make Christian disciples. Essentially there is only a congregant's personal journey with Christ, and only the congregation's journey with its congregants—which is the spiritually forming and maturing body of Christ.

Yet another insight, perhaps the most important for me, was that congregational spiritual transformation is a function of discipleship spiritual formation. In that a strong spiritual formation process consistently motivates members to transition to become Great Commission disciples (naturally embracing discipleship preparation and readiness), I conclude that local church transformation is the divine result (Matthew 9:35-38). And, in that a strong missional vision motives congregations to transform into Great Commission churches (naturally embracing community evangelism and missions), I conclude that local church growth is the divine result (Acts 1:1-8). Thus in my view, on-going congregant spiritual formation is the catalyst for congregational spiritual transformation; and in turn, congregational spiritual transformation is the catalyst for pursuing community missional visions and goals.

### **Implications for Rekindling Missional Ministry**

Mt. Zion's pursuit of missional code breaking strategies must thus focus on Christ's Great Commission vision and missional ministry locally. Taking this a step further and as mentioned above, my doctoral work has given me a deeper appreciation for the link between one's personal journey with Christ, and local church growth. I have concluded that the precipitous decline of local churches suggests that this link is somewhat elusive—especially for so-called traditional mainline denominational churches.<sup>1</sup> And yet Christ's Great Commission, which reverberates perpetually across time and vibrantly across generations, continues to remind his followers in all his local churches to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This suggests that Christ's Great Commission is itself an invariant command for local churches to grow and expand. As codified as this sovereign command appears to be in spiritual transcendence, it seems just as woefully elusive in physical practice.

To tackle this challenge for rekindling Mt. Zion's growth, historically our Wesleyan Methodist polity roots heavily stress the conviction that genuine Christian faith, is nurtured and sustained in a communal and a social context. This is done in contrast to historical revivalism emphasis on sudden conversions.<sup>2</sup> Wesleyan Methodist polity-based denominations believe this so strongly that we have established organizational structures, such as the Class Leader System (CLS), to ensure the process

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<sup>1</sup> Albert L. Winseman, *Growing An Engaged Church* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2012), 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 114-128.

of nurturing, training and growth for new converts. In fact, Methodist historical research found that only one-fourth of all new converts experienced the new birth in the context of the preaching they experienced prior to joining a Methodist society. According to their own testimony, by far the majority of new converts needed the nurturing of the Methodist society, classes, and bands. Furthermore, most of them spent nearly 2.3-years in this nurturing process before experiencing what they themselves identified as personal rebirth and spiritual transformation. Finally, in addition to providing fellowship, these nurturing groups provide training in biblical principles, development of an active prayer and worship life, as well as encouraging mutual accountability for Christian service.

### **Mt. Zion's Class Leader Ministry**

AME Church polity, as a beneficiary of Methodist polity, largely embraces the class leader system as well. The purpose of the class is to nurture new converts, to periodically visit and inquire how class members are doing, to discern whether members are indeed working out their own salvation, and to receive what members contribute to the support of the church.<sup>3</sup> As follow-up to my professional project, my LAC and I plan to use our new missional ministry framework to restructure the basic model of the AMEC Class Leader System into an enhanced model for Mt. Zion outreach ministry. The substantive change is that the former, according to AMEC polity, is an internally focused

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<sup>3</sup> AME Church Discipline, 2012): 71-72.

model. We hope to shift this model for Mt. Zion to progressively become over 70% externally focused on spiritual formation and outreach ministry.

I met with our existing twelve class leaders to discuss restructuring, training, and re-energizing their ministry consistent with, but evolving beyond AMEC polity.<sup>4</sup> They enthusiastically welcomed this review and commented that it has been long overdue. They highlighted their primary concerns as being the major changes in Mt. Zion membership, as well as to the class leader team itself. They felt that we need to rethink how we engage new converts joining the church. We need to account better for members who pass away. And we need to reorganize periodically to address the retirement and relocation of members to other parts of the country. They expressed a strong need for a new missional vision in the context of our relocation to Front Street in Plainfield. However, we all agreed that since settling into our new ministry facility has been our primary focus, revamping our CLS became a lower priority. We also concluded that Mt. Zion has a tremendous opportunity to transform our internally focused CLS into an externally focused local missional ministry. To accomplish this, we discussed expanding the number of class leaders from twelve to about twenty. Consistent with the AMEC Discipline, each class leader would be assigned no more than ten Mt. Zion members. Given our analysis of Plainfield-Union County, we plan to make class assignments as mixed and as diverse as possible. The exception to this would be if there are specific ministry opportunities that call for establishing specific segmented groups. Secondly, we

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<sup>4</sup> Christensen with Savage, 49-50.



discussed establishing a lay-ministry committee consisting of these class leaders, with our ministry staff as advisors. This committee would have assigned officers (i.e. chairperson, secretary, treasurer) who, along with our ministry staff, will form a leadership team. Its purpose would be to establish annual internal goals and priorities, execution strategy and results metrics, training/nurturing process and materials, class leader qualification, requirements and expectations.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, we discussed using this same committee—supplemented by additional members, or external partners with specific gifts—to establish an annual prioritized list of external contextual growth segments, such as Latino/Hispanics, single working parents, battered women, orphaned children and/or children of incarcerated parents. This lay-committee would develop a set of ‘ministry services’ to address the needs of a given target external segment, along with an affordability budget statement. We would review and leverage group outreach models, such as those suggested by Christensen and Stetzer and Putman, to help structure the quarterly and annual ministry plans.

For Mt. Zion and its current membership, this growth journey must start with expressing our ministry differently in Plainfield and Union County in several distinct ways. To rekindle our Great Commission missional ministry journey, as mentioned before my research suggests that we must consider launching some form of Hispanic/Latino ministry. This segment of Plainfield's population has grown over 58% from 2000-to-2010, while the African-American segment declined 25% over the same

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 52-56.

period. Recognizing this trend, in 2007 we established a partnership with a small Hispanic/Latino congregation of about thirty-two members. While our two congregations never reached the point of worshipping together, our Mt. Zion leadership team met quarterly with this congregation to discuss enhancing the partnership. We could have greatly benefited from the tools delineated by Stetzer and Putman—especially on planting missional ministries,<sup>6</sup> and the process of breaking the code.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, in 2010 upon selling our 4<sup>th</sup> Street ministry facility and moving to our current facility, we were not able to also transition this partnership. We met with four other Hispanic/Latino congregations in 2011 hoping to establish a similar type of partnership as before. However, given the challenge of settling into our larger campus location, we determined that we simply were not ready.<sup>8</sup> In my view, today we are better equipped to pursue this opportunity. A significant level of preparation remains however in order to make this a truly missional partnership, and to ensure that our missional ministry extends beyond simply sharing our facility.

Furthermore, to rekindle our Great Commission missional ministry journey, my research also helps me to see that we must consider expanding our ministry to include ‘contextual groups’. From Stetzer and Putman discussion on “House or Koinos Church,”<sup>9</sup> a particularly intriguing example for me was the Japanese nurses’ contextual group who

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<sup>6</sup> Stetzer and Putman, 156-166.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 216-223.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 159-161.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 112-117.

all share very similar ministry needs.<sup>10</sup> For Plainfield this could mean a number of groups, who share similar context but are mostly unreached, and that we never considered. Examples of these groups are firemen and policeman, locally incarcerated men and women awaiting trial, children and young adults currently in the County foster care system, local medical professionals, even business leaders.

Currently Mt. Zion has strong missional ministries for feeding and clothing in partnership with other local churches. For example, for seniors and the homeless we partner with the Plainfield senior citizen centers and the YMCA/YWCA. For HIV-AID's awareness for young adults we partner with IRIS House. Some of the Stetzer and Putman's depictions reveal hidden opportunity groups for which we could be the "House or Koinos [host] Church"—frankly for incremental expense.<sup>11</sup> These could be group ministries that meet monthly or weekly as required, with the specific groups focused on addressing their spiritual needs. These could also grow and spread to other local AME churches in neighboring cities.

Finally, to rekindle our Great Commission missional ministry journey we must redouble our efforts to make Christian disciples, and to ensure their readiness missional ministry. We currently have twelve local ministries through which Mt. Zion, as Christ's church to do ministry in Plainfield. From my doctoral work, and by reexamining our AMEC Discipline, I have concluded that we must collaboratively restructure each if these

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 27, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 79-83.

existing ministry. As the ‘called-out’ ordained and appointed ministers, our ministry staff must challenge ourselves to spend more time in prayer to ensure we have clarity on God's Great Commission missional vision for Plainfield.<sup>12</sup> Working with our lay ministry leaders we must examine each ministry's viability and relevance to make the necessary hard shift to become a missional church.<sup>13</sup> We must examine each ministry's purpose and effectiveness in order to dispel legacy preferences.<sup>14</sup> We must also examine their interlock and synergy with God's overall vision, and with each other. This critical examination also includes asking if we have the right disciplines leading each Mt. Zion ministry, based on their gifts. We must restructure how we train our lay ministry leaders, enhance how we move new converts along their discipleship journey (see Figure 3, and Appendix D), and examine how we define accountability and ministry progress.<sup>15</sup> And if we are to rekindle the growth of local churches, like Mt. Zion, we must realign with God's original Great Commission missional vision for the AMEC. Stetzer and Putman seem to stress almost as a refrain that with God's help, local AME Churches must break the missional code in order to tackle pressing ministry issues. These include the problem of drugs plaguing our shifting demographics; the issue of prison incarceration of minority men and women; the concern over high school dropout rates of minority children; and, the problem of unemployment in segments of our communities. Grenz notes that as

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 44-49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 50-58.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 59-71.

God's people, Christ's church (i.e., like Mt. Zion), does not exist only to worship God and to build-up one another. We also exist to minister to the world and our local community around us. A local church, as a community of faithful disciples, must not fail to set its sights outward—toward the local context in which it is called to serve.

Foundational to our corporate existence is a missional vision to see the Plainfield-Union County community, and indeed the entire human family, reconciled to God, to each other, and to all creation. Consequently, we must be obedient to Christ's outreach mandate entrusted to his church, and direct Mt. Zion's focus and energies on those with certain needs just beyond our fellowship.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the issues mentioned, this means that with God's help local AME churches like Mt. Zion must break their missional code in order to tackle community issues such as feeding the poor and homeless; to engage on concerns such as healthcare for the uninsured; to minister to contextual groups such as Latinos; and, to confront injustice by speaking truth to power.



Finally, the AME Church's logo shown above contains two major emblems. The first we think of as God's anvil, which symbolizes our resolve as Christian disciples, and our strength as a people forged out of historical oppression. The second is God's cross, which symbolizes our salvation and deliverance through the finished work of Christ on

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<sup>16</sup> Grenz, page 653.

the cross. In essence, if we—as episcopal leaders, clergy, and lay disciples—are to be God's anvil, and God's cross, and if our local churches like Mt. Zion, are to fulfill God's Great Commission where we are called to serve, we must break hindering legacy missional codes, and earnestly ensure our realignment with being Christ's church.

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Appendix A: Project Handbook—Invitation Letter, Lay Advisory Committee (LAC), Meetings and Events Schedule, Event Planning Tools, and Content Covered.



## Drew Theological School

### Doctor of Ministry Prospectus and Project Handbook

(last update: 09/28/16)

*“Strengthening Spiritual Formation in  
Mt Zion AME Church of Plainfield, New Jersey  
To Include Community Missional Goals and Readiness”*

Mt Zion Project Team	Mt Zion Ministries	2016 Project Schedule	Planned Project Events
Brother Bob Arrington	Director, Music and Chords	January 31 <sup>st</sup> (2 hours)	Work Session #1
Brother Gerald Johnson	Youth and Economic Dev. Corp.	February 7 <sup>th</sup> (3 hours)	Work Session #2
Brother Cliff Jones	Trustee Board and Choir	February 21 <sup>st</sup> (3 hours)	Work Session #3
Brother Vince Parks	Trustee Board and Choir	March 6 <sup>th</sup> (2 hours)	Work Session #4
Sister Mammie Perry	Steward Board and Lay	April 3 <sup>rd</sup> (w/Congregation)	Transformation Worship Event – Prep Sermon
Sister Roberta Simpson	New Member and Hospitality	April 10 <sup>th</sup> (w/Congregation)	Transformation Worship Event
Sister Lisa Spicer	Steward Board and Youth	April 20 <sup>th</sup> (2 hour)	Work Session #5: Team Review
Brother Rodney Taylor	Trustee Board and Youth	April 23 <sup>rd</sup> (2.5 hours)	D.Min. Advisor Site Visit

**Doctor of Ministry Candidate:**  
Rev. W. Golden Carmon, Sr.  
Pastor, Mt. Zion AME Church  
Plainfield, New Jersey 07060  
**ADVISOR:** Rev. Dr. Kevin Miller



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## Drew Theological School

Doctor of Ministry Program (Invitation Letter)

**DATE:** January 19, 2016 (updated: 04/20/16)

**TO:** Sister Lisa Spicer                      Brother Cliff Jones  
 Brother Rodney Taylor                  Brother Vince Parks  
 Sister Mammie Perry                      Sister Roberta Simpson  
 Brother Bob Arrington                  Brother Gerald Johnson

**FROM:** Rev. W. G. Carmon, Sr.

Happy New Year and greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus-the Christ!

**UPDATE.** As you know, Rev. Mattie and I are pursuing Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degrees at the Theological School of Drew University. Frankly we are doing this because we believe that any desire for greater christian service, requires greater training. While it has been very challenging, we have successfully completed 18-months of classes to-date. Our studies have given us new tools to help clarify God's divine future vision for Mt Zion. It has also enhanced our ministry skills to help us better serve the individual needs of all Mt Zion disciples.

**INVITATION.** This 2016 Spring Semester begins the second phase of our 3-year program, which is our Doctor of Ministry Project. During this phase, we are required to select our own team of Mt Zion disciples who will play an active role in our respective clinical ministry projects. Thus I am formally inviting each of you to join me in completing my approved DMin project.

**PROJECT.** Based on our studies, both Rev. Mattie and I have attempted to select professional ministry projects that we plan to continue after this initial clinical phase is completed. We also hope our projects will have an impact on the spiritual health and long-term growth of Mt. Zion. My specific project, approved by my DMin Advisor, is entitled: "*Strengthening Spiritual Formation in Small Groups to Include Goals on Local Community Missions.*" In essence this means that we will meet in working sessions to determine how we strengthen the focus of ALL Mt Zion ministries to address specific needs in the Plainfield community. During these sessions we will discuss the Biblical basis for the "*Why and What*" that should motivate our focus on community needs. And the Biblical basis for the "*How and When*" we should consider to address these needs. Our objective will be to identify one specific Plainfield community ministry need, and do a small outreach event at Mt. Zion to begin to address it.

**LOGISTICS and SCHEDULE.** We will plan to meet after Sunday Worship on January 31<sup>st</sup>, February 7<sup>th</sup>, February 14<sup>th</sup>, and March 6<sup>th</sup> for our working sessions. Each session is expected to run from 1:30pm to 3:30pm (a light meal will be provided). We will plan to do our ministry transformation Worship Event on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. And we will plan to do an overall project review session on Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, and a formal "Site Visit" by my DMin Advisor targeted for Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> (from 3:00pm to 5:30pm... a light breakfast will be provided).

Thanks in advance for your support, and God bless!

Rev. W. G. Carmon, Sr.

## DMin Project Overview

### *Purpose and Objectives*

This project is entitled: “*Strengthening Spiritual Formation in Small Groups to Include Goals on Local Community Missions*” Our purpose will be to explore the issue with which most local Churches struggle which is to drive an enhanced focus on christian missions outside of Mt Zion’s “four walls.”

Our first objective is to use our working sessions to develop a spiritual formation framework and process that motivates our existing Mt Zion ministries (e.g., Officers, Organized Lay, Seniors’ Ministry, Church School, EDC, etc.) to consciously pursue Plainfield community outreach. Secondly, we will also plan and conduct a ministry transformation event to help us discover the effectiveness of our framework and process.

### *Timeline and Critical Success Factors*

We will plan to meet Sunday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, February 7<sup>th</sup>, February 21<sup>st</sup>, and March 6<sup>th</sup> for our working sessions. Each session is expected to run from 1:30pm to 3:30pm. Our ministry transformation event will be targeted for Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. We will also plan to do an overall project review session on Thursday April 20<sup>th</sup>. Finally, a formal “Site Visit” with my DMin Advisor will be targeted for Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 3:00pm to 5:30pm.

Project success will NOT depend on the outcome of our working sessions, nor our community ministry event. Instead it will depend more on the commitment of each team member to learn and actively participate in each working session. It will also depend on our best creative efforts to structure our event to discover a repeatable process for ongoing Mt Zion community ministry outreach.

### **PROSPECTIVE: Ministry Community Events for Plainfield**

*“Pack the Pew” Event*—focused on the Great Commission outreach ministry of leading the un-churched to Christ.

*“Halfway House” Event*—focused on the Great Commission outreach ministry of spiritual transformation in Christ for those exiting the local jail system.

*“IRIS House” Partnership Event*—focused on the Great Commission outreach ministry of spiritual hope and healing for young adults for raising HIV/AIDS Awareness.

*“Economic Empowerment” Event*—focused on the Great Commission outreach ministry of spiritual transformation that leads to more responsible personal stewardship.

*“YMCA Feed the Homeless” Partnership Event*—focused on the Great Commission outreach ministry of feeding body and soul of the hungry in our community.

## Working Session #1 and #2

### *The Message and Meaning of the Great Commission*

**Biblical Foundation Texts:** Matthew 28:16-20 and Mark 16:12-20 (NSRV). *“After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.’ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.”*

**Christ’s Meaning and Message.** In this text Christ confirms that he is physically alive again (resurrected). Christ reminds his disciples (soldiers) of his constant love, support and respect for them. Christ validates for them that only he, no one else, has all power and authority in heaven and earth achieve God’s will in every generation. In other words, he makes it clear that he alone is Lord! Based on this, Christ empowers and commands his disciples (soldiers) to make new disciples—in all nations, in each generation. How?

1. *by being true believers in Christ themselves, with strong faith in God (Mark 16:12-14);*
2. *by being true evangelist that do miracles, that lay hands on the sick, and that cast out demons in Jesus’ name (to get their attention, Mark 16:15-18);*
3. *by being true evangelist that offer others God’s free gift of salvation, and baptizing those who accept in the name of the Holy Trinity (Matthew 28:19);*
4. *by training others to be true evangelist by compelling them to follow God’s laws, to release their prayer language for spiritual power, and to use this power to serve their community (Mark 16:16-17);*
5. *by reassuring his disciples (soldiers) that because he sits on the right-hand of God-the Father, he will empower the work of true evangelists with divine power (Mark 16:19-20).*

### *Historical Foundation for Local Community Outreach*

**Christian Missions.** From the beginning of the church age, Christ’s Great Commission has been the basis of all christian missions. The most influential models have been the missions models of the Apostle Paul, Peter and other disciples recorded in the Book of Acts. Unfortunately by default, over the years because of their model, christian missions has been defined as doing outreach in global communities. Today most theologians and church leaders agree that the need for christian missions in a Church’s local community is as strong as it is in communities abroad.

**Plainfield Community Profile.** The largest African American populations resided in primarily six(6) of the twenty-one(21) Union County townships, which were Plainfield (29,500), Elizabeth (24,090), Roselle (10,917), Union (10,752), Hillside (10,122), and Rahway (7,173).

Unfortunately in July 1967, the Newark race riots spilled over to other communities such as Elizabeth and Plainfield. The days that followed saw looting, rioting and large scale demonstrations against police, fire and other public safety personnel. And while in less than ten(10) days, with the engagement of U.S. National Guard, these tensions were quelled the stigma associated with this civil unrest and property destruction remains with Plainfield to this day. Many residences and businesses moved to neighboring, highly protected (Mayberry-like) suburban communities. This left only small pockets of wealthy residences (also highly protected) on the outskirts of town. In essence in 1967, Plainfield entered a period of decline, becoming primarily a majority of low-income residents, and a decimated commercial and employment environment. Efforts to revive Plainfield have been challenging due to extreme socio-economic inequity, low performing

schools, gang violence and a variety of other depressive factors.

However, Plainfield continues as a diverse city of about 49,404 residents that remains part of the vibrant NYC region. It is a major urban center, with a cost-friendly transportation hub that maintains a quality regional bus and railway system for commuters. Plainfield also remains the home of small businesses in industries such as printing, the manufacture of chemicals, clothing, electronic equipment and vehicle parts. Unfortunately these business are unable to attract highly skilled, highly educated residents. And the current residents struggle with the rising cost of living due to neighboring affluent communities such as Scotch Plains, Westfield, Watchung, Berkeley Heights, Garwood, Fanwood, and Cranford. Plainfield residents also struggle with inequities and limited access to vital goods and services such as healthcare and education.

Since 2000 Plainfield's demographics has dramatically shifted to low-income, Hispanic-Latino residents who are foreign born, do not have US Citizenship, primarily speak Spanish with limited English proficiency (i.e., 8.3%\_White; 46.3%\_African American; 40% Hispanic). The Public School System greatly needs improvement versus others in the state, with students unable to show advanced proficiency in Language Arts and Math, and graduates only 67% from high school. There is only one advance placement class for college credit. Crime and gang violence is an issue, with nearly 1-of-5 Union County violent crimes occurring in Plainfield.

*Mt Zion and Christian Mission.* Given all the tectonic shifts occurring in Plainfield and Union County, Mt Zion's vision of local community missions is as follows: In Plainfield, the surrounding communities God has given the us the opportunity to promote Christ's deliverance ministry. God has also given us the privilege of proclaiming Christ's salvation message. Thus our mission must be to minister to the needs of ALL peoples in the fulfillment of God's Great Commission. In this pursuit we must remain true to our social action heritage for the marginalized. We must not do these things in a vacuum, but through vibrant partnerships with community organizations. We must also welcome ALL—regardless of race, gender, age, cultural heritage, or sexual orientation—who desire to join us on this divine mission, so that together we might fulfill God's mandate to: '*go and make disciples in all nation*' (Matthew 28:19-20).

#### *Considerations for a New Mt Zion Missions Model*

1. What ministries does Mt Zion have to offer, and make us relevant in our local community?
2. What are the ministry needs, and the community residents, on which should focus?
3. Which community organizations, and/or other churches, with whom we should partner?
4. What is our goal, our time-frame, and our estimate of resources required (including Mt Zion)?
5. How do we measure our effectiveness, and is our ministry model easily repeatable?

**Mt Zion AME Church\_Plainfield**  
(DMin Project Event Planning Form\_\_1Q2016)

Based on your experience, list three(3) Plainfield community ministry needs that should be considered.

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Event Date:		Location:	
Theme:		Guest Preacher:	
Scripture:			
Chairperson(s):			

Goal(s):		
Total		

Activity	Owner(s)	Date Done	Cost

Expenditures Items	Expenses	Income	Net Income
<b>Total Sales (-) Total Expense =</b>			

**ACTION ITEMS**

1. Ensure event is approved by Pastor and placed on calendar at beginning of Conference Year
2. Prepare document and schedule meeting w/Pastor before getting started
3. Determine theme based on Bible verse (This should help to stay focused on the mission)
4. Guest Preacher – Letter must go out six months in advance, in some case longer, e.g. Bishop
5. Letters should go out two to three months in advance
6. COST: If fundraiser, determine if this will cost more than amount hoped to raise (include preachers, foods, gifts, etc.)

## Working Sessions #3 and #4

### *The Motivation and Mandate of the Great Commission*

**Biblical Foundation Text:** Acts 1:1-8 (NSRV). *"In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about God's kingdom. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This,' he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"*

**Christ's Motivation and Mandate.** In this text Christ commands all his disciples (soldiers) to tarry in their local church until they are anointed (baptized) by God's Holy Spirit. Christ teaches them that this empowered is required for them to be true witnesses (evangelists). Christ warns his disciples (soldiers) not to be distracted by this world's news and rumors. Finally Christ motivates them, through the angels, that he will return again from heaven one day. In other words, Christ mandates that all his disciples (soldiers), in each generation, complete God's will for their lives as true evangelists empowered by God's Holy Spirit. How? As we highlighted before:

1. *by being true believers in Christ themselves, with strong faith in God (Mark 16:12-14);*
2. *by being true evangelist that do miracles, that lay hands on the sick, and that cast out demons in Jesus' name (to get their attention, Mark 16:15-18);*
3. *by being true evangelist that offer others God's free gift of salvation, and baptizing those who accept in the name of the Holy Trinity (Matthew 28:19);*
4. *by training others to be true evangelist by compelling them to follow God's laws, to release their prayer language for spiritual power, and to use this power to serve their community (Mark 16:16-17);*
5. *by reassuring his disciples (soldiers) that because he sits on the right-hand of God-the Father, he will empower the work of true evangelists with divine power (Mark 16:19-20).*

### *Theological Foundation for Local Community Evangelism*

**Christian Evangelism.** True evangelism means christian disciples (soldiers) employing Christ's authority and God's anointing to reach, reclaim, and reconcile lost souls to Jesus-the Christ. It means uniting them with the local church, training them to become disciples, and motivating them to their responsibility for doing evangelism (i.e., from membership to discipleship, from discipleship to evangelism). Thus evangelism is more than sharing with others how much we love God (though our personal testimony, becoming "christian gossipers," is very important in this process). It is also our ability and responsibility, calling and commitment to share the whole gospel, and its miracle working power, with the "unsaved and unchurched." And to challenge them to embrace their own salvation, through faith in Christ!

**The Evangelism Imperative.** The time for every local church to do evangelism is now! Research estimates a steady decline of 1% per year in active christian disciples, over the past four generations since 1946. And those surveyed also reported that their primary reasons they stop attending church

today are:

1. they think differently than their parents' generation;
2. their faith is no longer tied to the church; and,
3. they no longer consider Sunday a sacred (holy) day.

Thus the decline in church attendance coupled with the absence of evangelism has resulted in a death spiral for some local churches. In other words, no evangelism means no new disciples; which leads to a shortage of financial support; which means a shortage of local community ministries and programs; which ultimately and unfortunately results in the death of a local church!

*Considerations for a New Mt Zion Evangelism Model*

1. What has been Mt Zion's greatest evangelism weaknesses, and receiving new people?
2. What percentage of Mt Zion disciples are prepared and willing to be true evangelists?
3. What should be Mt Zion's on-going evangelistic vision and goals for our local community?
4. What are the social/cultural groups with ministry needs, and can Mt Zion address them?
5. How should we reach-out to the "unchurch/unsaved," and is Mt Zion ready for them to come?

## APPENDIX

*Definition of Terms*

**Missions and Evangelism**—the adoption of the posture, thinking, behaviors, and practices required by Christ in the Great Commission (Mark 16:12-20; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11) in order to engage others, outside of an established local Church, with the gospel message and to help relieve human suffering.

**Spiritual DNA Transformation**—the basic alteration of a person's existing spiritual credo resulting from the willful embrace of external theology (i.e., external to the person's existing Credo) and existing Christian praxis that leads to a new or enhanced personal credo.

**Spiritual Formation**—an intentional Christian practice that has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness. These historical Christian spiritual practices include prayer, the study of scripture, fasting, simplicity, solitude, confession, and worship.

**Christian Service**—the response of a regenerate soul to the Lordship of Christ, the voluntary and hearty subjecting of oneself to his dominion, and the carrying out of his revealed will. It consists of obedience to God in full and entire obedience (Proverbs 3:6; John 15:1-7).



## Appendix B: Transformation Event: Prep Sermon (April 3, 2016)

**Sermon: "From Unbeliever to Believer In Jesus Christ!"**  
**Psalm 23:1-6; John 20:19-31**

Mt Zion AME Church, Plainfield, NJ  
 Pastor WG.Carmon Sr; 04/03/16

**Introduction.** My brothers and sisters how does an unbeliever begin a journey Jesus? How does an unbelieving child embrace Jesus as their Lord? And how does an unbelieving stranger, who believes in some human philosophy, embrace salvation through Jesus Christ? How does an unbelieving spouse come to a trusting relationship with the Lord? And how do a close friend, who may believe in some other world religion, embrace the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ? And how do unbelievers worldwide, some of whom attend Church every week, some whom serve on Church leadership boards, some of whom see the Church as just another one of their social clubs, become believers in Christ's finished work on the cross? In other words, how do unbelievers even sitting in Church pews begin their journey as true disciples of Jesus Christ?

Well, the ancient Chinese use to say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. The Bible helps us to see that the first step in a life-long journey with Jesus, for any unbeliever, is to become a believer. Let me make it plain—there are only two choices that God has given us. Either we choose to believe-in and follow his son, Jesus. Or by default, we choose to believe-in and follow the enemy, Satan. And despite what agnostics, atheist, or others think, there is no other choice in-between. This means that God requires every man and woman to put on their big-people pants, and decide to follow his son, Jesus. It means that God requires each boy and girl to put on their grown-up pants, and choose to trust his anointed one, Christ. And it means that God requires every person born into this world to decide for themselves which Lord, Jesus or Satan, they will follow in this life; and, which Lord, Jesus or Satan, they will spend eternity with in the life to come.

Unfortunately too many people are making uninformed decisions. My brothers and sisters it is hard to make a good decision when you don't have all the facts you need. It is difficult to make an important decision when you don't have all the information you need. And worst of all it is tough to make the right choice, if you are not willing to put some time in and do some homework. Yet this is exactly what unbelievers do—whether they are unbelievers in the world or unbelievers sitting in the Church. Too often unbelievers take this critical decision for granted, and they end-up living

lives filled with drama, frustration and defeat because by default they follow Satan—the destroyer and enemy of the christian faith journey.

**Biblical Expository.** In our text, John 20:19-31, Thomas thought that he was a believer in Jesus Christ. Thomas thought that he had made a good decision to trust-in Jesus Christ. And Thomas thought that he had made the right choice to follow Jesus Christ. In other words, Thomas thought he had a personal relationship with Jesus, and that he had taken the first step on his life-long journey. After 3-years of following Jesus it seemed like his belief was justified. After 3-years of sitting in the pew listening to Jesus preach the gospel and encourage the lonely, Thomas thought that he had made the right choice to follow Jesus. After 3-years of witnessing Jesus do mighty miracles and cast out demons, Thomas thought that he had a good relationship with the Jesus. And after 3-years of receiving Jesus' teachings and instructions it seemed like Thomas was well on his life-long journey with the Lord.

*It seemed like this, that is, until Jesus was crucified!* You see my brothers and sisters, Thomas' commitment to follow Jesus came to a sudden stop, because he only believed in Jesus—the Man, instead of Jesus—the Messiah. Thomas' belief in Jesus came to a sudden stop, because he only knew Jesus—as a Man, instead of Jesus—as the only Son of God. This means that, like so many people today who believe in preachers, Thomas made a decision to abandon his personal journey with Jesus base on some bad information. For after the crucifixion, Thomas must have told himself that Jesus was not the Spiritual Leader, not the Anointed One, not the Deliverer, and not the Savior that he thought he was. He must have told himself that Jesus was just another dead man, so why should I follow him anymore. Boy was Thomas wrong!

**Theological Observation.** You see, like so unbelievers, Thomas made a bad decision, based on bad information. Thomas believed more-in what he feared—the crucifixion of Jesus; instead of believing in what he knew about Jesus—which was 3-years of divine miracle-working ministry. And vv27-28 of our text says that it took the resurrected-Jesus showing him the large holes in his hands, to remind Thomas of what he already knew about Jesus. It too the resurrected-

Jesus showing him the deep slit in his side, to challenge Thomas to have more faith Jesus than fear of the world. And it took the resurrected-Jesus showing him the small holes in his head, to help Thomas to become a believer again and to rekindle his personal journey with Jesus. For Jesus challenges Thomas in v28, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." And Thomas responds in v29, "My Lord and my God!"

So my brothers and sister I ask the question, what is Jesus really saying to Thomas about his personal journey as a believer in Christ? And what is Jesus also saying to each of us about our personal journeys today as believers in Christ? Jesus is saying that there are some things every person should know about God—especially those, like Thomas, who say they know the Lord. *For if we really know God, Jesus is saying that we should believe in the Lord!* In other words, everybody should know that since God makes the sun to rise in the east, then we should believe that he will also make it set in the west. We should know that since God makes water wet, then we should believe that he also makes ice cold. We should know that since God makes fire hot, then we should believe that he also makes heat warm. And we should know that since God loves us, then we should believe that he also won't leave us nor forsake us.

**Homiletic Moment.** *Can I break it down and make it plain?* I don't know about you, but I'm so glad for the timeless wisdom that God gave King David for unbelievers of every age. For David helps us to see in Psalm 23 that if any unbelieving child knows that the Lord is your shepherd, then you should believe that God will make sure you never want. And if any unbelieving teenager knows that the Lord makes you lie down in green pastures and besides still the waters, then you should believe that God will restore your soul. *Are you still an unbeliever, or are you a believer in Jesus Christ?*

If any unbeliever in their 20's knows that the Lord will lead you into the paths of righteousness, then you should believe that God does this because he has given you his name. And if any unbeliever in their 30's knows that the Lord lets you walk through the valley and

shadow of death, then you should believe that you won't fear any evil because God is always with you. *Are you still an unbeliever, or are you a follower of Jesus Christ?*

If any unbeliever in their 40's knows that the Lord prepares a table for you in the presence of your enemies, then you should believe that God will use his rod and his staff to protect you while you eat. And if any unbeliever in their 50's knows that the Lord anoints your head with oil, then you should believe that God will make your cup run over with abundance. *Are you still an unbeliever, or are you committed to your journey with Jesus Christ?*

**Conclusion.** Finally if any unbeliever in their 60's and 70's knows that the Lord commands his goodness to follow you, then you should believe that God has done miracles for you all the days of your life. And if any unbeliever in their 80's and 90's knows that the Lord commands his mercy to follow you, then you should believe that God will make sure you dwell in his house and live in his kingdom, forever.

For the truth is that Psalm 23 helps us to see that because of his love and compassion, everyday we are alive God is better to us than we are to ourselves. Because of his kindness and protection, every month we are alive God is better to us than we are to ourselves. And because of his goodness and mercy, every year we are alive God is better to us than we are to ourselves. *Are you still an unbeliever or do you firmly believe in the goodness and mercy of the Lord?*

For John declares in vv30-31 to all unbelievers seeking a life-long journey with the Lord, *"Now Jesus did many...signs in the presence of his disciples and the people... but these examples are written in the Bible so that you might take the first step on your personal christian journey by coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God... and that through believing you may have life in his name!"*



Sunday, April 10, 2016 11:00 a.m. Service <b>SPECIAL SERVICE WORSHIP PROGRAM</b>		<b>Transformational Worship Expository*</b> Rev. W. Golden Carmon, Sr.
<b>Worship Leader</b>	Rev. Edward White	<b>Invitation to Christian Discipleship</b>
<b>Organ Prelude</b>	Brother Robert Arrington, Dir. of Music	<b>Apostle's Creed</b>
<b>Processional</b>	Choir, Officers and Clergy	<b>Doxology</b>
<b>Doxology*</b>	<i>"Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below praise Him above, The heavenly host, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen!"</i> No. 647	<b>Benediction</b>
<b>Call to Worship*</b>	AMEC Hymn Book - Page XIV	*Note: Please do not move about at this time*
<b>Opening Hymn:</b>	Choir & Congregation	<b>DAILY BIBLE READINGS</b>
<b>Invocation*</b> (...and choral response)	Rev. Edward White	April 11, 2016 thru April 17, 2016 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path."
<b>Scripture Readings*</b>	Matt. 28:16-20      Rev. Mattie A. Carmon Acts 1:1-8              Rev. Mattie A. Carmon	Monday    Apr 11    Completeness in God (Isaiah 61:1-7)
<b>Hymn</b>	<i>"From all that dwells below the skies, let the Creator's praise arise. Let the Redeemer's name be sung, through every land, by every tongue."</i> No. 69	Tuesday    Apr 12    Renewed relationship (Jeremiah 31:31-36)
<b>Decalogue* (Abridged)</b>	Rev. Mattie A. Carmon	Wednesday Apr 13    Steadfast love (Psalm 119:41-48)
<b>Gloria Patri</b>	<i>"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!"</i>	Thursday    Apr 14    Disciplined freedom (1 Corinthians 9:19-27)
<b>Missionary and Benevolent Offering</b>	Ushers	Friday        Apr 15    Freedom in the spirit (Romans 8:1-11)
<b>Selection</b>	Choir	Saturday     Apr 16    Christian freedom (Philippians 2:1-11)
<b>Worship in Tithes and Offerings*</b>	Rev. Edward White <i>"The Grace of Giving"</i> No. 750	Sunday        Apr 17    A sound mind (Luke 8:26-36)
<b>Offertory</b>	<i>"All Things Come of Thee O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee. Amen."</i> No. 644	<b>** SICK AND SHUT-IN **</b>
		Sister Mable Bufkin                      Sister Lillian Givens
		Brother Alex Burroughs, Sr.            Sister Lois Mitchell
		Sister Hannah Coston                  Sister Marie Moore
		Sister Edna Clark                        Brother Elijah Myers
		Sister Katherine Craig                 Sister Constance Parker
		Sister Daisy Gibson                      Sister La'Quirne Parker
		Sister Thelma Hill                        Sister Marion Roberts
		Sister Joyce John                        Sister Rose M. Wells
		Brother D. Larry Jones



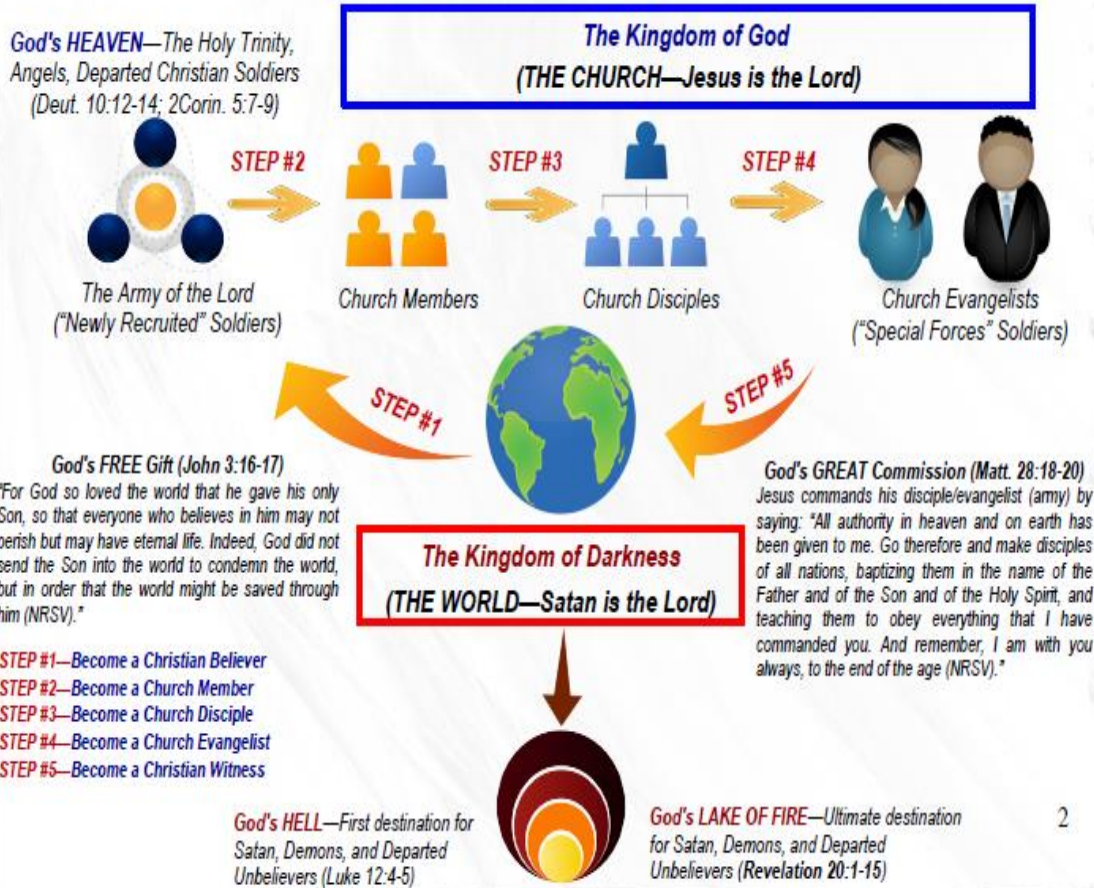
## Appendix D: Transformation Event Handout #1—Our Personal Journey with Christ

**Mt Zion A.M.E Church of Plainfield, New Jersey****Rev W. Golden Carmon, Pastor****Our Personal Journey with Christ****Transformation Worship Service****Mt Zion Transformation Project Team**

Robert Arrington, Director of Music and EDC Ministries	Sister Mamie Perry, Steward and Class Leader Ministries
Brother Gerald Johnson, EDC and Scholarship Ministries	Sister Roberta Simpson, New Members and Hospitality Ministries
Brother Cliff Jones, Trustee, Choir and Men's Ministries	Sister Lisa Spicer, Steward and Vacation Bible School Ministries
Brother Vince Parks, Trustee, Choir, and Men's Ministries	Brother Rodney Taylor, Trustee, Choir, and Church School Ministries

Sunday, April 10, 2016 (11:00 am)

# Our Personal Journey with Christ





# Our Personal Journey with Christ

## What are the major steps on our Christian Journey?

**Step #1:** Become a *believer in Christ*, as God's Messiah... *WE ARE CALLED TO:*

- believe in Jesus-the Christ (**John 3:16-21; 20:30-31**)
- be saved by Jesus-the Christ (**Romans 10:8-10**)

**Step #2:** Become a *church member* and active follower of Christ... *WE ARE CALLED TO:*

- follow Jesus in unity (**Ephesians 4:1-6**)
- be God's co-workers (**1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:9**)

**Step #3:** Become a *church disciple* and servant of Christ... *WE ARE CALLED TO:*

- love one another and develop a prayer life (**John 15:1-14**)
- study God's word and keep it (**John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 2:15**)

**Step #4:** Become a *church evangelist* and trained soldier for Christ... *WE ARE CALLED TO:*

- release God's deliverance power (**Mark 16:15-18; John 14:12**)
- pull down Satan's strongholds (**Ephesians 6:10-18**)

**Step #5:** Become a *christian witness* and ambassador for Christ to the world... *WE ARE CALLED TO:*

- share God's love and save souls (**John 20:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**)
- evangelize the world (**i.e., to recruit new christian soldiers, Acts 1:4-8**)

3

## Our Personal Journey with Christ

### Next Steps for YOUR successful Christian Journey

- read the booklet, "*Follow Me*" by Pastor David Platt
- learn *the roadmap and scriptures* in this handout, and take *the survey*
- attend *Worship Service and Prayer Call* each week
- attend *Church School and Bible Study* each week
- engage-in at least one of YOUR *Church's Outreach Ministries*
- practice thinking, speaking, and living by *Christ's Commandments*
- practice praying for, sharing your personal testimony with, and sharing God's gospel with...your family, friends, co-workers, and others!!

4

## Appendix E: Transformation Event Handout #2—Companion of Selected Scriptural References

### **Our Personal Journey with Christ**

(Key Bible Verses)

Pastor W. Golden Garmon, Sr.

#### **STEP #1: Become a believer in Christ, as God's Messiah**

**John 3:16-21** – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

**John 20:30-31** – And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

**Romans 10:8-10** – But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach); that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

#### **STEP #2: Become a church member and active follower of Christ**

**Ephesians 4:1-6** – I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

**1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:9** – To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours....For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

#### **STEP #3: Become a church disciple and committed servant of Christ**

**John 15:1-14** – I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command."

**John 8:31-31** – Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

**2 Timothy 2:15** – Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

#### **STEP #4: Become a church evangelist and trained soldier for Christ**

**Mark 16:15-18** – And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

**John 14:12** – "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

**Ephesians 6:10-18** – Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

#### **STEP #5: Become a christian witness and ambassador for Christ to the world**

**John 20:21-23** – So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

**2 Corinthians 5:18-21** – Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

**Acts 1:4-8** – And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [a]n Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

## Appendix F: Transformation Event: LAC Surveys (2) and Results

## Doctor of Ministry – Project Questionnaire

DMin Cohort: Congregational Growth and Community Development  
 DMin Candidate: Rev W Golden Cannon Sr; DMin Advisor: Rev Dr Kevin Miller

church name: \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 years of service: \_\_\_\_\_ ministry(s): \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Section 1: Understanding of God and a Relationship with Christ</b>	<b>Section 3: The Christian Church, It's Mandate and Motivation</b>
\$1.1. Who is the Holy Trinity? a) God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as equal. b) God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as one. c) both a) and b).	\$3.1. What is real Christian Evangelism? a) Discovering what Christ can do for me and my family only. b) Recruiting new members just to join a denomination. c) Christ's mandate to make disciples and serve the community.
\$1.2. What are God's three most important characteristics? a) Love, Grace, and Mercy. b) Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence. c) Holiness, Wisdom, and Justice.	\$3.2. What is a true Christian Evangelist? a) TV/Radio speakers who solicit donations, but no service. b) Disciples who are fanatical about the Great Commission. c) Members who love Church politics and gossip.
\$1.3. What is salvation and who can be saved? a) It must be earned, but it's only for Church members and friends. b) It's God's free gift for all who will believe and receive it. c) It's God's future gift for all who treat others right and lithe.	\$3.3. Where does Evangelism happen and who should do it? a) Inside the Church, and only the ministers should do it. b) Outside the Church, and all Christian Disciples should do it. c) In denomination meetings, and only Bishops should do it.
\$1.4. How do you know if you are saved? a) I am a good person, and strongly feel I deserve salvation. b) I was baptized as a young child and grew up in Church. c) I have faith according to Romans 10:8-10 that I am saved.	\$3.4. What are the major ministry needs in Plainfield-NJ? a) Food, clothing and shelter for the poor (seniors, kids, adults)? b) Social justice, job, and economic empowerment? c) Drugs, gangs, corruption, spiritual decline?
\$1.5. What is a Christian? a) One who helps only other Church members and others they like. b) One who lives by their own rules, but follow TV ministers. c) Saved disciples who serve and live by Christ's commandments.	\$3.5. What are the rewards for true Christian Evangelists? a) No problems or issues in this life, and eternal life with Christ. b) Only pain or suffering in this life, and eternal life with Christ. c) 100-fold return in this life, crown/mansion/eternal life with Christ
<b>Section 2: The Christian Church, It's Mission and Message</b>	<b>Section 4: DMin Candidate Evaluation</b>
\$2.1. To whom does the real Church belong? a) Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists. b) Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members. c) Christ, authorized by the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.	\$4.1. What did you think of your invitation to participate? a) very good b) good c) not good
\$2.2. What is a real Church? a) A social club where members gather only for their enjoyment. b) A team of disciples commissioned to build God's kingdom. c) A business competing for members, focused on raising money.	\$4.2. What did you think of the Project Questionnaire? a) very good b) good c) not good
\$2.3. What is the mission of every real Church? a) To use God's resources (TV, radio, etc) just to enrich ministers. b) To focus only on politics and social well-being of its members. c) To fulfill Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20.	\$4.3. What did you think of the Project Plan/Work Sessions? a) very good b) good c) not good
\$2.4. What is the message of every real Church? a) The good news of God's love and salvation of John 3:16-21. b) A chance for personal wealth via faith in biblical principles. c) A chance for personal healing via faith in Isaiah 53:1-6.	\$4.4. What did you think of the Leader (DMin Candidate)? a) very good b) good c) not good
\$2.5. Who should benefit most from its message & mission? a) Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists. b) Lost souls, the sick and diseased, the poor and hopeless. c) Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.	\$4.5. What did you think of Project Team Collaboration? a) very good b) good c) not good

LAC Svy\_013116

Mt Zion AME Church_Plainfield NJ				Lay Advisory Committee Survey_January 31, 2016			
total LAC responses for SECTIONS 1, 2, 4: <b>40</b>				total LAC responses for SECTION 3: <b>56</b>			
<b>SECTION 1: How do you see God and a Life with Jesus Christ?</b>				<b>SECTION 3: The Christian Church, It's Mandate and Motivation</b>			
<b>S1.1: Who is the Holy Trinity?</b>				<b>S3.1: What is real Christian Evangelism?</b>			
a)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all equal.			a)	Discovering what Christ can do for me and my family only.		<b>8</b>
b)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as one.	<b>5</b>		b)	Recruiting new members just to join a denomination.		
c)	both a) and b)		<b>3</b>	c)	Christ's mandate to make disciples and serve the community.		
<b>S1.2: What is God's 3 most important characteristics?</b>				<b>S3.2: What is a true Christian Evangelist?</b>			
a)	Love, Grace, and Mercy.		<b>7</b>	a)	TV/Radio preachers who solicit donations, but not service.		
b)	Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence		<b>1</b>	b)	Disciples who are fanatical about the Great Commission		<b>8</b>
c)	Holiness, Wisdom, and Justice.			e)	Members who love Church politics and gossip.		
<b>S1.3: What is salvation and who can be saved?</b>				<b>S3.3: Where does Evangelism happen and who should do it?</b>			
a)	It must be earned, but it's only for Church members and friends.			a)	Inside the Church, and only the ministers should do it		
b)	It's God's free gift for all who will believe and receive it.		<b>8</b>	b)	Outside the Church, and all Christian Disciples should do it.		<b>8</b>
c)	It's God's future gift for all who treat others right and tithes.			c)	In denomination meetings, and only Bishops should do it.		
<b>S1.4: How do you know if you are saved?</b>				<b>S3.4: What are the major ministry needs in Plainfield-NJ?</b>			
a)	I am a good person, and strongly feel I deserve salvation.			a)	Food, clothing and shelter for the poor (seniors, kids, adults)?		
b)	I was baptized as a young child and grew up in the Church.		<b>1</b>	b)	Social justice jobs, and economic empowerment?		<b>3</b>
c)	I have faith, according to Romans 10:8-10, that I am saved.		<b>7</b>	c)	Drugs, gangs, corruption, spiritual decline?		<b>5</b>
<b>S1.5: What is a Christian?</b>				<b>S3.5: What are the rewards for true Christian Evangelists?</b>			
a)	One who helps only Church members and others like them.			a)	No problems or issues in this life, and eternal life with Christ.		
b)	One who lives by their own rules, but follow IV ministers.			b)	Only pain or suffering in this life, and eternal life with Christ.		<b>1</b>
c)	Saved disciples who serve and live by Christ's commandments.		<b>8</b>	c)	100-fold return in this life, crow/mansion/eternal life with Christ.		<b>7</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>good answers</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>other answers</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>good answers</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>other answers</b>
	<b>88%</b>		<b>12%</b>		<b>69%</b>		<b>31%</b>
<b>SECTION 2: The Christian Church, It's Mission and Message</b>				<b>SECTION 4: DMin Candidate Evaluation</b>			
<b>S2.1: To Whom does the real Church belong?</b>				<b>S4.1: What did you think of your Invitation to participate?</b>			
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.			a)	very good		<b>7</b>
b)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.		<b>1</b>	b)	good		<b>1</b>
c)	Christ, authorized by the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.		<b>7</b>	c)	not good		
<b>S2.2: What is a real Church?</b>				<b>S4.2: What did you think of the Project Questionnaire?</b>			
a)	A social club where members gather only for their enjoyment.			a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	A team of disciples commissioned to build God's Kingdom.		<b>8</b>	b)	good		<b>2</b>
c)	A business competing for members, focused on raising money			c)	not good		
<b>S2.3: What is the mission of every real Church?</b>				<b>S4.3: What did you think of the Project Plan/Work Session?</b>			
a)	To use God's resources (tv, radio, etc) just to enrich ministers			a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	To focus only on politics and social well-being of its members			b)	good		<b>2</b>
c)	To fulfill Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20.		<b>8</b>	c)	not good		
<b>S2.4: What is the message of every real Church?</b>				<b>S4.4: What did you think for Leader (the DMin Candidate)?</b>			
a)	The good news of God's love and salvation of John 3:16-21.		<b>8</b>	a)	very good		<b>8</b>
b)	A chance for personal wealth via faith in biblical principles.			b)	good		
c)	A chance for personal healing via faith in Isaiah 53:1-5.			c)	not good		
<b>S2.5: Who should benefit most from its message and mission?</b>				<b>S4.5: What did you think of Project Team Collaboration?</b>			
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.			a)	very good		<b>5</b>
b)	Lost souls, the sick and diseased, the poor and hopeless.		<b>8</b>	b)	good		<b>3</b>
c)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.			c)	not good		
<b>39</b>	<b>good answers</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>other answers</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>very good</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>other answers</b>
	<b>97%</b>		<b>3%</b>		<b>80%</b>		<b>20%</b>

## LAC Svy\_031616

<b>Mt Zion AME Church, Plainfield NJ</b>				<b>Lay Advisory Committee Survey, March 16, 2016</b>			
total LAC responses for SECTIONS 1, 2, 4			<b>30</b>	total LAC responses for SECTION 3			<b>42</b>
<b>SECTION 1: How do you see God and a Life with Jesus Christ?</b>				<b>SECTION 3: The Christian Church, It's Mandate and Motivation</b>			
<b>S1.1: Who is the Holy Trinity?</b>				<b>S3.1: What is real Christian Evangelism?</b>			
a)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all equal.			a)	Discovering what Christ can do for me and my family only.		
b)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as one.		<b>4</b>	b)	Recruiting new members just to join a denomination.		<b>1</b>
c)	both a) and b)		<b>2</b>	c)	Christ's mandate to make disciples and serve the community.		<b>5</b>
<b>S1.2: What is God's 3 most important characteristics?</b>				<b>S3.2: What is a true Christian Evangelist?</b>			
a)	Love, Grace, and Mercy.		<b>5</b>	a)	TV/Radio preachers who solicit donations, but not service.		
b)	Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence.		<b>1</b>	b)	Disciples who are fanatical about the Great Commission.		<b>6</b>
c)	Holiness, Wisdom, and Justice.			c)	Members who love Church politics and gossip.		
<b>S1.3: What is salvation and who can be saved?</b>				<b>S3.3: Where does Evangelism happen and who should do it?</b>			
a)	It must be earned, but it's only for Church members and friends.			a)	Inside the Church, and only the ministers should do it.		
b)	It's God's free gift for all who will believe and receive it.		<b>6</b>	b)	Outside the Church, and all Christian Disciples should do it.		<b>6</b>
c)	It's God's future gift for all who treat others right and tithes.			c)	In denomination meetings, and only Bishops should do it.		
<b>S1.4: How do you know if you are saved?</b>				<b>S3.4: What are the major ministry needs in Plainfield-NJ?</b>			
a)	I am a good person, and strongly feel I deserve salvation.			a)	Food, clothing and shelter for the poor (seniors, kids, adults)?		<b>4</b>
b)	I was baptized as a young child and grew up in the Church.			b)	Social justice, jobs, and economic empowerment?		<b>3</b>
c)	I have faith, according to Romans 10:8-10, that I am saved.		<b>6</b>	c)	Drugs, gangs, corruption, spiritual decline?		<b>5</b>
<b>S1.5: What is a Christian?</b>				<b>S3.5: What are the rewards for true Christian Evangelists?</b>			
a)	One who helps only Church members and others like them.			a)	No problems or issues in this life, and eternal life with Christ.		
b)	One who lives by their own rules, but follow TV ministers.			b)	Only pain or suffering in this life, and eternal life with Christ.		
c)	Saved disciples who serve and live by Christ's commandments.		<b>6</b>	c)	100-fold return in this life, crow/mansion/eternal life with Christ.		<b>6</b>
	<b>27 good answers</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>other answers</b>	<b>35 good answers</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>other answers</b>	
	<b>97%</b>	<b>3%</b>		<b>83%</b>	<b>17%</b>		
<b>SECTION 2: The Christian Church, It's Mission and Message</b>				<b>SECTION 4: DMin Candidate Evaluation</b>			
<b>S2.1: To Whom does the real Church belong?</b>				<b>S4.1: What did you think of your Invitation to participate?</b>			
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.			a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.		<b>1</b>	b)	good		
c)	Christ, authorized by the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.		<b>5</b>	c)	not good		
<b>S2.2: What is a real Church?</b>				<b>S4.2: What did you think of the Project Questionnaire?</b>			
a)	A social club where members gather only for their enjoyment.			a)	very good		<b>5</b>
b)	A team of disciples commissioned to build God's Kingdom.		<b>6</b>	b)	good		<b>1</b>
c)	A business competing for members, focused on raising money.			c)	not good		
<b>S2.3: What is the mission of every real Church?</b>				<b>S4.3: What did you think of the Project Plan/Work Session?</b>			
a)	To use God's resources (tv, radio, etc) just to enrich ministers			a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	To focus only on politics and social well-being of its members			b)	good		
c)	To fulfill Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20.		<b>6</b>	c)	not good		
<b>S2.4: What is the message of every real Church?</b>				<b>S4.4: What did you think for Leader (the DMin Candidate)?</b>			
a)	The good news of God's love and salvation of John 3:16-21.		<b>6</b>	a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	A chance for personal wealth via faith in biblical principles.			b)	good		
c)	A chance for personal healing via faith in Isaiah 53:1-6.			c)	not good		
<b>S2.5: Who should benefit most from its message and mission?</b>				<b>S4.5: What did you think of Project Team Collaboration?</b>			
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.			a)	very good		<b>6</b>
b)	Lost souls, the sick and diseased, the poor and hopeless.		<b>5</b>	b)	good		
c)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.		<b>1</b>	c)	not good		
	<b>28 good answers</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>other answers</b>	<b>29 very good</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>other answers</b>	
	<b>93%</b>	<b>7%</b>		<b>97%</b>	<b>3%</b>		

Appendix G: Transformation Event: Congregational Survey and Results

**Our Personal Journey with Christ**

**SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

(please complete and return)

Pastor W Golden Carmon Sr – Worship Leader

church: \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

years of service: \_\_\_\_\_ ministry(s): \_\_\_\_\_

<i>Section 1: How do you see God and a life with Jesus Christ</i>	<i>Section 3: The Christian Church, it's Mandate and Motivation</i>
<p><b>S1.1. Who is the Holy Trinity?</b>                  a) God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as equal.                  b) God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as one.                  c) both a) and b).</p>	<p><b>S3.1. What is real Christian Evangelism?</b>                  a) Discovering what Christ can do for me and my family only.                  b) Recruiting new members just to join a denomination.                  c) Christ's mandate to make disciples and serve the community.</p>
<p><b>S1.2. What are God's three most important characteristics?</b>                  a) Love, Grace, and Mercy                  b) Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence.                  c) Holiness, Wisdom, and Justice.</p>	<p><b>S3.2. What is a true Christian Evangelist?</b>                  a) TV/Radio preachers who solicit donations, but not service.                  b) Disciples who are fanatical about the Great Commission.                  c) Members who love Church politics and gossip.</p>
<p><b>S1.3. What is salvation and who can be saved?</b>                  a) It must be earned, but it's only for Church members and friends.                  b) It's God's free gift for all who will believe and receive it.                  c) It's God's future gift for all who treat others right and tithe.</p>	<p><b>S3.3. Where does Evangelism happen and who should do it?</b>                  a) Inside the Church, and only the ministers should do it.                  b) Outside the Church, and all Christian Disciples should do it.                  c) In denomination meetings, and only Bishops should do it.</p>
<p><b>S1.4. How do you know if you are saved?</b>                  a) I am a good person, and strongly feel I deserve salvation.                  b) I was baptized as a young child and grew up in Church.                  c) I have faith according to Romans 10:8-10 that I am saved.</p>	<p><b>S3.4. What are the major ministry needs in Plainfield-NJ?</b>                  a) Food, clothing and shelter for the poor (seniors, kids, adults)?                  b) Social justice, job, and economic empowerment?                  c) Drugs, gangs, corruption, spiritual decline?</p>
<p><b>S1.5. What is a Christian?</b>                  a) One who helps only other Church members and others they like.                  b) One who lives by their own rules, but follow TV ministers.                  c) Saved disciples who serve and live by Christ's commandments.</p>	<p><b>S3.5. What are the rewards for true Christian Evangelists?</b>                  a) No problems or issues in this life, and eternal life with Christ.                  b) Only pain or suffering in this life, and eternal life with Christ.                  c) 100-fold return in this life, crown/mansion/eternal life with Christ.</p>
<i>Section 2: The Christian Church, it's Mission and Message</i>	<i>Section 4: Where are you on Your Personal Christian Journey?</i>
<p><b>S2.1. To whom does the real Church belong?</b>                  a) Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.                  b) Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.                  c) Christ, authorized by the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p><b>S4.1. Do you believe Jesus is God's Messiah, and your Lord?</b>                  please circle one response:                  1 (yes) _____ 2 _____ 3 (somewhat) _____ 4 _____ 5 (no)</p>
<p><b>S2.2. What is a real Church?</b>                  a) A social club where members gather only for their enjoyment.                  b) A team of disciples commissioned to build God's kingdom.                  c) A business competing for members, focused on raising money.</p>	<p><b>S4.2. Do you often attend weekly Sunday Worship?</b>                  please circle one response:                  1 (yes) _____ 2 _____ 3 (somewhat) _____ 4 _____ 5 (no)</p>
<p><b>S2.3. What is the mission of every real Church?</b>                  a) To use God's resources (TV, radio, etc) just to enrich ministers.                  b) To focus only on politics and social well-being of its members.                  c) To fulfill Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20.</p>	<p><b>S4.3. Do you often attend weekly Church School/Bible Study?</b>                  please circle one response:                  1 (yes) _____ 2 _____ 3 (somewhat) _____ 4 _____ 5 (no)</p>
<p><b>S2.4. What is the message of every real Church?</b>                  a) The good news of God's love and salvation of John 3:16-21.                  b) A chance for personal wealth via faith in biblical principles.                  c) A chance for personal healing via faith in Isaiah 53:1-6.</p>	<p><b>S4.4. Do you often support or lead specific Church ministries?</b>                  please circle one response:                  1 (yes) _____ 2 _____ 3 (somewhat) _____ 4 _____ 5 (no)</p>
<p><b>S2.5. Who should benefit most from its message &amp; mission?</b>                  a) Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.                  b) Lost souls, the sick and diseased, the poor and hopeless.                  c) Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.</p>	<p><b>S4.5. Do you often pray-for, or share, Christ with unbelievers?</b>                  please circle one response:                  1 (yes) _____ 2 _____ 3 (somewhat) _____ 4 _____ 5 (no)</p>



MZP Svy\_041016

Mt Zion AME Church, Plainfield NJ			Congregation Survey, April 10, 2016						
total MZP responses for SECTIONS 1 and 2: <b>215</b>			total MZP responses for SECTION 3: <b>301</b>						
<b>SECTION 1: How do you see God and a Life with Jesus Christ?</b>			<b>SECTION 3: The Christian Church, It's Mandate and Motivation</b>						
<b>S1.1: Who is the Holy Trinity?</b>			<b>S3.1: What is real Christian Evangelism?</b>						
a)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all equal.	2	a)	Discovering what Christ can do for me and my family only.	1				
b)	God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all as one.	15	b)	Recruiting new members just to join a denomination.	1				
c)	both a) and b)	26	c)	Christ's mandate to make disciples and serve the community.	41				
<b>S1.2: What is God's 3 most important characteristics?</b>			<b>S3.2: What is a true Christian Evangelist?</b>						
a)	Love, Grace, and Mercy.	33	a)	TV/Radio preachers who solicit donations, but not service.	1				
b)	Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence.	4	b)	Disciples who are fanatical about the Great Commission.	40				
c)	Holiness, Wisdom, and Justice.	6	c)	Members who love Church politics and gossip.	2				
<b>S1.3: What is salvation and who can be saved?</b>			<b>S3.3: Where does Evangelism happen and who should do it?</b>						
a)	It must be earned, but it's only for Church members and friends.	1	a)	Inside the Church, and only the ministers should do it.	3				
b)	It's God's free gift for all who will believe and receive it.	40	b)	Outside the Church, and all Christian Disciples should do it.	40				
c)	It's God's future gift for all who treat others right and tithe.	2	c)	In denomination meetings, and only Bishops should do it.					
<b>S1.4: How do you know if you are saved?</b>			<b>S3.4: What are the major ministry needs in Plainfield-NJ?</b>						
a)	I am a good person, and strongly feel I deserve salvation.		a)	Food, clothing and shelter for the poor (seniors, kids, adults)?	36				
b)	I was baptized as a young child and grew up in the Church.	2	b)	Social justice, jobs, and economic empowerment?	29				
c)	I have faith, according to Romans 10:8-10, that I am saved.	41	c)	Drugs, gangs, corruption, spiritual decline?	16				
<b>S1.5: What is a Christian?</b>			<b>S3.5: What are the rewards for true Christian Evangelists?</b>						
a)	One who helps only Church members and others like them.	3	a)	No problems or issues in this life, and eternal life with Christ.	5				
b)	One who lives by their own rules, but follow TV ministers.		b)	Only pain or suffering in this life, and eternal life with Christ.	36				
c)	Saved disciples who serve and live by Christ's commandments.	40	c)	100-fold return in this life, crow/mansion/eternal life with Christ.					
169	good answers	46	202	good answers	99				
	78%	21%		67%	33%				
<b>SECTION 2: The Christian Church, It's Mission and Message</b>			total MZP responses for SECTION 4: <b>43</b> for each question						
<b>S2.1: To Whom does the real Church belong?</b>			<b>SECTION 4: Where are you on Your Personal Christian Journey?</b>						
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.	1	<b>S4.1: Do you believe Jesus is God's Messiah?</b>						
b)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.	5	# of responses: 43						
c)	Christ, authorized by the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit.	37	41	2	3	4	5		
<b>S2.2: What is a real Church?</b>			95%	0%	5%	0%	0%		
a)	A social club where members gather only for their enjoyment.	1	<b>S4.2: Do you often attend weekly Sunday Worship?</b>						
b)	A team of disciples commissioned to build God's Kingdom.	41	# of responses: 43						
c)	A business competing for members, focused on raising money.	1	37	1	4	1			
<b>S2.3: What is the mission of every real Church?</b>			86%	2%	9%	0%	2%		
a)	To use God's resources (tv, radio, etc) just to enrich ministers	2	<b>S4.3: Do you often attend Church School or Bible Study?</b>						
b)	To focus only on politics and social well-being of its members		# of responses: 43						
c)	To fulfill Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20.	41	13	2	9	7	12		
<b>S2.4: What is the message of every real Church?</b>			30%	5%	21%	16%	28%		
a)	The good news of God's love and salvation of John 3:16-21.	38	<b>S4.4: Do you often support or lead specific Church ministries?</b>						
b)	A chance for personal wealth via faith in biblical principles.	1	# of responses: 43						
c)	A chance for personal healing via faith in Isaiah 53:1-6.	4	27	5	3	8			
<b>S2.5: Who should benefit most from its message and mission?</b>			63%	0%	12%	7%	19%		
a)	Bishops, Pastors, Ministers, Televangelists.	2	<b>S4.5: Do you often pray for or share the gospel with unbelievers?</b>						
b)	Lost souls, the sick and diseased, the poor and hopeless.	37	# of responses: 43						
c)	Officers, Seniors, and other Lay Members.	4	21	6	9	3	4		
194	good answers	21	49%	14%	21%	7%	9%		
	80%	10%	total responses (215):						
			139	9	29	13	25		
			85%	4%	13%	6%	12%		

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