TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS TO ENGAGE COMMUNITY FROM THE
INSIDE OUT

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of

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Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS TO ENGAGE COMMUNITY FROM THE

INSIDE OUT

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While many churches are trying to figure out how to increase membership rolls and get the youth back in the church, churches are still closing at an alarming rate despite the best laid plans for evangelism and outreach. In my opinion, people are not leaving the church, per se; they are just finding other ways to be involved with the church that allow for them to pursue their livelihood, passions and other interest. It is my position that the issue with the church is not a decline in membership but a failure to remain relevant within a changing society. The practice of biblical or radical hospitality not only creates avenues of communication and relationship, but also removes barriers that would otherwise prevent interaction with strangers as well as the estranged.

Transformation begins with re-envisioning church space and ministry. In understanding hospitality as an intentional act, this project was designed to create events focused on the perceived needs of local residents and congregants. These needs include creating safe spaces for recreation, sharing of resources, as well as college readiness information and referral. All events were conducted at the church on Friday evenings and all day Saturday. This project goes beyond the traditional approach of outreach by attempting to engage with the community on an ongoing basis. The establishment of relationships was critical to the goal of this project. These relationships were forged through the narrative research process, which included one-on-one interviews.

This paper implores the local church to reconsider its identity from what it is now to what it can become if the church were more at home within its community as resident and/or neighbor. This shift will require a new reading of Scriptures that excavates the practice of hospitality as a spiritual discipline that preserves, engages, forms and transforms the host, guest, and stranger.

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Acknowledgements

IN MEMORY OF

Peggy Sica

and

Reverend Ellen Little

1 Corinthians 15:58

…Your labor in the Lord is not in vain

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Introduction

During the two-week 2015 Summer Intensive course at Drew University, I began

to formulate my narrative of concern amongst my professors and cohort members. In the

Theological Methods course, I was asked about the current narrative of concern within

my particular context. As an African American woman with ties to the African

Methodist Episcopal Church, the narrative of concern centered on the recent shooting in

South Carolina in Mother Emmanuel AME Church. Based on this event, my topics of

discussion focused on how the church might respond to and reduce risks of harm and

danger within the church without losing its identity of being welcoming and open to all

people. I expected that my research might become an exploration of sanctity and security

and a plan of action to reduce harm while increasing openness and welcome to all people.

I entered this research and ministry practice as a Local Lay Servant in the United

Methodist Church at New Brunswick (UMCNB). At the time of my licensing as a lay

servant and the start of this doctoral project, I was not fully aware of the polity and

governing structures of the United Methodist Church (UMC). As a result, I defaulted to

my past experiences with leadership in the church where the Pastor was the sole decision

maker. As a lay servant, I was aware of my limitations in congregational leadership and

decision-making. In order to implement this project in decency and order, I sought after

the support and guidance of the pastor to ensure alignment of my work with the mission

of the church.

During a meeting with the pastor of the church I asked what were the vision and

plans of the church. The pastor provided the standard answer of developing mature

Disciples of Christ. However, he did not mention the plan for accomplishing this goal. In explaining that I had an idea for a project topic, it seemed as if the idea might not be well received by the Church Council. At this point, I began to realize that the Church Council represented the leadership and decision making functions of the UMC. After assembling my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) which consisted of the Pastor and a few members of the Church Council, I pitched my idea to the group and it was agreed that another topic should be explored.

My life is marked by itinerancy. This motif of movement from place to place has been a constant in my life on all levels since birth. This project bears the marks of itinerancy as well in that I had to move swiftly from my initial project idea to one that was more amenable to the context and goals of UMCNB. What follows is my process of discovering a meaningful ministry practice specific to the UMCNB and its surrounding community.

In pursuit of calling and service, I found myself moving from one congregation to the next in my quest to see mainline denominational churches engaged in meaningful ministry within their local community. I would define meaningful ministry as one that seeks to articulate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in practical ways that foster ongoing relationships and subsequently bring about reconciliation and restoration.

At present, most churches seem to have some form of outreach in operation within their local parish. These outreach ministries may include: feeding the hungry, providing basic resources to needy families around the holidays, hosting temporary housing shelters, etc. While providing these goods and services are necessary, it seems to me that that local churches may be missing the mark in the area of gathering and

nurturing community in Christ within the congregation and surrounding community. The questions that arise are how are churches showing forth the rudiments of the Christian faith as it relates to loving the stranger and neighbor and does this act of loving stranger and neighbor garner reconciliation and restoration?

My qualm with ministries that are identified as outreach is that the word outreach itself seems to denote a measure of distance. As a noun, outreach is defined as "the extent or length of reaching out."[1] As a verb, outreach is defined as "to reach further than." Either way you look at, there is a space between the person or organization that is reaching out and the person or community that is on the receiving end. Something about the word outreach stirs up within me images of momentary involvement having no concern or idea about the long-term implications of the problem that is the precursor to the need. Outreach seems to say, "Here's a Band-Aid for your wound." It does not ask what caused the injury and if there were a way to prevent this injury from spreading and impacting others. As a result, outreach appears to fall short in making long-term to permanent change. In addition, fellowship, ongoing relationship, reconciliation and restoration seems to be missing in the act of outreach.

Considering that outreach is a response to a need, what happens when the needs of the community are not clearly identified? Most affluent communities don't always show signs of need like impoverished communities. Yet, spiritual, social, and emotional needs abound in all places. This idea further emphasizes a limitation of the outreach approach in connecting with the community.

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[1] Define Outreach, Dictionary.com. Accessed 3/7/2017, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/outreach

Could there be another way for a local church to connect with its community in a way that garners ongoing relationship, reconciliation and restoration? I am beginning to think that there might be an alternative to the generic outreach ministry that may foster ongoing relationships within the congregation and surrounding community. Perhaps there is another approach that upholds the ecclesial goals of the church to gather and nurture community in Christ that may lead towards reconciliation and restoration for individuals as well as communities.

What if congregations viewed themselves as residents of the communities where they are located and became involved in the life of its members as neighbors?" The more I thought about this idea, I had to ask myself: "What does being a resident look like for me in my own neighborhood?" I can honestly admit that when I first moved into my apartment complex, I would go to my car and to my apartment and vice versa without making any stops in between. Many congregations are like that as well. They drive into the community for worship service and leave without even noticing what is going on around them. However, after being at my complex for over a year now, I have met several new neighbors, some friendly and welcoming while others are still standoffish. Nevertheless, I have invited some of my neighbors to my home for dinner and conversation. I've even participated in community events outside of my apartment, which allowed me to meet more people and hear first-hand information about their experiences within the complex. This is the part that many congregations are missing within their ministry –walking along community members as a hospitable neighbor and hearing what is on their heart. This is not outreach. This is not targeting a specific

population to address a need. This is hospitality. This is about being present and offering presence right where you are and building relationships.

My task in this research and ministry practice is to incorporate the biblical themes of hospitality into the liturgy of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick to explore how adding this spiritual practice of hospitality might transform the church identity from a "Regional Church" to a "Resident Church." In the United Methodist Church, churches are grouped according to districts. The districts are comprised of several cities within a particular area. One day I asked a member of the church if UMCNB were a commuter church. The member replied that UMCNB was a Regional Church and went on to state that the congregants represent the region where the church is located.[2] As a result of this conversation, I defined Regional Church as a church where congregants represent the UMC district rather than its surrounding community and do not have ties or ongoing interaction with residents or other members of the community. Consequently, my definition of a Resident Church is a church that makes its home within a geographic area, functions within its immediate environment as a neighbor and engages actively in the community life, affairs, and concerns of its neighborhood. The possible collateral benefits of becoming a Resident Church may result in the church's becoming more actively engaged in meeting the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of congregants as well as residents and other members of the area. It's not about where the congregants begin their journey to the church, but what they become once they gather in New Brunswick for worship and ministry.

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[2] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

While this may sound like a simple and noteworthy goal, I have discovered that the terrain one must travel to even begin a discussion on positioning congregations to make this shift from a regional to a resident orientation is like embarking upon a road trip that is filled with unexpected twist and detours, U-turns, dead-ends, backseat drivers and redirected traffic. To further complicate this journey towards church and community engagement, it seems that if one would take on such a task without having authority of office (i.e. being identified as a Pastor or Deacon), then that person would have to find a seat on the passenger side of the vehicle hoping that the driver will take heed to his or her direction towards the destination.

Chapter 1

Where Do We Go from Here: Narrative of Concern for A Church In Transition

"There's no place like home." Many may remember that famous line, spoken by Dorothy, from the movie The Wizard of Oz. After being caught up in a whirlwind and embarking upon an unforgettable adventure in an uncharted land, immediately Dorothy finds herself longing to return home. Her quest to get back home seems to represent the need for grounding, familiarity, and purpose.

When I accepted the call for ministry to serve the people of God and support the work of the church, I knew that I no longer wanted to serve as a volunteer but as an ordained minister. As a result, I also accepted the requirements for ordination, which in most mainline denominations includes going to seminary to obtain a Master of Divinity Degree. However, after enrolling in seminary, it seemed like my entire life got turned upside down. Around this same time, I had to relocate my residence and subsequently my church home. I also found myself in a short-lived relationship that cost me mentally, personally, and financially. My usual supports were gone and it seemed like I was being tossed to and fro by a whirlwind of experience. Not unlike Dorothy, I felt like I was suspended in air, my feet dangling desperately, as I tried to obtain my footing. At times I was tempted to stop my process. I exclaimed: "this is for the birds." Even though I had formed new relationships and began working in various ministry settings, I longed for the

familiar comforts of a church home and the community from which I had become

separated. Despite how I felt, I keep pushing and rising above my discomforts

and uncertainties. I was determined to finish my educational process or else regret not

doing so. I continued to move through unfamiliar and uncharted territory in my

education and personal life. It seemed like the closer I got to obtaining my Master of

Divinity degree, the more I began to look towards the future and a new beginning. I was

coming into a new season of my life that required new thinking, a new community and a

new church home.

After completing my Master of Divinity degree and searching for and settling

down in a new church home, finally, I exhaled. For the first time in a long time, I could

feel the ground beneath my feet in a place that felt familiar but was very different from

any other place I had been. I began to feel a sense of purpose and connection at the

United Methodist Church at New Brunswick and became a professing member in the fall

of 2014.

You Are Here: Positioning The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick In The

Context Of Its Surrounding Community

I discovered the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick while I was living

on campus at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and pursing my Master of Divinity

degree. The location and accessibility of the church was convenient and the Sunday

worship offered a meaningful liturgical experience.

Being a seminary student and concerned about the relationship between church

and community, I seem to have a sixth sense that seeks to understand, probe, and

question a church's vesting within its community. I use the term vesting here to refer to

persons' or organizations' stability, interest, and commitment to the overall betterment of the communities in which they reside.

The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick is located in the downtown area of New Brunswick in the heart of the city's entertainment district. Also nearby are Rutgers University, New Brunswick Campus; Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center, and the New Jersey Transit Train Station. New Brunswick has been deemed "a successful model of redevelopment in New Jersey."[1] While the city has received a significant consumer-driven facelift, I cannot perceive what the cultural and community life is like for the residents or the congregation itself. In addition, because this area is bustling with commerce, entertainment and dining venues, the spiritual, social and emotional needs of the residents are not readily apparent. However, census data provide some insight into the demographics of the city of New Brunswick as a starting point to access the makeup of the community. According to Census Data in 2013, New Brunswick had a total population of 55,831 and was designated 100% urban. The racial makeup of the city reveals: 53.4% Hispanic, 24% White, 14.3% Black and 8.2% Asian. The median age in New Brunswick is twenty-three.[2]

In the past few months the newly appointed senior pastor of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick has been on a mission to ascertain the community life of the congregation and its connection with the surrounding community. In efforts to accomplish this mission, the pastor brought in a consultant to conduct listening groups

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[1] "New Brunswick As A Model For Redevelopment," On The Banks, accessed online July 13, 2015, http://www.onthebanks.com/2010/8/29/1656943/new-brunswick-as-a-model-for.

[2] "City-Data.Com," New Brunswick, NJ, accessed online July 13, 2015, http://www.city-data.com/city/New-Brunswick-New-Jersey.html.

and opened a room to the congregation before and after service for prayer and meditation.

Most recently, the praise and celebration hour that was once conducted in the basement

of the church has moved into the sanctuary so that all congregants and visitors who arrive

before the eleven a.m. service can take part in this praise and worship experience. This

service continues to be held in the sanctuary.

<div align="center">The Inside View</div>

Membership Demographics at UMCNB

One of the first things I notice when I enter a church is its ethnic identity. The

UMCNB is diverse. A significant number of its congregants are from various African

countries as well as the Caribbean. I have also noticed a few congregants of Indian and

Asian descent. More specially, based on church census information, the congregational

demographics during the time of this research and ministry practice are as follows:

- Total Membership: 394

- Median Age of Females/Males: 45/44

- Ethnic/racial percentages (of those identified):

  o 23% Caucasian/European

  o 3% Asian Indian

  o 1% Chinese/Japanese/Korean

  o 71% Afro American/Black

  o 1% Hispanic 1% Multi-racial

In a later section of this paper, I will discuss how church demographics align with the

community's demographic.

UMCNB Leadership Demographics

The leadership demographics match the ethnic demographics of the two largest groups within the congregation. However, Hispanic, Asian or Indian members seem not to be represented in the leadership of the church. There seems to be no plan or system for recruiting additional congregants for lay leadership in the church. As I recall, my process in getting involved in ministry at the church was through a cover letter and resume submitted to the pastor who later referred me to a Staff Parish Relations committee member. In other words, it was through my own initiative. However, I have been involved with churches that were intentional in garnering congregational participation through Ministry Fairs and other in-house events to make congregants aware of leadership needs.

General Governing Structures within the UMC

Who's in charge?

"Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" ~Dorothy, Wizard of OZ Thinking about who makes decisions and has the final say on what happens or does not happen in the life of congregation, I assumed the pastor would hold that authority. Before suggesting or doing anything at church, I thought one should first talk it over with the pastor to see if he/she will support and participate in the endeavor. This has always been my experience coming from a non-denominational church setting. But my experience of authority in the church would not be a safe assumption in the United Methodist Church tradition. It was at this point that that I would now learn the institutional structures that govern and guide the United Methodist Church.

There is a difference in being a member who attends and receives the ministry of church and a member who actually participates in the development of the ministry of the church. While I was a member attending UMCNB, the congregation had a different feel. I was moved by the warmth of the people, the attentiveness provided by congregants during the sharing of the peace, and the overall fellowship during the coffee hour. In short, things were welcoming. However, when I became a member engaged in the actual development of ministry, I experienced a highly formalized system that is not easily perceived by a visitor or member who merely attends a Sunday worship service. There are rules and regulations and finding one's way through the system required a willing tour guide. One gathers this type of information through a formation process; whether that be a bible study class, church meeting, or possibly a new member/seeker orientation course for the United Methodist Church. At the time of this research, there was no formalized course for visitors or members to learn about the polity and institutional structure of the UMC. However, when asked, there were more than enough capable individuals to provide guidance about the operations of the UMC.

I find that the governing document *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (The Discipline)* is similar in structure if not in content to the organizing documents for a public sector or nonprofit entity. For instance, the polity, leadership structure, purpose and constitution of the UMC as recorded in the UMC Book of Discipline, has the same intent as a public agency's administrative policy and by-laws. Just as a public organization's leadership periodically review administrative policy, so too does the United Methodist Church revise and amend the Book of Discipline at least every four years.

The Discipline is a governing resource for the UMC in general. More specifically, *The Discipline* delegates decision making authority for local churches to the Church Council.

The UMC defines *The Discipline* as:

> A fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work and procedures of The United Methodist Church. Each General Conference amends the Book of Discipline, and the actions of the General Conference are reflected in the quadrennial revision. Often referred to as The Discipline.[3]

The Discipline was first published in 1784. The founder of Methodism (John Wesley) and the United Methodist Church are the noted authors the *UMC Book of Discipline*. The *UMC Book of Discipline* is referenced as follows:

> The basic unit in the book of Discipline is the paragraph (¶) rather than the page, chapter or section. The paragraphs are numbered consecutively within each chapter or section, but many numbers are skipped between parts, chapters, and sections in order to allow for future enactments…[4]

Unfortunately, the print version of *The Discipline* is not provided free of charge. There is an electronic version (e-book format) that is provided at lower cost than the print version. There are also web sites that allow for free online browsing of the book. However, for those who are not Internet savvy, the print version comes at a higher markup. As a result of this, there may be some barriers to accessing this important book of the UMC.

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[3] "Glossary: Book of Discipline, The" United Methodist Church. accessed online. August 31, 2016, http: //www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary-book-of-discipline-the.

[4] Content Page. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012 (online version). https://issuu.com/abingdonpress/docs/9781426718120_online_part1. accessed online 8/31/2016.

The Church Council Meeting and Decision Making

Church Council meetings were critical to the implementation of this research

because it was in these meetings that I kept my LAC informed of the project's status and

presented biblical and theological themes related to the project. Also, this was where I

solicited support and participation from the LAC and other interested parties. Finally,

these meetings were instrumental in familiarizing myself with key leaders within the

congregation and getting approval to implement the project. With that in mind, I will

share the rationale for the existence and outline for the procedures of Church Councils as

found in *The Discipline*.

> *The Discipline*, delineates the role of the Church Council as follows:
>
> ¶ 252.1. Purpose - The Church Council shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life. It shall envision, plan, implement, and annually evaluate the mission and ministry of the church. The Church Council shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference (¶ 244).
>
> 2. Mission and Ministry - Nurture, outreach, and witness ministries and their accompanying responsibilities include:
> a) The nurturing ministries of the congregation shall give attention to but not be limited to education, worship, Christian formation, membership care, small groups, and stewardship. Attention must be given to the needs of individuals and families of all ages.
> b) The outreach ministries of the church shall give attention to local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy. These ministries include church and society, global ministries, higher education and campus ministry, health and welfare, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and the status and role of women.
> c) The witness ministries of the church shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; Lay Servant Ministries; and other means that give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ.
> d) The leadership development and resourcing ministries shall give attention to the ongoing preparation and development of lay and clergy leaders for the ministry of the church (¶ 258.1).

e) The nurture, outreach, and witness ministries and their accompanying responsibilities shall include consideration of (i) the election of a prayer coordinator to promote prayer and mobilize the local church to pray, (ii) establishing a prayer room or designated place for prayer and prayer resources, and (iii) encouraging intentional prayer for the pastoral leadership of the local church.

3. Meetings - a) The council shall meet at least quarterly. The chairperson or the pastor may call special meetings.
b) In order for the council to give adequate consideration to the missional purpose of the local church, it is recommended that the first agenda item at each meeting be related to its ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness. The administrative and supportive responsibilities of the church will then be given attention. It is recommended that the council use a consensus/discernment model of decision-making.

4. Other Responsibilities - It will also be the responsibility of the Church Council to:
a) review the membership of the local church;
b) fill interim vacancies occurring among the lay officers of the church between sessions of the annual charge conference;
c) establish the budget on recommendation of the committee on finance and ensure adequate provision for the financial needs of the church;
d) recommend to the charge conference the salary and other remuneration of the pastor(s) and staff members after receiving recommendations from the committee on pastor-parish relations (staff-parish relations);
e) review the recommendation of the committee on pastor-parish relations regarding provision of adequate housing for the pastor(s), and report the same to the charge conference for approval. Housing provisions shall comply with the annual conference housing policy and parsonage standards. Housing shall not be considered as part of compensation or remuneration except to the extent provided for in denominational pension and benefit plans.

5. Membership - The charge conference will determine the size of the Church Council. Members of the Church Council shall be involved in the mission and ministry of the congregation as defined in ¶ 252.2. The membership of the council may consist of as few as eleven persons or as many as the charge conference deems appropriate. The council shall include persons who represent the program ministries of the church as outlined in ¶ 243.
The membership shall include but not be limited to the following:
a) the chairperson of the Church Council;
b) the lay leader;
c) the chairperson and/or a representative of the pastor-parish relations committee;
d) the chairperson and/or a representative of the committee on finance;
e) the chairperson and/or a representative of the board of trustees;
f) the church treasurer;

g) a lay member to annual conference;
h) the president and/or a representative of the United Methodist Men;
i) the president and/or a representative of the United Methodist Women;
j) a young adult representative
k) a representative of the United Methodist Youth;
l) the pastor(s).

6. Quorum - The members present and voting at any duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum. [5]

For the most part, the Church Council, which also served as this project LAC, was responsive to my presentations and plans. The Church Council provides direction on how to access space resources, how to complete requisitions forms and other protocols. They seemed to enjoy the presentations and provided their undivided attention and support during the meeting. However, to my chagrin, for a significant majority of the Church Council/LAC members their participation began and ended in the Church Council meeting.

The Church Council at the UMCNB meets faithfully every second Tuesday of the month in the Fellowship Hall. Prior to the meeting, members receive an email confirming the date and time of meeting and directions on forwarding any agenda items to the Church Council chairperson. The meeting opens with prayers followed by the acknowledgement of absent members and then turns to the listed agenda items. The meeting also closes in prayer.

In times past, many people had attended these meetings. I could remember meetings where there was standing room only. However, attendance dwindled down

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[5] Church Council, United Methodist Church. Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012, accessed on 8/31/2016, http: //www.umc.org/what-we-believe/para-252-the-church-council .

during the time of this research. Nevertheless, the meetings seem to be fulfilling the

attendance standards as set in *The Discipline*.

Leadership at UMCNB

The leadership at the UMCNB consists of a Church Council (as described above),

Staff Parish Relations Committee, Pastor, Trustee Board, Certified and Local Lay

Servants, a Lay Leader, and various committees on outreach, finance, and other special

projects. In order to understand how this project was supposed to function, it is important

to identify the core leaders who comprise the various decision making bodies within the

UMC. This structure allows congregants to know who is responsible for what and to

whom they should go when questions arise about church matters and activities. In the

UMC, the pastor is the designated leader of the congregation and has a lot of

responsibility; however, the pastor is not the sole decision making authority.

Below are brief descriptions that outline the titles and roles of these leadership

positions at the UMCNB taken from *The Discipline*:

> ¶ 258.2. There shall be elected annually by the charge conference in each local
> church a committee on pastor-parish relations or **staff-parish relations** [emphasis
> originated from the text) who are professing members of the local church or
> charge or associate members (¶ 227), except in cases where central conference
> legislation or local law provides otherwise. People serving on this committee
> must be engaged in and attentive to their Christian spiritual development so as to
> give proper leadership in the responsibilities with which the committee is
> entrusted.
> In conducting its work, the committee shall identify and clarify its values for
> ministry. It shall engage in biblical and theological reflections on the mission of
> the church, the primary task, and ministries of the local church.6
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> The committee shall reflect biblically and theologically on the role and work of
> the pastor(s) and staff as they carry out their leadership responsibilities. The
> committee shall assist the pastor(s) and staff in assessing their gifts, maintaining

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6 ¶ 258.2. Pastor-Parish Relations Committee. United Methodist Church., accessed online 9/7/16,
http: //www.umc.org/what-we-believe/para-2582-pastor-parish-relations-committee

health holistically and work-life balance, and setting priorities for leadership and service. It is the responsibility of the committee to communicate with the committee on nominations and leadership development and/or the Church Council when there is a need for other leaders or for employed staff to perform in areas where utilization of the gifts of the pastor(s) and staff proves an inappropriate stewardship of time.

¶ 340. **Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors**-1. The responsibilities of elders are derived from the authority given in ordination. Elders have a fourfold ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service and thus serve in the local church and in extension ministries in witness and service of Christ's love and justice. Elders are authorized to preach and teach the Word, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments, and to order the life of the church for service in mission and ministry as pastors, superintendents, and bishops. 2. Licensed pastors share with the elders the responsibilities and duties of a pastor for this fourfold ministry, within the context of their appointment.7

¶ 2533. **Board of Trustees' Powers and Limitations**- 1. Subject to the direction of the charge conference, the board of trustees shall have the supervision, oversight, and care of all real property owned by the local church and of all property and equipment acquired directly by the local church or by any society, board, class, commission, or similar organization connected therewith, provided that the board of trustees shall not violate the rights of any local church organization elsewhere granted in the Discipline; provided further, that the board of trustees shall not prevent or interfere with the pastor in the use of any of the said property for religious services or other proper meetings or purposes recognized by the law, usages, and customs of The United Methodist Church, or permit the use of said property for religious or other meetings without the consent of the pastor or, in the pastor's absence, the consent of the district superintendent; and provided further, that pews in The United Methodist Church shall always be free; and provided further, that the church local conference may assign certain of these duties to a building committee as set forth in ¶ 2544 or the chairperson of the parsonage committee, if one exists.8

¶ 133. Mission as Active Expectancy **[Lay Servant Ministers]**-The ministry of all Christians consists of service for the mission of God in the world. The mission of God is best expressed in the prayer that Jesus taught his first disciples: Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as in heaven. All Christians, therefore, are to live in active expectancy: faithful in service of God and their neighbor;

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7 Book of Discipline ¶ 340. Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors. United Methodist Church., accessed online 9/7/16, http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/para-340-responsibilities-and-duties-of-elders-and-licensed-pastors.

8 Board of Trustees, The United Methodist Church. http: //www.umc.org/what-we-believe/board-of-trustees accessed online 9/7/2016.

faithful in waiting for the fulfillment of God's universal love, justice, and peace on earth as in heaven.

Pending this time of fulfillment, the ministry of all Christians is shaped by the teachings of Jesus. The handing on of these teachings is entrusted to leaders who are gifted and called by God to appointed offices in the church: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11-12). For these persons to lead the church effectively, they must embody the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries and servant leadership. Through these ministries and leadership, congregations of the church are faithfully engaged in the forming of Christian disciples and vitally involved in the mission of God in the world.[9]

There is no wonder why the UMC and more specifically the UMCNB relies

heavily upon the work of the Lay Servant Ministry. According to The Discipline:

¶ 134. Calling and Gifts of Leadership-The United Methodist Church has traditionally recognized these gifts and callings in the ordained offices of elder and deacon. The United Methodist tradition has recognized that laypersons as well as ordained persons are gifted and called by God to lead the Church. The servant leadership of these persons is essential to the mission and ministry of congregations. They help to form Christian disciples in covenant community within the local congregation through spiritual formation and guidance for Christian living in the world.[10]

The former pastor of this church directed me to the Lay Servant Ministry despite

my expressed interest in becoming an ordained elder in the UMC. I believe this may

have been due to the fact that the job description for the ordained elder (which I have not

listed here in full detail, but is available in its entirety in *The Discipline*) does not seem to

allow for ordained elders to be bi-vocational leaders; i.e. ordained elders are exclusively

employed by the church and only perform work that is required of the UMC as an

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[9] Section 3: Servant Ministry and Servant Leadership. The United Methodist Church., accessed online 9/7/16, http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/section-3-servant-ministry-and-servant-leadership.

[10] Section 3: Servant Ministry and Servant Leadership. The United Methodist Church., accessed online 9/7/16, **http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/section-3-servant-ministry-and-servant-leadership.**

institutional system. It was my understanding that elders do not have second jobs outside of their calling to the office of elder. However, in my opinion, the job description for the ordained elder does not appear to give the pastor room to be fully present in pastoral work either –which I define as: direct care to the spiritual, social and emotional needs of local congregants and surrounding community. Instead, the job description seems to require that the ordained elder be more of an ecclesial agent –functioning in multiple areas of the UMC district, conference as well as national and worldwide levels. Hence, the role of the Lay Servant is crucial to meeting the missional and pastoral needs of the local congregation and surrounding community.

<div align="center">

The Way We Were: Self-Identification As A Regional Church

And The Implications Thereof

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As mentioned in the Introduction, I made an attempt to assess whether or not church members resided in the area. I asked one of the members if this particular congregation was considered a commuter church; i.e., do the church members commute to attend services or do they reside in the community? The response revealed that this local congregation was a Regional Church as mentioned in the introduction. The church member further explained that the church membership represented the region or the UMC district. I walked away from this conversation unsure if the majority of the congregants lived in New Brunswick or elsewhere. I later found out during a review of residential zip codes of church members that only a small amount of members lived within a five-mile radius of the church's own zip code. In addition, these zip codes did not indicate the households that were still actively involved with the church.

The self-identification of the UMCNB as a regional church may explain why outreach ministries at the church are general in scope and seasonal in operation. The church does participate in the sheltering of homeless men on a two-week rotation between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day with a consortium of other local congregations. There is also an Angel Tree project during Christmas time.[11] In addition, the church makes donations to a Thanksgiving program to feed the poor called Elijah's Promise. I believe the church needs to have an ongoing, significant and meaningful presence in its community. I feel compelled through the work of this research and ministry practice to assist in leading this church into the community as an engaged resident and concerned neighbor. I begin to wonder: if the UMCNB is a Regional Church (i.e., congregants representing the district around the church rather than its neighborhood with no connection or ongoing relationship with resident or other members of the community), might it become a Resident Church (a church that makes its home within a geographic area and functions within its immediate environment as a neighbor and is actively engaged in the community life, affairs, and concerns of its neighborhood). It seems as if the pastor of the church also questions the connectedness of the church to the surrounding community, which may be another reason why a consultant was brought on board to assess the church's internal and external connectedness as well as other underlying issues.

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[11] Angel Tree is a holiday project that includes providing gifts to less fortunate families in need. The United Methodist Church New Brunswick partners with the local Catholic Charities Diocesan in assisting families in need for the holidays.

The Outside View

Defining what it means to be a Resident Church

The purpose of this project is to incorporate the biblical themes of hospitality into the liturgy of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick and to explore how adding this spiritual practice of hospitality might transform the church's identity from a Regional Church into a Resident Church.

By my own definition and as aforementioned in the introduction of this paper, a Resident Church is at home within its immediate environment and is actively engaged in the community life, affairs, and concerns of its neighborhood. It's not about where the congregants live in the UMC district, but what happens when congregants gather as the local church in the City of New Brunswick for worship and ministry.

The possible collateral benefits of becoming a Resident Church may result in the church's establishing ongoing relationships and becoming more actively engaged in meeting the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of congregants as well as those needs within the surrounding community.

Barriers

Changing of the Guard: Leadership in Transition

During the time of this research and ministry practice, the leadership at the UMCNB experienced significant loss. The church has a newly appointed pastor who has been in place for a little over one year. The newly appointed youth minister resigned suddenly. The certified Lay Leader in charge of the worship committee died; and shortly thereafter, a retired pastor who was also instrumental in the liturgical life of the

congregation died as well. There were other committee members who relocated and were no longer serving at the church at the time of this research.

If ever there were a time to revive and strengthen the ministry of the laity, this was that time.

Organizational and Leadership Challenges

Based on the description of the Church Council duties, the Church Council accomplished an important task: they verified the biblical and theological basis for the planning and implementation of this research project. The Discipline does not require or rule out Church Council participation in the delivery of ministry in line with the ministry of nurture, witness, and mission. However, the fact that the Church Council did not fully participate in the ministries that they approved seems to confirm an aforementioned idea about outreach and distancing themselves from the work and purpose of the ministry events.

If one were to take into consideration the temperament of an ordained elder (which may not be clearly observable during board examinations or at other times during the ordination process) and couple this information with Bowen's Family/Organizational System Theory concepts of over-functioning and under-functioning, it becomes clear: ordained elders in the UMC, according to their job description in The Discipline and their personal dispositions, may be susceptible to over-functioning in one or more areas of their ecclesial responsibilities; which subsequently leads to under-functioning in other areas.

During the course of this research and ministry practice, the pastor was not available to participate in any of the events outlined in this project. The pastor did not

respond to requests for assistance in announcing the events outlined in this project to congregants from the pulpit, which may have rallied more support and participation of the congregation. I am not sure if this was because of a lack of interest in the work that was being done through this ministerial research, the latent distancing from the work of this ministry of this project, or other denominational priorities. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the pastor's lack of participation had a definite impact on the outcome of this ministry project at UMCNB.

Lay servants, like ordained elders and licensed pastors, are called to serve the church in dynamic and spirit-led ways. Lay servants can preach and lead all types of ministry and play an important role in cultivating community, pastoral care and other vital signs of thriving congregations. However, these individuals may not be able (or have a desire) to meet the rigorous requirements of ordination as set forth in The Discipline. Therefore, lay servants function as non-ordained volunteers for the church. Just like volunteers at any organization, it is unlikely that lay servants are afforded compensation for their service. But, unlike volunteers in any other organizations, lay servants might be responsible for using their personal funds to carry out ministry that is directly related to the mission of the local church without any financial support of the local church.

This ministry project did incur some financial expenses in its delivery. The cost for the delivery of ministry was primarily related to the copyright license to view movies in the church, food for participants, gift cards for volunteer presenters and other materials associated with the college readiness event. As a local lay servant and a member of the church where this ministry project was implemented, there was no offer of financial

support to help with the cost of ministry delivered to congregants and community members. As a student, I was prepared to cover all costs for the delivery of this ministry project.

During a one-on-one interview I conducted with the former youth minister, I discovered that while the youth minister was in the process of planning a block party for the youth, the pastor and trustees told him that he would have to obtain and pay for all permits for the event out of his own money.[12] The youth minster informed me of this event as well as a few other events planned for the youth at the church that did not come into fruition.[13] It was not clear if there were other issues in addition to personal finances that kept the youth minister from carrying out youth ministry activities. However, this information further supports the idea stated earlier regarding lay servants whom the church expects to volunteer their time as well as their finances to support the work of the local church who are not supported in their work to deliver ministry to the congregants and surrounding community. I am not sure if this is standard operation of the denomination or if it just the practice of this local church.

Generational Clash: We and Them

While one obvious distinction between the UMCNB congregation and its surrounding community is its ethnic make-up, the most glaring difference is the median age of the congregation and community. As reported earlier, the median age of the congregants is forty-four and the median age of the city of New Brunswick resident is

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[12] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

[13] All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

twenty-three. This age difference of nearly twenty years reveals two different

generations' views of society, institutions, societal roles and expectations. It is the

difference between Generation X and Generation Y also known as Millennials.

Generations matter in understanding one's perceptions and responses in a

particular context. According to David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group[14] :

> A generation is an analytical tool for understanding culture and the people within it. It simply reflects the idea that people who are born during a certain period of time are influenced by a unique set of circumstances and global events, moral and social values, technologies, and cultural and behavioral norms.[15]

> Social scientists contend that there are four generations in American society: the silent generation, the baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y — also known as the millennial…" The silent generation was born between 1930-1945… The baby boomers were born between 1946 -1964… Generation X was born between 1965 and 1979 or 1981… The millennials were born between 1980 and 2000.[16]

A defining contrast between Generation X and Generation Y (millennials) reveals the

following: "…millennials, the largest generation since the baby boomers, represent a

shift in generational mindsets, moving from the skepticism found in many of Generation

X to a sensibility that is more free-spirited, flexible, and open-minded."[17]

One missional area that the church is discussing involves designing an outreach

ministry to draw in the surrounding population. As I mentioned in the introduction, this

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[14]The Barna Group is "A private, nonpartisan research and resource company" excerpt taking from book cover "You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church… And Rethinking Faith."

[15] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church…And Rethinking Faith.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2011), 246.

[16] Sharon A DeVaney, "Understanding the Millennial Generation." *Journal Of Financial Service Professionals* 69, no. 6 (November 2015): 11-14. *Business Source Elite*, EBSCO*host* (accessed 9/5/2016).

[17] Laura L. Lundin, "Millennial Generation." *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (September 2013): *Research Starters*, EBSCO*host* accessed 9/5/2016.

idea of outreach is antiquated. Outreach seems to engender an idea of We and Them. In addition, while this approach appears to be participative, it also promotes an idea of authority that We know what is best while They are still trying to figure things out. To further this analogy, it seems that while We (Generation X) are tied to our religious structures, They (i.e. the millennials) could not care less about organized religion. Based on the free-spirited mindset of millennials, the mere thought of being targeted for return to the religious fold would be greeted with resistance –as the need for belonging now takes place in various and accessible forms outside of the church.

So now what? Where do we go from here? As we move onto our next chapter, we will see how these and other considerations of this context will play out in this project methodology and results.

Chapter 2

Getting from Here to There: Theological and Biblical Foundations

Theological Foundation

My source for theological reflection originates from The Blackwell Reader in

Pastoral and Practical Theology edited by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison. In the

introduction to Chapter Nine, entitled "Some Straw for Bricks, a Basic Introduction to

Theological Reflection," Pattison identifies the basic elements of theological reflection

when he describes theological reflection as a critical conversation. He further states:

> Adopting and adapting ideas of critical correlation, interpretation, dialogue, and
> hermeneutics, Pattison suggests the model of "critical conversation" as a fairly
> simple way of trying to understand and think through the complex relationships
> between situations and theological and other ideas and theories. Pattison argues
> that People who wish to engage in creative theological reflection might see
> themselves as being engaged in a three way 'conversation' or dialogue between
> their own ideas, belief, feelings, and perceptions; the beliefs, assumptions, and
> perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation
> which is being considered.[1]

Before I delve into Pattison's mode of theological reflection, I would like to first identify

the participants in this three-way conversation. The first voice in this conversation is my

own personal views, beliefs and assumptions about Christian Hospitality, which seem to

mirror a universal/catholic view. The second voice is that of my denomination as

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

reflected in the Methodist understanding and practice of Christian Hospitality. The contemporary situation (third voice) that I will consider is the practice of Christian Hospitality specifically within my local context, the UMCNB and its desire to extend into the surrounding community.

<div align="center">The Personal View</div>

In my experience, the church is a vital member of the community because of its accessibility to the residents and its historical relevance as the first line of contact in meeting the spiritual as well as the social, educational and physical needs of community members.

Growing up in an urban neighborhood, and becoming a part of a local nondenominational church, I found that congregation to be very interested in engaging with residents' spiritual and social needs. In some cases, relationships would be formed through addressing a particular need, which would then lead some individuals to attend Sunday worship services and/or Bible study gatherings. Some even converted to Christianity as a result of individuals' sharing the goodness of the Lord in ways that did not seem like evangelizing but still communicated that the church was present to help in time of need.

As I continued to grow in my faith, I also began to realize that faith-based service to the community was not just for the saving of souls. I believe that salvation is holistic and seeks to redeem the soul and the ways we communicate and intersect in social systems. As a result, when the local church extends hospitality to its congregation and surrounding community, God's salvific work can begin to impact lives and systems that are touched by the church's ministry.

There will always be a call to communicate hospitality through the Gospel of

Jesus Christ in ways that show forth the love, care and grace that God made available to

all people with the hope of bringing about transformation and liberation. This idea

resonates with the claims of Stephen B. Bevans (author of Models of Contextual

Theology and Louis J. Luzbetak Professor of Theology and Culture at Catholic

Theological Union, Chicago) as well as Roger P. Schroeder (associate professor of

missiology at Catholic Theological Union) in their work entitled Constants in Context:

A Theology of Mission for Today.[2] Their Six Constants of Mission are: Jesus, the

Church, the future, salvation, human nature, and the human as summarized in the

following questions:

1. Who is Jesus Christ and what is his meaning?
2. What is the nature of the Christian Church?
3. How does the church regard its eschatological future
4. What is the nature of the salvation it preaches?
5. How does the church value the human?
6. What is the value of human culture as the context in which the gospel is preached?[3]

It is my opinion that mission and hospitality can be viewed as one and the same as

they both communicate the collaboration of Divine and human interaction in the world to

accomplish God's will. So with this idea in mind, I would like to juxtapose the six

constants of mission with my notion of the practice of hospitality as follows:

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[2] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroder, *Constants In Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 34.

[3] Ibid., 34.

1. Who is Jesus Christ and what is his meaning?

Jesus is both the host and content of hospitality sent into the world to accomplish God's will.

2. What is the nature of the Christian Church?

The Christian Church is the servant of the host assisting in accomplishing God's will through the leading of the Holy Spirit in preaching, nurturing, gathering, and sending community.

3. How does the church regard its eschatological future?

To be regarded as "Good and Faithful Servants" and to be received into eternity for service that was well done.

4. What is the nature of the salvation it preaches?

The nature of salvation is spiritual, physical, and social. God desires to redeem the souls of humankind, meet human needs, and transform the society in which we live through hospitable acts of the church

5. How does the church value the human?

The church values the human as a guest or sojourner in the world in need of safety, guidance, and other resources to meet physical and social needs. But most importantly, humankind is in need of the revelation of Gods plan for redemption and the church hopes to convey that message through acts of hospitality.

6. What is the value of human culture as the context in which the gospel is preached?

Human culture is the platform or platter, if you will, by which the gospel is served

allowing it to be presented in a way that is accessible, meaningful and useful to

those who would receive its message.

Bevans and Schroeder cite two contemporary theologians, Justo L. Gonzalez and

Dorothee Solle, and introduces Solle's Three Types of Theology as:

Orthodox/conservative, liberal, and radical/liberation theology. Gonzalez simplifies

these three distinct perspectives respectively, as Type A, Type B, and Type C Theology.

I find my views on hospitality and the relationship between the Church and the

surrounding communities to be in alignment with Type C or Radical/Liberation theology.

According to Bevans and Schroeder:

> Type C theology understands mission as commitment to liberation transformation. …It is a theological perspective that remains centered on the mystery of Christ while always acknowledging the importance and dignity of the human. …God relates directly to the world both in Christ and in the Spirit. …God is engaged in the world's history through the working of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son. …Salvation is human and cosmic wholeness; it is radically this-worldly, but it is not simply material well-being or prosperity; it is about healing, because the world and humanity have been scarred by sin. …The church's mission is the proclamation, service, and witness to the fullness of humanity. It is in the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, the 'annunciation' of the good news of liberation and the 'denunciation' of the situations and structures that hinder human freedom and human development.[4]

Where there is no relationship, there can be less of a chance for liberation and

transformation. Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible defines hospitality as: "The practice

of receiving and extending friendship to strangers." Hospitality is the vehicle by which

the church can initiate a relationship with humanity for the purposes of liberation and

transformation; further, through hospitality the church can respond to injustice and social

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[4] Bevans. *Constants In Context,* 61-70.

inequalities. From this perspective, I find myself in the company and trajectory of John

Wesley—the founder of Methodism.

> For Wesley, there was no religion but social religion, no holiness but social
> holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot
> be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the
> church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to
> the world.[5]

<div align="center">The Denominational View</div>

The slogan of the United Methodist Church is: "Open Hearts, Open Mind, and

Open Doors." There is a need to define how this saying applies to UMCNB and its

understanding of hospitality. Being open will allow access but does not speak to how one

would be treated upon entry to the congregation, its liturgy and polity. Is this openness

one-sided; i.e., does it communicate only one's access into the gathered community or

does this openness speak to the church entry into the larger society or perhaps both?

During a Church Council meeting, I provided an introduction on hospitality entitled "The

Continuum of Biblical-Based Hospitality." I asked the participants what comes to mind

when they hear the word hospitality. Some of the responses included "food, fellowship,

and welcome." The responses reflected the outcome of hospitality; however, no one

mentioned the host, strangers, or guest – the participants within the act of hospitality. To

further elaborate on the importance of presence in the act of hospitality, as well as show

the difference between hospitality and charity, I followed up with another question:

Would it be ok to invite someone to your home and not be there when they arrived? The

answer was a resounding "No." I then stated, you are right to say no as that would be

rude and not hospitable. Then I asked would it be ok if you were not home but left the

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[5] "What We Believe," United Methodist Church, accessed November 8, 2015,
http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage.

door open with a note telling the guest as well as strangers to come in and "help themselves" to whatever they needed? The "No" was louder followed by a few chuckles and a comment that conveyed a message of that action being perceived as irresponsible. I informed the participants the last scenario might be viewed as charitable but not hospitable.

It was not a surprise that the participants at the Church Council meeting would understand hospitality with regard to only goods and services provided as a byproduct of the act of hospitality. I make this assumption because I was addressing the core leadership of the church who are responsible for making decisions regarding the management of church resources. Their mindset clearly reflected the culture of the Church Council as described in the Book of Discipline mentioned in Chapter One. Lastly, and based on the aforementioned comments, I would even venture to say that the Church's self-identification as a Regional Church clearly reveals an identity that weighs more heavily on what it does in the form of outreach than on fostering relationships; i.e., presence within the congregation and its community.

It is safe to conclude that Church Council members would understand hospitality as a function within the ministry of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church as described in *The Discipline*:

> The outreach ministries of the church shall give attention to local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy. These ministries include church and society, global ministries, higher education and campus ministry, health and welfare, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and the status and role of women.

> The witness ministries of the church shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; Lay Servant Ministries; and other means that give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ.

> The leadership development and resourcing ministries shall give attention to the ongoing preparation and development of lay and clergy leaders for the ministry of the church (¶ 258.1).[6]

For the UMCNB, hospitality appears to be synonymous with outreach. The church does have a strong history of collaboration with community agencies, as mentioned in Chapter One. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, outreach can create the idea of We and Them and therefore renders an ongoing relationship with the community short-lived at best or non-existent at worst. Also as mentioned above, charity does not require presence, and presence is necessary to accomplish the transformative, relational goals of hospitality.

The practice of hospitality should allow the UMCNB to develop a different type of service to community where community engagement supplants mere community outreach. The difference between outreach and engagement is that outreach is a temporary arrangement to address a need while engagement is an ongoing and committed relationship that not only seeks to address a need but to identify causes and seek to provide permanent resolutions.

During the implementation phase of this project, The UMCNB was at a transitional moment where it was questioning its identity, its interpersonal relationships within the congregation and its standing within the community. The UMCNB appeared to be open for discussion on how to expand its commitment to serve and how it may extend its reach beyond the confines of the local congregation and into the community.

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[6] Church Council, United Methodist Church. Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012, accessed on 8/31/2016, http: //www.umc.org/what-we-believe/para-252-the-church-council.

As a result of this, this ministry project seemed to have entered the UMCNB at a critical time – when people were listening and possibly ready to act.

Biblical Foundation

Practice of Hospitality in Ancient Times

There are countless instances in the Bible that call for human hospitality even in the midst of God's sovereignty. More importantly, hospitality was a daily practice in ancient times.

> In ancient Near Eastern culture, hospitality was of paramount value and importance. It was more than oriental custom or simple good manners; It was sacred duty that everyone was expected to observe. Only the depraved would violate this obligation. In nomadic life where there were few public places to obtain lodging and food, the practice of hospitality was necessary for survival.[7]

In addition to providing resources necessary for survival, hospitality could also be viewed as a spiritual discipline. Alongside the notion of hospitality as a sacred duty is the belief that God is present when individuals and groups practice hospitality. People in ancient times lived with the understanding that heavenly beings mingled with or were disguised as human beings. Therefore, showing hospitality could also be observed as a sign of reverence for the Divine dwelling among humanity.

> In Greek epic tradition, the gods themselves put on human disguises and visited the unsuspecting host. If they were welcomed, they responded with good news or extraordinary gifts. Hindu legends likewise included tales of gods who became beggars in order to test a devout householder. In the biblical account of Abraham hosting his three angelic visitors (gen.18:1-15), which laid the foundation for hospitality in Jewish and Christian traditions, the strangers were also divine.[8]

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[7] Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999), 17-18.

[8] Ibid., 18.

The idea of strangers' being divine reminds me of Hebrews 13:2, "Don't forget to show

hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels

without knowing it."

> Hospitality is clearly a quality of God and is meant to be a quality of God's
> people as well. "The Lord watches over strangers," says Psalm 146:9; "he
> upholds the orphan and widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." And
> just exactly who are "the wicked" that Gods brings to ruin? "They kill the widow
> and the stranger," says Psalm 94…[9]

"The ancient concept that God is always present when hospitality occurs can be a

scary notion as we consider many of our hospitable encounters as North Americans."[10]

As we consider the mounting acts of domestic terrorism taking place across the country

in places of worship, schools, and public gathering spaces, there is a valid reason to

approach the practice of hospitality with caution. It is my belief that churches need to be

diligent in watching, assessing and reducing the risk of harm from and to strangers who

come into our sanctuaries or other shared spaces of fellowship. I believe it is always the

responsibility of the host to protect and ensure the safety of everyone within the

community including the stranger/guest.

<div align="center">Hospitality Defined and Translated</div>

From biblical and other ancient sources, Christian author and researcher Andrew

E. Arterbury presents a definition of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world:

> At its core, hospitality is the Mediterranean social convention that was employed
> when a person chose to assist a traveler who was away from his or her home
> region by supplying him or her with provisions and protection. It has been

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[9] Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 5.

[10] Ibid., 84.

suggested that the 'main practices stem from nomadic life when public inns were a rarity and every stranger was a potential enemy…[11]

In considering the above definition of hospitality, it is necessary to show how our conventional understanding of hospitality aligns or detracts from the biblical meaning. The English dictionary defines hospitality as "the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers."[12] This definition seems to limit the meaning of hospitality to the idea of friendliness rather than the notion presented in the biblical text. In the biblical narratives (that we will soon consider) where hospitality is taking place, reverence for the stranger seems to be more of a motivating factor for the practice of hospitality than friendliness. This idea can lead one to conclude that hospitality from a biblical standpoint is simply about meeting the needs of the stranger. The climate in which acts of hospitality take place in the biblical narratives is not familiar and expected, but rather unknown and impromptu. Again, as we have seen above, those who are engaged in the act of hospitality often find themselves at the mercy of strangers who are either struggling with resources (which we will witness in the story of Elijah and the Widow of Zarepath) or at risk of danger from helping the stranger (as observed in the story of Rahab and the Spies).

The following is a short list of notions for hospitality that are found in Biblical languages and are pertinent to this research:

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[11] Lee Roy Martin. "Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35.1 (2014): 1-9.

[12] Dictionary.com, accessed online 1/14/17 http: //www.dictionary.com/browse/hospitality.

- Hebrew - Hebrew has no specific word for the practice of hospitality, but the activity is especially evident in the patriarchal traditions of Genesis and narratives in Judges[13].

- Greek- In the New Testament, the Greek word *philoxenia* (love of strangers) is usually translated as "Hospitality" (1 Peter 4: 9)[14]

- Latin - Hospitality comes from the Latin word *hospes* which is defined as: host, guest, or stranger[15].

The Greek word for hospitality *philoxenia* reminds one that the love of strangers is not identical to what is comfortable for one personally. Hospitality is not just about treating and caring for the people we know but going out of our way to extend this graciousness to those we don't know. In addition, the Latin word for hospitality, *hospes* reminds us of the interconnectedness of the host, guest/stranger and how each participant is conjoined in the act of hospitality. As mentioned earlier, hospitality is a sacred act. When we practice hospitality, the Divine becomes present and provides blessing upon all involved as well as potential transformation for the host and guest/stranger.

<div align="center">From Ancient Times to Present Day</div>

As we move our consideration closer to the present time and our present experiences, here is a definition of Radical Hospitality:

> An active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a

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[13] David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, *Hospitality,* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2000), 611.

[14] Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999), 20.

[15] Ibid., 18.

part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members' openness and adaptability, a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talent of newcomers. [16]

Radical Hospitality has its roots in biblical hospitality. Radical Hospitality is about serving and looking out for the stranger. It begins within the church and can be observed in all phases of the worship/ministry experience: from start to finish. It also extends into the community and can be observed in our mission to those who are within the surrounding community. This form of hospitality as practiced at UMCNB can be observed in the church in its various outreach programs and collaborations with community entities to meet the needs of residents. Radical Hospitality, like shepherding, includes acting in response to identified needs or concerns within the congregation as well as the surrounding community.

The Elements of Biblical/Radical Hospitality

Based on the above readings, I have concluded that the elements of Biblical/Radical Hospitality include (key words are highlighted):

1. Receiving and inviting **strangers**

2. Offering of **presence**

3. Creating **space**

4. Sharing of **resources**

5. Meeting **needs**

6. Providing **protection**

Communicating Elements of Biblical/Radical Hospitality for the Local Church

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[16] Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 4, Location 66 of 1880.

As the local church prepares itself to practice hospitality, the Church must ask the following questions:

1. How do we identify and encounter strangers?

2. In what ways do we offer presence?

3. How do we make room for others, i.e. create space?

4. What resources are we willing to provide?

5. What are the present needs in the congregation and community?

6. How do we provide protection for those in need?

The answers to these questions will allow church members to assess their practice of hospitality and/or where they might want to direct their efforts to begin the practice of hospitality for today's church.

<div align="center">The Continuum of Biblical Based Hospitality</div>

The image below represents my understanding of the movement of the practice of hospitality from ancient to present times. From left to right, as we have seen, in ancient times, hospitality was practiced as a form of preservation, which led to the host, guest/stranger being engaged in interesting and unusual ways. For the local church, the practice of hospitality is focused on transformation through spiritual formation.

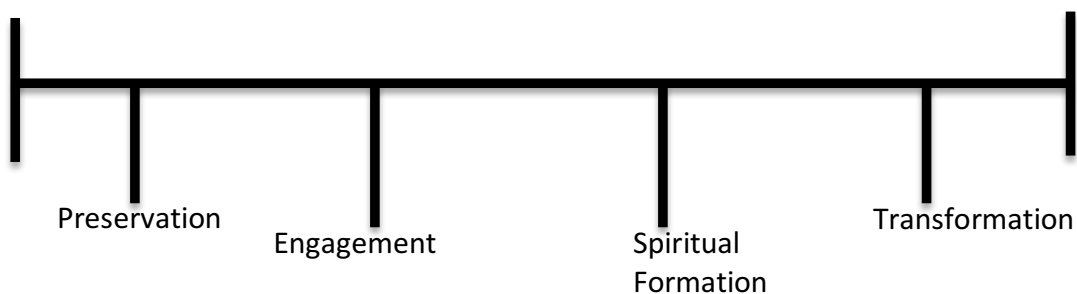Preservation   Engagement   Spiritual Formation   Transformation

Figure 1. Continuum of Biblical Hospitality

In the next section of this paper, I will provide Old Testament examples on the practice of hospitality as it relates to preservation and engagement. I will then move forward to New Testament examples that shows how the host's and guest/stranger's physical and spiritual needs become entangled and the act of hospitality becomes a means of spiritual formation which leads the way to transformation.

Old Testament

> Old Testament hospitality is sometimes characterized incorrectly as kindness offered to the 'stranger'. Although in current English a 'stranger' can mean simply 'a person or thing that is unknown or with whom one is unacquainted,' in the Hebrew Bible the term 'stranger' (ger) signifies more specifically a 'sojourner, resident alien'... A stranger (ger), therefore, is not a potentially threatening traveler but is a person who has entered the community from the outside and who has taken up residence more or less permanently…[17]

The Old Testament narratives embody the spirit of the sojourner as the Israelites moved through various terrains with the assistance of God's provision. This movement often placed the patriarchs of the faith at the mercy of their kinsman, foreigners, and even potential enemies. As aforementioned, hospitality towards the travelling stranger was impromptu and necessary for survival and the preservation of life. The following narratives are some examples of hospitality that preserved life and engagement with the concerns of the stranger in the Old Testament.

Preservation

> 1 Kings 17:8-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
> The Widow of Zarephath
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> 8 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 9 "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." 10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the

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[17] Lee Roy Martin, "Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35.1 (2014): 1-9.

town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." 11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." 15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.[18]

The history within this text reveals that there was a drought in the land – food and water were scarce. Elijah was no longer in his homeland. Zarephath appeared both as a "Gentile City" as well as an enemy to the Israelites. Elijah needed food and water and these came through the hand of a Gentile widow in a Gentile city! In this text we find two strangers, Elijah and the widow, on common ground. Yet, God prepares them both for mutual service. In addition, God is also involved in the act of hospitality which ensures the well-being of the widow for the days to come by keeping her vessel filled with substance as a result of her obedience.

Engagement

Joshua 2:1-7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
Spies Sent to Jericho

2 Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. 2 The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land." 4 But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. 5 And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went

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[18] Bible Gateway, Scripture Search, accessed online December 28, 2016, https://www.biblegateway.com.

I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them." 6 She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.[19]

There are several controversies that surround this text and I am going to comment on the least debated, the fact that spying found its way into the narrative of the journey of the Israelites and subsequently became part of God's plan for provision. Spying denotes secrecy and information-gathering that may expose someone to other clandestine situations that would warrant a possible alliance so as not to blow one's cover. The other issue is that lying and deceit are prevalent in this text. While I do not read this text as a justification for telling lies for a higher good, I do believe its inclusion is a reminder of the frailties of human life and God's prevenient grace. But the most popular debate over this text centers on how the spies ended up at the house of Rahab –The Harlot? Was it possible that she encountered the spies in her line of business? Perhaps the following interpretation reframes the text as an example of biblical hospitality rather than the solicitation of a prostitute:

> Rahab may have recognized the men as strangers, and because the whole city was on alert to the possibility of spies, and because of her convictions about the God of Israel, she may have concluded that they were Israelites and invited them into her house for protection and to express her faith, but not for business.[20]

Rahab is remembered for her faithfulness rather than her reputation or profession and is listed in the ancestral lineage of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. In addition, and

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[19] Bible Gateway, Scripture Search, accessed online December 28, 2016, https: : //www.biblegateway.com.

[20] Bible.Org. 2. Preparing to Enter the Land (Joshua 2:1-24), accessed 0nline December 28, 2016, https://bible.org/seriespage/preparing-enter-land-joshua-21-24.

more to the point of this project, Rahab should also be remembered for her hospitality. For the sake of having one moment of facetiousness, I would like to refer to these newfound characteristics of Old Testament hospitality as *Lessons from a Harlot on Hospitality*. Through Rahab we learn the following things about radical hospitality which requires the Church to be:

- Accessible - Rahab's profession required her to be a people watcher which subsequently led to her being on the streets and places of commerce noticing and assessing the needs of regulars, visitors and strangers.

- Available - Rahab was intentional and her work required that she make herself available.

- Inviting - Rahab does not wait for people to come to her door, she's out and inviting people into her space.

- Unashamed - Rahab knew what her job was and so did the community and no one seemed bothered by it.

- Confidential - While it was clear to everyone the type of work Rahab was involved in; her client's confidentiality was paramount.

New Testament

> In the New Testament, however, hospitality was a distinctive mark of Christians and Christian communities ….The instructions of the New Testament on hospitality go beyond mere necessity and strategy. There were deep spiritual and theological foundations, as Paul suggests with his exhortation: "Receive one another as Christ received you." I dare to believe that hospitality was rooted finally in Jesus own teaching and command: I was a stranger and you received me in your homes…Indeed, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these, you did it for me: Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me; and

whoever welcomes you, welcomes the one who sent me (Mt 25:35, 40, 43; Mk 9:37, Lk 9:48).[21]

As mentioned earlier, hospitality in the New Testament takes on a more radical characteristic than what is represented in the Old Testament. More specifically, hospitality in the New Testament is intentional and as the quotes above imply, it can be viewed as a spiritual discipline of the Christian faith. A definition for spiritual discipline is:

> … tried and true activities undertaken in order to give our spirits more control over our bodies, by molding and shaping our embodied selves... we grow in spiritual life and in ministry by well-directed effort…[22]

The life and ministry of Jesus can serve as a model for hospitality and as a result, a spiritual discipline. In the following New Testament narratives, we will witness Jesus at work in the act of hospitality that leads to spiritual formation of the stranger. Then we will follow with an act of hospitality involving a disciple that leads to the transformation of the host. In both situations, Jesus and the disciple are guests requesting the hospitality of a stranger and the exchange leads to spiritual formation and transformation respectively. This shifting of roles where the host suddenly becomes the guest and the reverse is another characteristic of New Testament hospitality. It would do well at this point to explain a little further the origin of the Latin root for the word hospitality, because it heightens our scriptural discussion here:

> The word hospitality is a translation of the Latin noun *hospitium* (or the adjective *hospitalis*), which in turn derives from *hospes*, meaning both guest and host. This

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[21] Mortimer Arias, "Centripetal mission or evangelization by hospitality." *Missiology* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 69-81.

[22] Beverly Vos, "The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry." *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 100-114.

concept was undoubtedly influenced by the Greek word *xenos*, which refers to the stranger who receives welcome or acts as a welcome of others. Thus the origins portray layers of meaning –the fluidity of the guest-host relationship, the concept of hospice and hospitals, the idea of blessings and healing through partnership exchanges.[23]

Spiritual Formation

John 4: 4-16 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

4 But he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.
7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)[a] 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."
11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."[24]

The encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well begins with a request for hospitality. The conversation quickly turns from meeting a need to a discussion on race and resistance. Jesus shifts gears in the conversation and makes her an offer that she finds appealing. This turn in the conversation allows Jesus to get her attention and in this, her spiritual formation begins. In this instance, hospitality becomes the catalyst to lead this woman into the faith, demystify racial relations and defuse what could become a

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[23] Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999),18.

[24] Bible Gateway, Scripture Search, accessed online December 28, 2016, https://www.biblegateway.com.

volatile situation. This passage of scripture informs the reader that what might block

individuals from engaging the stranger can be found deeply rooted in notions or biases

about the other person.

Jesus begins to teach the woman about faith through hospitality and service. The

exchange between the woman and Jesus continues until she sees Jesus as a prophet. She

is now becoming aware of who Jesus is, which marks another level of spiritual formation

and spiritual knowledge.

Transformation

Acts 8:26-39New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south[a] to
the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)
27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of
the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had
come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot,
he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to
this chariot and join it." 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the
prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 He
replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in
and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was
this:
"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
    and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
        so he does not open his mouth.
33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
    Who can describe his generation?
        For his life is taken away from the earth."
34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say
this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip began to speak, and
starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.
36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch
said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" [b] 38 He
commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went
down into the water, and Philip[c] baptized him. 39 When they came up out of

the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.[25]

The interaction between Phillip and the eunuch begs the question of how comfortable we are as the gathered community of Christ when we get close enough to see and hear the stranger? Are we willing to share space with the stranger within our churches and other facilities? I believe that as a church we should make an honest assessment to ascertain our comfort level with strangers. The encounter between Phillip and the eunuch reveals that if we can get close enough to a stranger to hear what is spoken verbally or by nonverbal cues, we might be in the position to assist that person's life in a meaningful way. We don't always know the end result of our hospitality. We may not even know if the person is receptive to our extension of grace.

Getting close to strangers in the practice of hospitality may be an unsettling idea for some. Fortunately, the UMC has a Safe Sanctuary policy in place to minimize risks of abuse for children youth, and other vulnerable people within the church. Leadership could adapt this policy to address our engagement with strangers in general: "Safe Sanctuaries is an overt expression in making congregations safe places where children, youth, and elders may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith."[26] Congregations might want to consider having a safety protocol in place to protect human life as well as making sure that the facility design can protect

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[25] Bible Gateway, Scripture Search, accessed online December 28, 2016, https://www.biblegateway.com.

[26] Safe Sanctuaries. UMCdiscipleship.org. Accessed online 1/14/17. https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries?group=61&limit=10&sortBy=resource_date%7Cdate&sortDirection=desc.

against the potential risk of harm and abuses while still engaging strangers and practicing hospitality.

These Biblical images of hospitality are rooted in human experience and demonstrate God at work in the history of humankind through God's Spirit moving upon the hearts of men and women. In addition, these examples demonstrate that hospitality is not necessarily being nice or simply doing what is right. Instead, it shows that hospitality is about doing what is required regardless of whether the activity is nice or politically correct. It's about doing and saying what is necessary to provide refuge to those who are in danger, alleviate the distress of those who have been victimized, and provide advocacy and a safe space for those who are different or don't follow societal or cultural expectations.

Another important aspect of these biblical narratives is the instantaneous formation of relationships between those who are in need and those who are meeting that need. These relationships show radical hospitality in that they are contrary to what would be expected culturally during the time in which the events took place. Likewise, would the Church consider opening itself in ways that might forge unexpected relationships? These Biblical narratives demonstrate that risks and the quest of for spiritual wholeness do exist in this world and that radical hospitality might be an alternative route to care for humanity.

In the next chapter, I will explore the methodology of this project that will take into consideration the values and practices of the UMC Book of Discipline for all who were involved in this process as host, guest or stranger.

Chapter 3

Mapping Change through Narrative Research:

Research Methodology

I am not good with driving directions. Especially when the directions are as follows: At the second light, make a left and then make two sharp rights. Get into the left lane and stay right to take the first jug handle towards the traffic circle.... I shudder at the thought of such narrative directions. As a result of this, Google Maps and satellite GPS are my primary sources for directions. While these tools help to make my travel easier by providing turn-by-turn directions, they are not without error. Sometimes the directions provided by the mobile applications take you around in circles before getting you to your destination. In the worst case, you can be driving for hours before you realize that you are headed in the opposite direction from your destination. The only way to overcome the errors embedded in mobile map applications and the confusion of word of mouth directions is to utilize both and hope for the best. As you will see as this paper unfolds, this analogy will prove applicable in many instances.

Selection of Lay Advisory Committee Members

I selected the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) in hopes that their experience and knowledge of United Methodist Church polity and local church operations would provide access to the resources needed for the project as well as direction and suggestions for successful implementation.

While I have attended the UMCNB for several years during my studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, I did not become a professing member until 2014. I had no idea how things were done in the United Methodist Church. I was more accustomed to the leadership style of my former nondenominational church where the Pastor was the primary decision maker. I did not have expertise and familiarity with congregants and leadership to garner congregational support and participation for the project and hoped the LAC would offer these strengths to the project.

In addition to obtaining support from the Church Council members, I also hoped they would see this endeavor as a work aligned with the objectives of the church. Neither I nor Drew University intended this project to be a one-woman-show. After leadership thwarted my first project idea, I prayed, listened, planned and observed the congregation to discern a project that would be acceptable to their needs. As an active member of the congregation, I intended this project not only to fulfill my course requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree. It was also a labor of love and sacrifice to enliven the congregation in which I had chosen to make my church home.

The first person I identified for the LAC was the pastor of the church. As a local lay servant at the church, I understood that my leadership was limited in influencing congregational support and participation. I was under the impression that collaborating with the pastor on a project that would support the goals and mission of the church would result in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Other church members whom I identified included individuals from the worship council, church trustees and usher board. In September 2016, I sent an email to the Church Council requesting volunteers for the LAC. I will share the final result of this request in the next chapter.

The Nitty-Gritty of Ethnographic Research

For this research and ministry practice the LAC and existing ministry leadership in the church employed the Ethnographic Research Method which narrative theologians Carl Savage and William Presnell describe as: "Using this method, the researcher becomes a participant observer joining the faith community as a kenotic, or empty listener."[1] I hoped to find the ethnographic research method to be useful for this type of project because the needs of the congregation might be revealed in their own narratives on the topics of hospitality.

I also employed Narrative Inquiry to gather information for my research project. Qualitative researcher Sarah Tracy writes that Narrative Inquiry is "Research that views stories – whether gathered through field notes, interviews, oral tales, blogs, letters, or autobiographies, as fundamental to human experience."[2] We (the LAC, existing ministry leadership and I) gathered narratives through one-on-one conversations/interviews with congregants and visitors. For the most part, the narrative approach allows the researcher to gain insight from a practical perspective. The personal story/narrative allows one to know what's important to the participants in the project. In addition, the narrative method of research adds collective authority to the project because it is a work that is created not for, but within and by, the community of believers.

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[1] Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities.* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oats Institute: 2008),108.

[2] Sarah J. Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact.* (Malden, Wiley-Blackwell: 2013), 36.

In addition to one-on-one interviews, there were additional opportunities for learning and fellowship in order to foster an understanding of hospitality and its application. These opportunities included a five-week small group study on radical hospitality entitled "The Continuum of Biblical Based Hospitality" as well as other community events.

Below is a brief synopsis of the one-on-one interviews, church and community events, and the small group study on radical hospitality, which includes the purpose, process and goals of using these methods to gather information.

<div align="center">Getting to Know You: One-On-One Interviews</div>

One-On-One Interviews

Purpose: The LAC members and I implemented the one-on-one interviews in order to capture information from congregants and visitors. Information gathered included their experience of hospitality at the church, to determine their needs, and to imagine what could be done to help them experience welcome and growth in their faith at UMCNB.

Process: I provided the LAC and ministry leaders with a brief training session on ethnographic research. I showed the LAC how to conduct one-on-one interviews and collect/record qualitative data. I coached the LAC members in reading interview questions to participants and asked them to record interview results on their question sheets. I also advised LAC Members to write down responses verbatim without paraphrasing. I encouraged LAC Members to ask for short answers; however, I cautioned them not to ask leading questions or give suggestions on how the questions could be answered.

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you choose to attend UMCNB?

2. How would you describe your needs at this point in your life?

3. What makes you feel welcomed and engaged to grow in your faith at UMCNB?

4. How can the UMCNB be of better service to you in meeting your specific needs and help you feel welcomed and engaged to grow in your faith?

The one-one interviews took place primarily at the Coffee Hour – a brief fellowship after service where congregants can socialize and get to know each other while enjoying light refreshments.

Goal: To gather specific information from congregants and visitors regarding their experience of hospitality from UMCNB and to discern the themes that might strengthen and improve hospitality at the UMCNB.

Church and Community Events

On February 9, 2016, I provided a brief presentation to the Church Council regarding the theological underpinning of the proposed events at UMCNB. The purpose of this presentation was to introduce church leaders to the theological concept of *Missio Dei,* translated from the Latin as Mission of God/Sending of God. I wanted to demonstrate how this theological concept might encourage church and community engagement through the following proposed events. I also needed to garner support and participation from church leaders, obtain approval to host the events at the church, recruit volunteers to help facilitate the events, get assistance in advertising the events (i.e. emailing fliers to family and friends) and most importantly, ensure the Church Council's participation at events. The events planned included the following:

The Gospel According to the Movies

Purpose: To host a movie day or night where a faith-inspired film would be viewed followed by discussion on the themes of grace, mercy and/or theodicy (i.e. the defense of God's goodness and omnipotence against objections arising from the existence of evil and suffering in the world).[3]

Process: The atmosphere was set by playing contemporary gospel, inspirational or praise and worship music as participants arrived. Food was set up buffet-style to allow participants to serve themselves. The table seating was arranged so that individuals could face the screen during the movie and face each other during dinner. Following the movie, the discussion began. The first question asked participants their thoughts about the movie? The host's role was to facilitate discussion and not dominate the conversation. It was hoped that the participants would lead the discussion and the host would provide direction and clarification on themes where needed.

Goal: The goal of this event was to assist in the spiritual formation of participants in understanding biblical and theological themes of the Christian faith.

Family Game Night

Purpose: Congregants and local residents would hopefully enjoy an evening of board games, food, and fellowship.

Process: The atmosphere was set by playing contemporary gospel, inspirational or praise and worship music as participants arrived. Tables and seating were arranged so that individuals could face each other. Food was set up buffet-style to allow participants to serve themselves. Before starting the games and activities, and once everyone was

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[3] F.L. Cross and E.A Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, 3rd Edition (New York, Oxford Press: 1997) 1598.

seated, someone led a scripture reflection on the themes of fellowship and gathered community. Tables were arranged with assorted board games ranging in age requirements and skill difficulty.

Goal: The goal of this event was to provide a meal, recreation and a safe space for youth and their family to have fun in a Christ-centered environment.

College Readiness Resource Day

Purpose: I designed this activity for juniors and seniors in high school, their parents and adult learners seeking assistance in accessing post-secondary education at a community or four-year college.

Process: This event took place on a Saturday and was scheduled for the entire day. Pre-registration was not required but same-day registration took place an hour before the start of the event. During the same-day registration time slot, a light breakfast was served. Advertising for this event took place three weeks in advance. Three workshops were presented at this event. Workshop one focused on the admission and application process. Workshop two focused on all things related to Financial Aid. Workshop three focused on college success strategies. Local college recruiters were invited to this event and set up resource and information tables during the lunch hour. Lunch was catered for this event and set up buffet-style. The table seating was arranged so that participants faced each other.

Goal: The goal of this project was to assist congregants and residents with resources to strengthen post-secondary academic attainment.

Five Week Small Group Study on Hospitality

> Christian education involves formal instruction in the faith, but instruction is best defined as homemaking. We tend to the tasks of creating a safe and intimate environment where the meanings that are deepest to ourselves can be shared and where we come to know what it means to live in the family named Christian. The tending, building, cleaning, nurturing, caring, and knowing of homemaking replace the control and mastery of schooling.[4]

I developed and implemented a five-week small-group course on radical hospitality. I chose the small group learning process because it is responsive to all learning levels and removes the rigid structure and demands of formal education. In small group learning, there are no experts. Instead, there are co-learners who, while walking alongside each other, make discoveries and apply newfound information to their daily lives. In this informal setting, the facilitator replaces the role of the teacher and the role of the student becomes that of collaborator who brings experiences and personal narratives to the table as fodder to increase learning and absorption of information.

In his work entitled "Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning," education researcher Jack L. Seymour identifies Four Approaches to Christian Education. Each has a particular goal: role identification for teacher and learner, a framework for the education process, a specific context, and implications for ministry. These four approaches include: Transformation, Faith Community, Spiritual Growth and Religious Instruction. I decided that both the Transformation and Faith Community approaches to Christian Education might be able to guide the Radical Hospitality Small Group learning process.

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[4] Jack L. Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press,1997), 20.

The chart below is an adaptation from Seymour's "Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning:"

Map of Approaches to Christian Education[5,6]

	Transformation	Faith Community
GOAL	Assisting People and communities to promote faithful citizenship and social transformation	Building communities that promote authentic human development; helping persons enact community
TEACHER	Sponsor who invites learners in partnership for reflection and action	Leaders who facilitates small groups and help congregation structure for parish life and missions
LEARNER	Free and responsible historical agents	People and community of faith
PROCESS OF EDUCATION	Seeing- Judging- Acting	Service- Reflection- Action
CONTEXT	The compassionate church and it ministries in and with the world	The congregation set within a wider community
IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY	Supporting the church call to become an alternative way of seeing life, of being, and of living	Assisting groups and churches to enact community and reach out into the world

Figure 2. Map of Approaches to Christian Education

This small group-learning format, applied to the topic of radical hospitality, seeks transformation of the social environment within the congregation and surrounding community as well as the development of faith community. In my experience and in the area of engagement and informed decision-making, there appear to be underlying power struggles and a need for reconciliation both within the organizational structure of this

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[5] Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education*, 21.

[6] This is a partial rendering from the map of approaches to Christian Education that are relevant to my study; the other two approaches, "Spiritual Growth" and "Religious Instruction," seem to be more suitable for a Sunday School learning format. In addition, these models seem to be focused on individual growth and expression, while the two I am using in this research and ministry practice are more community oriented.

local congregation itself and between the leadership and congregants. There also seems
to be a need for community Transformation outside this local congregation and a means
for members to become aware of the social issues and concerns present in the
surrounding neighborhood. It seems to me that a focus on Faith Community might gather
congregants in a way that encourages transformation within the congregation and may
also impact the surrounding community.

Purpose: I designed the small group study on radical hospitality in order to
examine the biblical and theological foundations of Christian hospitality. We hoped that
this study would generate an idea of hospitality as divine providence and perhaps show
some direction on how we might apply the principle of hospitality to address the
identified spiritual, social, and emotional needs of the city of New Brunswick, New
Jersey.

Process: In keeping with the educational process of Transformation (seeing,
judging and acting) and that of Faith Community (service, reflection, and action), the
LAC and I decided that the best way to invite small group participants to delve into and
excavate meaning from Biblical texts relating to hospitality was through a practice called
Lectio Divina.

Lectio Divina is Latin for sacred reading, and is a monastic spiritual formation
practice that involves reading, listening and mediating on how God reveals God-self in
the text as well as in the context of the reader/listener. With regards to monastic reading,
contemporary mystic Thomas Merton states:

> All of our reading should tend, in one way or another, to increase in us the
> knowledge and love of God. Three great subjects need to be sought out by us in
> our reading:

1. God our Creator and Father: Who He is, His Holiness, His Greatness (mirrored in creation too)
2. Man (sic), his original dignity, his fall, his present state-and the structure of his soul, its illusions, its powers, the enemies, which beset it.
3. The history of God's way with man (sic):   the dynamic interrelation between the merciful Redeemer and fallen man; God's plan, the history of salvation, the Church, the Last Things; Parousia, our eternal destiny and the means to arrive at it.[7]

Using *Lectio Divina* as a tool in this research ministry practice allows for the participants

to share their thoughts (and narratives) around a particular text and identify how God

seems to be moving through humankind in acts of hospitality within the scriptures and in

the world.

The plan for the five-week study on hospitality consisted of an introduction which

was first presented to the Church Council on 4/12/16 and to the congregation in place of

the sermon at the 11:00 a.m. worship on 4/17/16. We planned the remaining four weeks

to cover the characteristics of hospitality that we observed as: **Preservation,**

Engagement, **Formation**, and **Transformation**. My thought in choosing these

characteristics was that hospitality begins as the need to preserve life, which leads to

engagement –being in close contact with the person or situation until the need has passed.

It is expected that at some point the hospitable acts lead to a change in either the host or

the guest/stranger and that change leads to some kind of transformation: spiritually,

socially and/or emotionally.

Goal: To facilitate discussion on how God works though and is present in acts of

hospitality to accomplish God's will in the world, in the lives of individuals and in local

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[7] Merton, Thomas, "Lectio Divina" Cistercian Studies Quarterly 50.1 (2015): 5, 37,103. ProQuest. Web. (accessed on July 25, 2016).

communities with the intent of motivating participants to be more hospitable to guest/strangers.

These directions seem straightforward, accessible, and easy to follow. However; one never knows how participants will receive these directions and apply them in order, hopefully, to move the congregation towards change and possibly towards transformation. In the next chapter entitled "Where The Rubber Meets The Road: Research Results," we will see those who went along for the ride, those who decided to walk in a different direction, those who remained oblivious to the movement, and other barriers and potholes that entered into the narrative of this journey.

Chapter 4

Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Research Results

The first thing I do when I enter my car, before driving off, is turn on the music. I

need my music; it helps me relax during arduous tasks. There is nothing like listening to

your favorite tunes while driving, especially long distances. As I begin to write this

chapter about the results of my project, George Benson's "Everything Must Change" is

playing in the background:

There are not many things in life
You can be sure of
Except rain comes from the clouds
And Sun lights up the sky
And hummingbirds do fly.[1]

I can honestly say that when I began this research, I had some solid expectations.

I had my plan and I was ready to "make it work" to quote Tim Gun from Project

Runway. I just knew that the people I had identified for my LAC would accept my

invitation to serve. There was no doubt in my mind that the pastor as well as

congregational leaders and the congregation itself would participate in the church and

community events the LAC and I had planned as well as the five-week small group study

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[1] George Benson (Song Lyrics). A-Z Lyrics. Accessed online 3/13/2017.
http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/georgebenson/everythingmustchange.html.

on radical hospitality. However, this was not the case (insert Let's Make a Deal Zonk sound here).

Support and participation is relative. In addition, one must never forget that churches are not only liturgical bodies but also voluntary institutions. No one is under compulsion to serve, support or participate in the ministry of the church. According to George Parsons and Speed B. Leas, the authors of Understanding Your Congregation as a System:

> Congregations, like human beings, live between the polarities of order and freedom. Between these two fundamental requirements lies the stage upon which the history of the people of God has been played out. The tension between order and freedom has birthed the great stories of the Bible and framed the historical struggles of the church.[1]

I did not ground my expectations of support and participation in duty, but in the idea that we are all in this together. I assumed that my plan was in line with the church mission and that I was in one accord with the congregation and church leaders' quest for change and a concomitant new identity. George Benson is right: there are not many things in life you can be sure of.… I discovered this the hard way at every stage of the implementation of this project. However, there were some amazing surprises. I did not expect the unexpected and, as we shall see, the unexpected events restored my soul over and over again.

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[1] George Parsons & Speed B. Leas. Understanding your congregation as a System: The Manual (The Alban Institute. Henderson, VA: 1993), 21.

The Project: What Actually Happened

Let's start with the selection of the Lay Advisory Committee. On September 25, 2015, I sent an email to Church Council members to solicit their participation as LAC members. There were a few individuals that immediately came to mind based on my initial interaction with them. Another qualifier was the positions they held in the church that were relevant to the project goals and outcomes. In addition to the pastor of the Church, I selected individuals from the usher board, board of trustees, and discipleship leaders. With the exception of members from the usher board, the rest of the candidates were members of the Church Council. Of the seven individuals I selected to participate as LAC members, only two accepted the invitation. This was my first disappointment. Then something happened that I did not expect. A member of the trustee board and Church Council volunteered to join the LAC (my soul was restored). I never thought to ask these individuals. This encouraged me to reach out to another Church Council member and this person also agreed to join the LAC.

The role of the LAC changed as this project unfolded. Instead of reporting to select individuals, the Church Council as a whole became the guiding body for the duration of the project. If I had known then what I know now, I could have saved myself a lot of time and grief by just identifying the Church Council as the LAC. The council turned out to be a great resource for this project by virtue of its assigned tasks and responsibilities as outlined in the Book of Discipline. In many ways, that council was the saving grace for this project and as Dr. Leonard Sweet, the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University would say: "Bingo!"

The first stop on the implementation process was to conduct the one-on-one interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to assess the congregation's perception of hospitality and welcome at the church. I was able to recruit two members from the LAC as well as three other congregants who were interested in the work I was doing to assist with these interviews which we conducted in person during the coffee hour following the Sunday worship service. In total, we gathered twenty-nine responses over a four-week-period. The congregants and visitors were responsive and willing to share their experience at the church. We made sure that the interviews were anonymous and the themes that emerged painted a picture of a congregation that is pastoral, close knit, and family oriented. Below, I will share a sample of responses from five congregants to each question.

Question #1: Why did you choose to attend UMCNB?

Congregant #1: We felt welcomed and enjoyed the sermon

Congregant #2: I felt very welcomed

Congregant #3: I like the form of worship

Congregant #4: Did not choose, been here since age one

Congregant #5 I was born into this church

Question #2: How would you describe your needs at this point in your life?

Congregant #1: Fellowship, continuity and encouragement. Cycle in life…
Family life even though the kids are grown… Wonderful people
to look up to…

Congregant #2: I have a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of others

Congregant #3: I need to reach out to more people than just those in my circle

Congregant #4: I want an experience that brings me closer to God. I feel that

activities that we are encouraged to participate in sometime

interferes with that

Congregant #5: Not sure

Question #3: What makes you feel welcomed and engaged to grown in your faith

at UMCNB?

Congregant #1: The people

Congregant #2: The love of the people

Congregant #3: Diversity and opportunity to be vocal and conversational and

acceptance of people different than we are

Congregant #4: Fellowship and pastoral care are very important. The current

pastor is very good at that

Congregant #5: Able to use gifts and talents to serve congregation

Question #4: How Can the UMCNB be of better service to you in meeting your

specific needs and help you to feel welcomed and engaged to grow

in your faith?

Congregant #1: Implementation of the praise and worship service

Congregant #2: My hope is that the church will have more small group

discussion on specific topics of interest. This will increase the

opportunity of people to be engaged in the church beyond the

Sunday service

Congregant #3: I like the new spirit centered direction of the church

Congregant #4: Personally, I don't feel there is much room for improvement for

me. Everything is being met.

Congregant #5: The young adults are meeting more and more. The introduction

of praise and worship has been good with new music[2]

However, the self-portrait of the congregation gleaned through the one-on-one

interviews versus what actually exists outside of the Sunday worship experience shows a

community that lacks cohesion. I could see this demonstrated clearly in the lack of

participation in events that were developed in light of the congregational responses that

were gathered through the one-on-one interviews. While the events varied in themes,

they all created new space for congregants to be in community outside of the Sunday

worship experience. The events allowed for congregants to share their gifts to serve

others, provide care and encouragements to others, to engage with others who are

different from them. Nevertheless, congregational participation was low to nonexistent.

Perhaps there was an inherent reason for the lack of participation and cohesion that I

observed within the congregation; which as observed by Parson and Leas might be…

> …a danger: too much change. In reacting to our "stuckness" [sic] we may swing
> to the other extreme. When driven by trends or in ongoing efforts to respond to
> changing environments, congregations can lose their way, their identity, and their
> cohesiveness.[3]

Taking into consideration the timing of the implementation of this research

project, coupled with the change of leadership style (brought on by the appointment of

new pastor), the hiring of a consultant and changes in the schedule and the style of the

Sunday worship might have been too much change within a short period of time. These

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[2] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

[3] Parsons and Leas, 21.

changes took place over the span of three months and may have created tension that rendered the congregation stagnant and unconnected.

Next stops on this journey were the church and community engagement events. The purpose of these events were to find creative ways for church members to gather in fellowship with each other and local residents as well as to present the Gospel in relevant ways.

The first event that we held at the church was called, The Gospel According to The Movies. During this event we watched The War Room, a popular movie from 2015 about the power of prayer, faith and perseverance. The pastor seemed to approve of the movie event and from the pulpit one Sunday he even encouraged the congregants to come out and view the movie if they had not already done so.

The Gospel According to the Movies event included a movie, dinner and discussion. This event was well attended by congregants and, in addition, three local residents walked into the event. The latter may have attended because one of the greatest assets for evangelism of is its accessibility and its proximity to public transportation. There is a covered bus stop with a bench located right outside of the church. In total, there were eighteen participants at this event. Prior to the movie and during dinner, I had the opportunity to speak with one of the visitors who shared his story with me. This young man was twenty years old and homeless. He had no job but was about to be admitted to the New Jersey Job Corps program— an alternative education and housing program for at-risk youth and young adults. I was relieved to hear that this young man had a plan to address his homeless and jobless situation. We talked more about his plans as we both enjoyed the dinner. This conversation is an example of what hospitality and

welcome looks like outside of the Sunday worship experience —loving the stranger, offering care by listening and responding to their present need.

Following the movie, an older gentleman disclosed, "If it was not for this event, there could have been some negative things I could have been involved on a Friday night in New Brunswick."[4] As he continued to share his story about his military career and homelessness, he continued to express his gratitude for the positive environment and fellowship. On the following Sunday after the event, he attended the worship service. After several weeks of attending Sunday worship service, he asked me when would there be another Friday night event. I told him that the event was a part of doctoral program research and that if were to be continued I would need to get permission from the Church Council. He seemed to have understood my response and continued to attend Sunday worship services sporadically. The movie night created a safe space for fellowship in a Christ-centered environment. It also demonstrated that visitors as well as congregants are interested in being community on other days of the week than just the Sunday worship experience. In showing radical hospitality, it important for the church to open and available at all times.

After seeing the response of the congregation after the pastor announced the Gospel According to the Movies event, I asked the pastor if he would do the same for the next event. In addition to trying to increase congregational participation in the scheduled events, another reason I asked him to participate in the announcements was because the pastor had changed how announcements would take place within the worship service.

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[4] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Previously, individual committee members did the announcements. The new method

simply referred congregants to the bulletin without reading them verbally from the pulpit.

In my opinion, and from observation as a congregant, most people come to church

to hear; i.e., hear the Word of God preached, the music, as well as the announcements.[5] The only reading that seems to be done by congregants either individually or collectively are the prayers, hymns and components of other liturgical rites. People do not seem to read the bulletins for general announcements.

"Thanks for understanding, in lieu of our malfunctioned sound system."

Figure 3. Comic Strip

To simply refer the congregations to the bulletin for announcements without

verbalizing their content seems to convey that announcements are not important to the

life of the congregation and not exactly a positive message to convey. The

announcements are the conduits by which people can become engaged in church and

community in meaningful ways. The announcements provide the opportunities to carry

out God's mission for the church, the local community and the world.

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[5] Church Cartoons, Accessed online 10/27/16 , http: //www.you-can-be-funny.com/Church-Cartoons.html.

There were instances where the Lay Leader gave certain announcements special attention. I was able to get hold of the Lay Leader once to announce the Family Game Night and she did her best to rally support. Nevertheless, congregational attendance was very low for this event (only eight congregants attended) and no individuals from the community attended despite the fact that we sent out fliers to the families of the preschool children and to another community agency that assists families. Despite my attempts to get the pastor more involved with the announcements for the events, he did not do so. Those who did attend the game night enjoyed themselves and offered words of encouragement such as: "We are here and appreciate having a planned event." "Thank you for everything." "Let's do this again."[6]

My biggest disappointment was the attendance for the College Readiness Workshop. I worked very hard to garner community support by reaching out to local high schools, youth centers, as well as domestic violence shelters. I had fliers made and distributed them myself within the surrounding community. However, it was not the surrounding community's lack of interest that brought on feelings of frustration, but the lack of support and participation of the congregation and the leadership of the church.

During the Church Council meeting prior to the college readiness event, I spoke at length to the Church Council and asked them to be available for the event and provide assistance for visitors on that day. Even if no one from the community showed up, I hope the church as host would be present to welcome any visitors to the church. I informed the Church Council that all I needed was their presence. The food (breakfast and lunch) for the event was catered. There was no speaker cost since the speakers had volunteered his

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[6] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

or her time for the event. Those who volunteered their time and resources included:

Dr. Erin Avery, founder of Avery Educational Resources; Colby McCarthy, Director of

Financial Assistance at Drew University; and Mecca K. Terry, Associate Professor at

Middlesex County Community College. The LAC and I had organized the registration

supplies, folders and other resources for the participants. Even though the pastor did not

respond to my request to make the announcement, I extended an invitation for him to

welcome the visitors and offer a prayer to open the event. He replied he was scheduled to

be out of town on the day of the event and asked if I could schedule one of the lay

servants for the event.

On the day of the College Readiness Event, the only leadership that attended were

those who volunteered to help with set-up and clean up. Only one family of four from

the church attended. One volunteer asked, "Was the event announced in the church?"

This question began to generate conversation about who presents the announcements at

the church, their impact on congregational awareness and subsequent attendance at

events. I shared with the group that I made efforts to ask the pastor to announce the event

from the pulpit to no avail. At that time a church member shared why the format of the

announcements had been changed:

> It was the pastor's idea to change the format of the announcements because he
> wanted to ensure that the last thing the congregants heard and remembered was
> the sermon. As a result, the congregants would be referred to the bulletin for the
> announcements to be read at their convenience. [7]

In total, there were only eight individuals present for this event. Fortunately,

there was a trustee meeting being held on the same day and they were able to help

consume the lunch. However, there was much food left over so much so that the

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[7] All interviews were confidential; the names are withheld by mutual agreement.

refrigerator could not hold it. As a result, I took the food to several of my relatives in

Jersey City so that it would not go to waste. It seemed to me that of all the instances of

leadership's disregard for project events, this one in particular might have been

intentional. A possible explanation could have been their desire to distance themselves

from any fiscal or liability responsibility for the event. One volunteer from the church

who assisted with the set up and clean up for the event asked me:

> Did you receive any financial support from the church to assist with the food and
> supplies? I responded, "No. The pastor informed me that since this is my
> doctoral project, I should be responsible for any cost associated with
> implementation. As a result, I did not ask for any assistance from the church
> regarding food and supplies.[8]

As I moved forward with the Radical Hospitality small group curriculum, I

prepared an overview/introduction and presented it to the Church Council at their

monthly meeting. The pastor was very receptive to the introduction, so much so, that he

asked for me to present the same introduction as the sermon for that upcoming Sunday

Worship service. This was very encouraging, as it seemed the pastor's interest had been

piqued once again as it had been for Gospel According to the Movies event.

I presented the introduction during the worship service. The people were very

receptive and gave good reviews during the receiving line following the service. Some of

the comments included: "Well-presented project." "This is a timely topic." "Good luck

with your studies." In hindsight, I could have used that platform as an opportunity to rally

participation and advertise for the subsequent small group lessons. Nevertheless, I

canvassed the surrounding community to promote the event at local venues. I mailed

invitations to other local churches and I placed invitations for the event at local eateries.

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[8] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Participation for the small group course on hospitality was low and inconsistent. I

presented this five-week course on Sunday mornings prior to the Praise and Celebration

service. On April 4, 2016, I sent the following email to the Worship Council members

and pastor:

Grace and Peace!

I look forward to the next Church Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday, 4/12/16. At such time I will share some exciting news from the College Readiness Event.

For the final phase of this study, I will create and implement a five-week small group study entitled: "The Continuum of Biblical Based Hospitality" A brief overview of this study will be presented at the next Church Council Meeting. This course will launch Sunday, 4/17/16 and will end on Sunday, 5/15/15. I have spoken with Russ, who will ensure that the church is open and technology is set up by 9am. This course will take place in the sanctuary from 9:15am to 10am. This time was selected to avoid overlapping with other events and classes taking place after Sunday service, including Coffee Hour.

Participants who complete the five-week course will get a certificate of completion and encouraged to connect with current ministries at UMCNB for opportunities to apply what they have learned. It is hoped that participants will remain engaged practicing Biblical Hospitality. (I will need a current list of active ministry at the church)

That's all for now. If anyone has any questions, concerns, or thoughts about anything presented in email, please "Reply All" to this message and let me know. Thanks.

Blessings,

Tammy[9]

I selected the time for the small group study listed above to ensure that there were

no overlaps with other classes, meetings or coffee hour that took place on Sunday.

However, this time did not work for everyone and no one told me that another bible study

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[9] Tammy Peoples, "Doctoral Study Update," email to Church Council at United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, (April 4,2016, 8:53 AM ET), accessed February 26, 2017, sent messages.

class had been scheduled at this same time. I received an email from one of the core

leaders of the church indicating the following:

> I have concerns about the timing of this program. The Praise Service needs set up
> time in order to be ready to start at 10am and the Bible Study groups starts at
> 9:30 am and overlaps. If you have any hope of having a big enough groups to
> actually serve as a hospitality core, I doubt this would be a good time provide the
> base. …Good Luck — you're facing the biggest issue here—finding a time to
> meet.[10]

I responded to this email as follows:

> Thanks for your input.
>
> At this point, there was bound to be some conflict with scheduling. I chose the
> 9am time with the Praise Service in mind. We will be using the same technology
> as the Praise Service so it will already be set up. I could even end the group at 9:
> 50am to allow for any extra set up time.
>
> This is a short term (5 week) pilot open to congregants, visitors, and the
> community. I am working on fliers/invites not to go out into the community. I
> am looking for "whomsoever" will attend. I would like at least ten to twelve
> people to attend. Hopefully the offering of a light breakfast may help with
> attendance. Even if two or three people chose to come, it will still generate a
> result.
>
> There is way too much going on after service for this course to be placed on the
> back end of the service. In addition, Sunday seems to be the preferred days for
> church group meetings. This course is kind of a hybrid Sunday School/ Small
> Group Format based on its content and process.
>
> So let's see what happens.[11]

When I was informed of this overlap, I asked it were possible for the class to shift gears

for five weeks and join the class on hospitality. In follow up to the above-mentioned

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[10] All interviews were confidential; the names are withheld by mutual agreement.

[11] Tammy Peoples, "Doctoral Study Update," email to Church
Council at United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, (April 4, 2016, 5:44:35PM ET), accessed
February 26, 2017, sent messages.

email, I sent the following reply: "Do you think the members of the Bible Study would like to shift gears for five weeks and learn about hospitality based on the scriptures?"[12]

I received the following reply:

> …I can't speak for the Bible Study group; I'm just a member. [the correspondent named the leaders which I intentionally omitted their names for the purposes confidentiality) …Our curriculum is dated and flows a sequence so I would be surprised if they would want to take on a different program. Check with the leaders for their input.[13]

I later received the following email from one of the class leaders:

> As the [correspondent] says below, we have an Adult Bible Study class that meets from 9:30-10:15; we end early because about half of the group is also in the voice choir and [name of music director here] wants to rehearse before service. Getting people to come earlier for a study group will be difficult. Most of the members of this class are already engaged in ministry and/or hospitality.
>
> I will talk to [co-leader of the class] about this and also poll the class to see if they are interested.[14]

This was my last communication with the study leaders on this topic as I did not want to press the issue beyond this response. As indicated above, the class leaders responded that many of the participants in the Bible study class were already engaged in some form of ministry in the church that related to hospitality and that he would discuss the matter with the other class leader about pausing the adult bible study class and joining the small group study on biblical hospitality temporarily. I never heard back from either of the class leaders and both classes continued to meet at the same time.

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[12] Tammy Peoples, "Doctoral Study Update," email to Church Council at United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, (April 5, 2016, 3:35:18 AM ET), accessed February 26, 2017, sent messages.

[13] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

[14] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

It was my hope to provide certificates of completion to those who participated in all five sessions. However, this did not occur because no one attended all five sessions.

<div align="center">The Impact of These Events</div>

The Senior Pastor

The pastor's involvement with this project was minimal and mostly centered on making it possible for me to conduct the project at the church and allowing me to go before the Church Council with the plans for the project. While my expectations of pastoral involvement were high at the onset of this project, during the process, I realized that sole responsibility of the pastor in this project was to allow space for it to occur. Since the pastor did not participate in any of the events, I cannot ascertain the impact that these events had on the pastor. However, I would say that the pastor did show support for proposed plans during Church Council meetings and showed interest about the project's relevance by allowing me to present the introduction to the hospitality study during the Sunday worship service.

The Church

As mentioned earlier, the church's self-portrait, called to be in community with each other, turned out to be the opposite of what actually happens outside of the Sunday worship experience. The church is a close-knit unit, which may be due to congregants' being immediate relatives or sharing the same ethnic origins. In June 2016, there was an event called "African Thanksgiving," an annual event hosted by congregants as fundraiser. I had the privilege of attending the event this year. For the first time, I saw a great outpouring of support and participation for this event. The church was filled to capacity and the overflow during the coffee hour filled the fellowship hall and the

basement area to standing room only. This is example of camaraderie amongst the people of the African diaspora and family members of African descent represented in the congregation. Another observation is that the congregants appear to be responsive specifically to the pastor's guidance. I witnessed this by the significant number of congregants who participated in the Gospel According to The Movies event. Did participation in later events taper-off because the pastor did not rally support or encourage congregants to attend? Or did the congregation want to be the gathered community only for Sunday worship? I cannot answer these questions definitively. However, I am persuaded to believe that the answer is yes on both accounts based on the above African Thanksgiving experience and additional responses from the one-on-one interviews regarding what makes the people feel welcomed and engaged to grow in their faith:

> ~I love the people
> ~Everyone is welcoming and I love the pastor
> ~I know everyone here.
> ~Most of the church members are like family to me
> ~The sermon
> ~The current pastor helps us to grow by stretching us both in service and community
> ~The people with the same goal to worship God in a faithful way
> ~The familiarity of the service
> ~The people
> ~The preaching[15]

 These responses also show forth the characteristics of a Pastoral-Sized congregation. The UMNB's present identity resonates with Parson and Leas findings of Pastoral-Sized Congregations:

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[15] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

The pastoral-size church has between 50 and 150 people on an average Sunday morning. There may be two or three cells in this sized congregation. The primary groups are often extended-family units, but in some Pastoral Congregations the cells unit around a common interest such as music or a Sunday-school class or the women's organization. A leadership circle replaces the patriarch or matriarch and usually the pastor is at the center of this circle.

These congregations are often structured like a wheel rather than a pyramid. The hub is the minister with the spokes being the various cells that are in touch with and work with each other. [16]

A second feature of the Pastoral Church is its sense of itself as a family where everyone knows everyone else. If you show up at church with your daughter Julie by the hand, everyone will greet you and Julie, too. When congregations begin to have 130 to 150 people coming every Sunday morning they begin to get nervous. As Carl Dudley put it in Unique Dynamics of the Small Church they begin to feel 'stuffed." Members wonder about the new faces that they don't know-people who don't know them. Are they beginning to lose the intimate fellowship they prize so highly?[17]

The UMCNB is the type of congregation whose strengths lie in the interconnectedness of the members either through familial bonds or common interest concomitant with leadership of the pastor which is central in all aspects of the life of the congregation. Within the UMCNB, I was able to observe these characteristics during the Sunday worship experience, events that follow the Sunday worship experience or events attempted during the week.

The events that took place during this research were not sporadically scheduled. The Church Council as well as the pastor had both been aware of the events since January 2016. Considering the findings of Parsons and Leas as indicated above, probably a big

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[16] Parsons and Leas, 125-126.

[17] Roy M. Oswald. How To Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate-Sized Churches Accessed online 10/31/16
http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200702/200702_000_various_size.cfm

factor in the lack of participation in project events was that I was neither the pastor nor senior minster at the church. To use the language of church size theory, I was not part of a leadership circle or the central focus at the core of the leadership circle. Parsons and Leas go further with this when they state: "Membership seems to be granted much more easily in the Pastoral-Sized church that in the Family church. But inclusion into the core circle may prove difficult and may take a significant amount of time."[18]

When placing these results in conversation with church-size theory as mentioned above, it becomes apparent that my initial expectations as a lay servant in securing the pastor's support and participation in this project were critical to the success of this project within this congregation. It was clear to me at the onset of this project that we needed the drive and influence of the pastor to make inroads within the congregation. However, interestingly, the email exchange mentioned earlier regarding the conflict between the hospitality small group course and the Adult Bible Study class appears to be a power struggle with an existing leadership circle and emerging leadership circle. It is unclear if this tension might have been the result of the overlapping of the courses, the request to shift gears and merge the course temporarily, or resistance to the authority that approved its implementation in the first place. Finally, taking into consideration that project implementation took place while the congregation was adjusting to the appointment of a new pastor, and the fact that the church had some underlying tension brewing regarding leadership decisions made prior to the new pastor's installment, this project came about during a difficult time in the life of the church.

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[18] . Parsons and Leas, 125-126.

Some of this tension materialized during a church meeting where the findings of the consultant's listening group report were being presented and discussed. The tension between the Trustee's and Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) chair became vocal when the SPRC chair stated: "I am ready to leave this church." To which a representative of the Trustee Board replied: "You said and did some things that were not right." It was a messy and intense conversation that reflected the then and current state of the UMCNB.

The surrounding community

The LAC and I both felt that the community had much to gain from these events. I know this to be relevant based on my limited interactions with the visitors who walked into the movie event and the response from school officials regarding the college readiness event. When I reached out to a local high school guidance counselor she said, "College readiness begins as early as possible. In addition to the juniors and seniors, you may want to reach out to the seventh and eighth graders."[19]

There were a few barriers in advertising for all of the events. I was limited to email, telephone, and fax notifications to community agencies. On Sunday's after worship service, I would post fliers at local eateries and other place where people congregated. Nevertheless, the fact that I no longer resided in the neighborhood where the church is located made contact with community members difficult. If I were still a resident of the town where the where the church was located and the project was

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[19] New Brunswick High School Guidance Counselor, 2016. Interview by author. Telephone Communication. New Brunswick. February 22. All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

implemented, I would have had direct access to local residents over the weekends, after work hours or in just carrying out my routine errands in the community.

Ongoing Ramifications

Traffic Congestion: Too Much Going on at One Time

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the small group study on hospitality occurred during the same time as another Bible study class. This overlap caused individuals to pick and choose between the two classes. One woman appeared to be torn by having to choose. She indicated the following to me, "I want to support both classes but I cannot stop attending the Adult Sunday School class." [20] This church member seemed to be unaware of my offer to combine both classes temporarily. This conversation implied that the leadership of the Adult Sunday School class may not have offered the option for the small group study on hospitality to the class participants.

Because Sundays are the best days to garner congregational participation in events, classes, and meetings there seemed to be no other days where congregants might have been readily available. Unfortunately, many congregants do not come to church during the week for events except for memorial services, holidays or other seasonal events.

Screeching Halt: Participation as well as support matters

I had never received a clearer picture of support and participation than I did as I carried out this project. There was no question regarding support for this project at UMCNB. The LAC and I explored all appropriate avenues to ensure that the proper channels authorized access to church space. Many Church leaders and congregants were

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[20] All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

glad to hear about the initiatives that this project offered. Congregants offered accolades to me about the work of the project. One congregant approached me during the sharing of the peace and stated, "Thank you for all the work you are doing for the church." Another women approached me after service and stated: "We haven't had events like this before and they sound very promising." However, while support helps to keep individuals encouraged and motivated to continue their work, it is participation that brings about change and promotes a new way of being the gathered into a community of God.

In the next chapter entitled "Are We There Yet?" I will provide the overall evaluation of the project and conclusion to determine if or when this congregation might arrive at its desired state.

Chapter 5

Are We There Yet: Evaluation and Conclusion

There is an old adage that holds a journey begins with the first step. There is always a path that leads from here to there. However, in order to move, one must take the first step. From my perspective as a local lay servant and researcher within the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, this first step was listening and responding to the ethos of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick.

I designed my subsequent actions in the development and selection of the Lay Advisory Committee, the one-on-one interviews, the project events, and small group sessions to assist the congregation in understanding its current identity. I also had hopes that the project might help my context shift towards a new identity that would be inclusive of the changes within the congregation and social milieu of the surrounding community. Recall that the existing identity was the congregation's self-identification as a regional church and the new or counter-identity would be a resident church. The vehicle the LAC and I identified to facilitate a possible move between the two identities was the implementation of Biblical hospitality.

As mentioned earlier, I initially came to this congregation with my own idea of what I believed all local churches needed – a security plan. However, it was necessary that I abandon that idea for a more congregationally suitable pursuit. My preconceived

idea was like a road block on this journey that could have halted the project in its entirety.

But, in hindsight, I consider my previous idea to be a detour sign that signaled a change

of direction ahead.

<div align="center">Observing Change and Discerning Transformation</div>

Qualitative research calls for a qualitative approach to evaluation.

According to Savage and Presnell:

> We see a form of evaluation that consists of two distinct parts. One part is
> observing change…you compare the state of the context prior to new ministry
> intervention and afterward…the second part is discerning transformation…the
> latter part of this definition is critical…in the purpose of evaluation – discerning
> transformation toward a preferred future.[1]

Change is simply doing something different or making alternative adjustments. One can

observe change with all the senses; however, the process leading toward change can

range from possible to impossible, easy to difficult, likely to unlikely depending on the

change agent and/or situation. As I look back on this work, I can honestly say that the

change in direction I mentioned above was the best move. However, it was not the

easiest move to make because I quickly had to rethink the plan and process.

Nevertheless, this was the first change the LAC and I observed in this project which then

became a sign of a new emergence within myself as a researcher as well as an opening

for the congregation to dialog and participate in a new emergence of congregational life.

There were a few notable areas of change that happened during the progress of

this project. The most noticeable was the establishment of relationships that did not exist

prior to its implementation. As mentioned previously, I had been a member of the

congregation two years prior to the implementation of the project. During this time, I had

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[1] Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 124.

met a few congregants; however, there were some denoted as leaders that I never had the opportunity to meet. There were also some leaders who were very quiet during worship and coffee hour and did not seem as approachable as others. However, in different settings, like the Church Council meetings or other small gatherings, these individuals were very vocal and engaging. The project created an opportunity to engage with individuals who at first appeared to be distant and uninterested and later became key players to implementing and supporting the project. I believe that I was able to develop possible lifelong relationships as a result of this project.

Another change that I observed within the congregation was the creation of activities that would allow for the congregation and community to connect outside of the regularly scheduled worship service and Bible study classes. Prior to implementation, congregational activities were limited to fundraising events, seasonal celebrations, and weekly scheduled services. This project created homegrown events that addressed social, spiritual, and physical needs in one location. These events provided alternative forms for fellowship. Despite low levels of participation, we set the table and made sure to welcome everyone to take their fill freely of what we offered for enrichment of, nurturing of and care for the gathered community.

In further consideration of the first part of evaluation – observing change, I find Mary Clark Moschella's approach to organizing and analyzing data in Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice useful in observing, consolidating, and interpreting information gathered. This technique was critical to understanding data collected through the one-on-one interviews and additional narratives we received during the course of this project.

This process allowed me to develop categories and themes to describe the social climate within the congregation as a whole.

The steps that I have identified to observe change through collected data include Moschella's "immersion, slices and bags, and literal reading and usage of charts and graphs. Immersion speaks to becoming familiar with the data collected. It also allows the researcher to 'get a feel for the data, their content and scope.'"[2] In addition, Moschella designation regarding 'Slices and Bags' refer to how one will organize the data in groups or categories for further review. Moschella describes the initial grouping of material as putting the data into loose bags or slices and treating these as unfinished resources that can be examined in order to help see themes in the data set."[3] Moschella cites three ways to read data:

> Literal reading of a recorded conversation might involve coding a particular vocabulary, forms of speech, pause, interruption and so forth. Interpretive reading of a conversation involves sorting the data for implied or inferred meaning. Reading the material reflexively would involve concentrating on your own comments and influence in the interview.[4]

I found that a literal reading would be sufficient for this task. A literal reading involves "coding particular vocabulary…."[5] I found that coding for particular vocabulary could set the stage for charting the information in a particular way to look for themes and other relationships between respondents. According to Moschella, "…charts and graphs can help you see aspects of our data in a more efficient and comprehensive way."[6] This

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[2] Moschella, *Ethnography,* 167
[3] Ibid., 170.
[4] Ibid., 172.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 175.

observation process should allow the researcher to interpret data in a way that drives the

research goal forward or creates an alternative view of the issue.

What follows is a chart that organizes the information gathered from the one-on-one interviews and the subsequent themes generated from the top three responses for each question. As mentioned previously in this paper, the purpose of the one-on-one interviews was to gauge the congregation's perception of hospitality at the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick. There were four questions, twenty-nine participants and one-hundred and sixteen responses.

The chart below represents the summary of narratives received and the frequency of the narrative for each question:

Response	Question#1	Question#2	Question#3	Question#4
116 responses summarized and listed according to frequency	Why Did you Choose to attend UMCNB?	How would you describe your needs at this point in your life?	What makes you feel welcomed and encouraged to grow in your faith at UMCNB?	How can UMCNB assist in you in feeling welcomed and encouraged to grow in your faith
Family/Friends Connection	12	1	5	2
Fellowship/Friendliness	5	7	17	11
Pastoral Care	0	3	2	0
Preaching/Sermons	2	0	3	0
Liturgy/Worship	2	1	2	3
The Pastor/Leadership	1	1	6	0
Outreach	1	0	7	7
Proximity to Home	3	0	0	0
Spirituality/Disciplines	0	1	1	1
N/A	0	5	0	4

Figure 4. Summary of One-On-One Interview Responses

The top three narrative the LAC and I received for each question and associated themes in parentheses reveal the following:

Question #1 Why did you chose to attend UMCNB:

1. Congregants stated "Personal relationship within the congregation" was the primary reason why they attended the church (Family/Friendship Connection)
2. Congregants stated the "opportunities for gathering within and outside the church setting and feeling welcomed" was an important factor of why the attended the church. (Fellowship/Friendliness)

3. Congregants also stated that the church was "accessible and close to home" as a reason for attending the church. (Proximity to Home)

Question #2 How would you describe your needs at this point in your life:

1. Congregants stated "a need for connection with family and friends" was a priority in their lives. (Family/Friendship Connection)
2. Congregants also expressed a need for "counselling, nurture, ensuring and spiritual needs are met" was a need in their lives. (Pastoral Care)
3. Congregants also identified a need for "pastoral leadership, a deeper experience of spirituality and spiritual disciplines, as well as liturgy and family and friend connections" as a need in their life.

Question #3 What makes you feel welcomed and encouraged to grow in your faith UMCNB:

1. Congregants revealed that "having the opportunity and being encouraged to gather within and outside church" helped them to grow in their faith. (Fellowship/Friendliness)
2. Congregants stated that having the "opportunity to serve others and connecting with community" encouraged them to grow in their faith (Outreach)
3. Congregants identified that having a "skilled/knowledgeable pastor…visibility and connecting with leadership" was important to their faith development.

Question #4 How can UMCNB assist you in feeling welcomed and encouraged to grow…:

1. Congregants stated that providing "opportunity for gathering within and outside of church setting and creating a welcoming environment" will help them to feel encouraged to grow in their faith. (Fellowship/Friendliness)
2. Congregants stated that having the "opportunity to serve others and connecting with community" was important part of feeling welcomed and encouraged to grow in their faith (Outreach)
3. Congregants indicated that having a skilled/knowledgeable pastor…visibility and connecting with leadership" was necessary to feel at home/welcomed at the church and useful for growing in their faith. (Pastoral Leadership)[7]

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[7] All Interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Further consolidation of the top three narratives for each question reveals the following themes and faith language of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick.[8] They deal with issues regarding hospitality and welcome: personal relationship to the congregation, opportunities for gathering and feeling welcomed, accessibility, pastoral care which includes having a skilled and knowledgeable pastor and ensuring that spiritual needs of congregants are met and being able to connect with church leadership, and finally, opportunities for outreach and service to the community. Communication is key to initiating change. These narratives reveal part of the process of moving this congregation towards change by communicating pastoral leadership, presence, care, connection; accessibility and welcome; and avenues to be in fellowship and service to others.

These responses and themes reflect textbook characteristics of Pastoral-Sized congregations. However, these responses seem to reflect the point of view and expectations of the congregants and not necessarily the ideas and perspective of the pastor or key leaders. To verify this idea, I checked the consent forms to see the names of those who completed the one-on-one interviews. While I cannot link the names to particular responses, being able to identify who participated in the interviews would shed light on whether the responses came from the congregants or the congregation leaders. The consent forms revealed that of the twenty-nine responses received, twenty-one responses were from congregants, five responses were from ministry chairs, one response was from clergy and one response from Lay Leader/Servant.

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[8] Faith Language is a term I created to describe a congregation's articulation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in terms of being a gathered community, mission and Christian beliefs. In my experience, I found that congregations have a unique way of living out Christianity. It is my guess that knowing the faith language or the way in which a congregation communicates Christian beliefs is useful to assist congregation to change and possibly transform to a new state of being.

The chart below represents the number of One-on-One Interviews received:

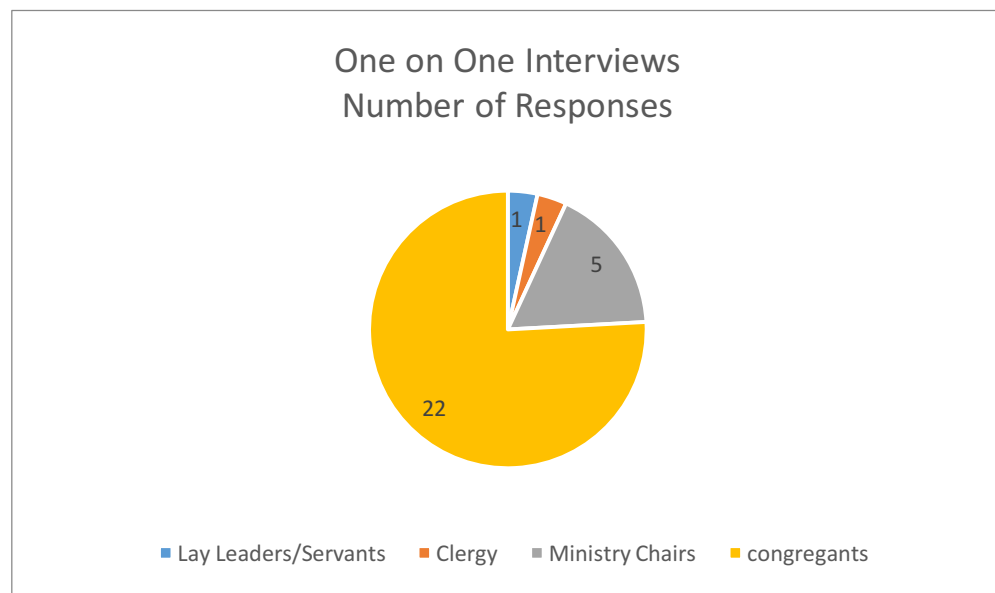One on One Interviews
Number of Responses

Figure 5. One-On-One Interviews Number of Responses

Since 76% of the responses represent congregant views and not those of the

congregational leaders; i.e. clergy, lay leader/servants and ministry chairs, it seems safe

to say that these themes do represent a significant majority of the congregants and not the

congregational leaders. This information shows forth a lack of shared interest between

the perception of the congregants and the views of the congregational leaders. This lack

of shared interest could possibly bring about a negative change which could lead to other

symptoms of unmet needs, such as: attendance drop off, criticism of church leadership,

reduced tithes or offerings, and other signs of passive discord within congregations.

   After observing change, Savage and Presnell describes how to determine

transformation towards a preferred future:

> Since postmodern evaluation seeks to understand changes in the ways faith
> communities identify themselves and practice that identity, altered boundaries
> and/or worldview of the ministry context, the team or the student are important
> signals. The change in identity or conditions may indicate that the preferred story

is entangling the ongoing story of the context and simulating a change in relationships and structures that may harbinger it emergence.[9]

Savage and Presnell identify three locations to observe change as follows: "A great beginning place for evaluation [of] ministry project is to note social change in any of the three major constituents for the project (context, team and leader/research…)" [10] These three elements seem to match Stephen Pattison's model for theological reflection as it relates to having a means towards:

> …a three way 'conversation' or dialogue between their own ideas, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions; the beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions, and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation which is being considered.[11]

While it seems as if these are individual aspects of the research and ministry practice (i.e. the ministry context, team, and the researcher), I see these three elements unified within a conversation. In addition, in this particular project, the Lay Advisory Committee, Ministry context, and the student/researcher are all part of the same context. Therefore, I will not delineate each member for signs of change. Instead, I will view the ministry context (i.e. congregation and surrounding community), team (i.e. Lay Advisory Committee, and existing ministry leaders) and student (i.e. this researcher) as a three-way conversation and will discern the process of transformation based on the congregation's ongoing story entwined with the preferred story; i.e., becoming a Resident

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[9] Savage and Presnell, *Narrative Research*, 127.

[10] Ibid., 124.

[11] Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 135.

church and using *Radical Hospitality* to engage each other as a faith community as well as the surrounding community.

During the last Church Council meeting, there was a conversation about a noticeable change in attendance in the past six months; and subsequently less tithing and offerings. The Church Council began to deliberate about what could have caused the decline in attendance. The topic of the recent Consultant Report of 9/11/16 was referenced as a nodal event; i.e. an event that has a profound impact on a person, community or family. While I was not present at the congregation when the consultants delivered this report to the church in a town hall meeting, there were conversations amongst the Church Council attendees that the report was not well received by congregants and may have pushed some members away. This report came to the congregation after the implementation of the research project; however, there is reason to believe that the consultant as well as the report may have given rise to a necessary tension and unrest in the congregation because some stated that the report was not an accurate representation of the congregation.

I make this statement based on the fact that my research could best depict this congregation as pastoral a congregation because of its size (see my earlier discussion of this in the results chapter) and the consultant and his report acted as outsiders having no vested leadership authority within the congregation. In addition, using the paradigm of the three-way conversation (congregation/context, researcher, and team) one has to question where the consultant and his report fit into the conversation. In my estimation, the consultant and the report appeared to act as a kind of hired-gun; i.e. an external entity with skill and expertise brought in to resolve a complex problem objectively. Even

though the pastor with the approval of the Church Council brought the consultant on board, at the time of the consultant's work, the pastor was newly appointed to the congregation. As a result, the congregation was adjusting to the new pastor as well as the consultant at the same time. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the congregation would be resistant to the report of the consultant. As a matter of fact, it is possible that the findings of the consultant report had little to do with the resistance and pushback from the congregation as observed in tension generated during the first consultant reading and the reaction during the second report. What's more likely the root of the resistance is the paucity of pastoral care and presence which seems to be the inherent lifeline of this pastoral-size congregation. Would the response of the congregation have been different if the report were delivered by and filtered through pastoral oversight with an identified course of actions before it was presented to the congregation? I would say yes to this assertion because within a pastoral size congregation the pastor is at the center of all leadership circles existing or those that are up and coming. In addition, it appears that the consultant and the consultant report were received as an end instead of the means to an end. I say this because the reception of the report was not seen as a tool or information to help guide the congregation to its desired state, but instead it was viewed as an indictment showing forth an undesirable state or image of the congregation. My inclusion of the consultant and consultant report is because his work and the work of this project began at the same time within the congregation. The project does incorporate some of the earlier work of the consultant who identified the congregation's preferred future and how the congregation might establish its presence within the community. The presence of the consultant was at the behest of the pastor and it was clear that in addition to having this

consultant approved by the Church Council, the pastor supported its work through announcements from the pulpit and calling gather together members to participate in the vision planning team. As a result of this, the consultant and consultant reports were very much a part of the life of the congregation and did manage to have a profound impact on the congregation during the implementation of this research project.

<center>Methodology of Evaluation</center>

Savage and Presnell speak of entangling as a sign of transformation where the preferred story intertwines with the ongoing story and as a result spurs people on towards discernment of transformation in relationships and structure. Savage and Presnell state:

> Since postmodern evaluation seeks to understand changes in the ways faith communities identify themselves and practice that identity, altered boundaries and /or worldview of the ministry context, the team or the student are important signals. The change in identity or conditions may indicate that the preferred story is entangling the ongoing story of the context and stimulating a change in relationships and structure that may harbinger its emergence.[12]

I like the usage of the word entanglement because it not only denotes a sense of knitting together, but it also seems to represent struggle and tension necessary for transformation. It seems to remind the reader that authentic transformation does not come about easily or comfortably. On the contrary, it can be a difficult process.

This notion of entanglement also reminds me of Mary Clark Moschella's Thematic Analysis as a means for evaluating and discerning transformation. Max Van Manen[13] as cited in Moschella states the following: "Themes are "like knots in the webs

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[12] Savage and Presnell, 127.

[13] "**Max van Manen** is emeritus Professor in Research Methods, Pedagogy and Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and Adjunct Professor at the University of Victoria. He is the leading proponent of the practice and meaning of phenomenological inquiry in pedagogy, psychology, health science, and the human sciences.

of our experience, around which certain lived experience are thus spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Themes are like stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through."[14]

Moschella spends a lot of time focusing on the star's analogy in her writing, while I think knots are a more appropriate way to discern change and transformation. I say this because stars, like pie in the sky, may generate nice ideas/themes that may not be achievable in this lifetime. However, knots are an everyday occurrence; they are tangible, and common to humanity.

As mentioned earlier, the consultant's subsequent report represented a strand that created a necessary tension within the congregation. The pastor (a second strand) was indirectly involved with this tension caused by the consultant's findings. However, this does not exempt the pastor from the responsibility of steering the congregation through the many obstacles the consultant and the report presented. The Church Council represents another strand and level of tension that is in the middle of the tension between the pastor, congregation, and consultant report because they were the ones who approved the consultant's work within the congregation. The surrounding community in New Brunswick was an outlier strand which the congregation was attempting to connect. My work in this ministry project was like the knitting needle, using the pattern of biblical hospitality, attempting to thread all the strands of established resources together to get to

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www.amazon.com, Search: Max Van Manen "Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (Suny Series, Philosophy of Education), Editorial Review: About Author, accessed online 12/8/15.

[14] Moschella, *Ethnography,* 178.

the preferred future – a clear understanding of the congregational identity within the context of the surrounding community.

The questions that beg to be answered by this research and ministry context are: How did the faith community's ongoing story become intertwined with its preferred story which was communicated as establishing the church's presence and becoming engaged with the surrounding community? How did this new identity/knot transform its response to members of its faith community and its response to the community at-large? Does the congregation have a new idea of itself? Did the congregation remain as they identified themselves as Regional and Welcoming congregation or did it become the Resident and Engaged congregation? Discerning this type of transformation is in line with Presnell and Savage's Ecological perspective of evaluation which holds:

> Traditionally, the ecological approach is employed when determining how a society relates to its physical environment. In our approach to understanding a specific context in its larger context, we may move this understanding of ecology beyond a simple physical basis. That is, the ecology of a ministerial context does indeed incorporate its relationship to the physical environment, but we may include its relationship to other larger cultural contexts. These larger contexts function perhaps as the physical landscape in which the ministerial context resides. Take, for example, a local church that is located in an urban area. The urban physical landscape is the physical environment that the ministerial context relates to on one level, and one can move outward to the global environment from that starting point.[15]

I find that the ecological approach to evaluation correlates with the idea of concentric circles of concern diagrams. Concentric circles are about relationships and proximity. Concentric circles of concern diagrams begin with a common core. Each subsequent circle become another level of influence that ranges in closeness or awareness of the core.

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[15] Savage and Presnell, 128.

The farther out the circle, the less connection with or knowledge of those within the core and vice versa.

In figure six, we see the congregation at the core of its physical and social environment. There are shared expectations and nuances within the core that appear in the one-on-one interviews, the report on listening groups, and the recent Vision/Strategic
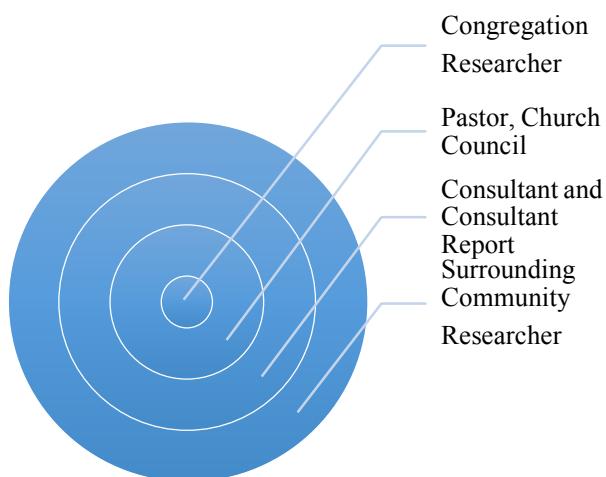

Figure 6. Concentric Circles of Concern

Planning Interim Report. This research as well as the subsequent consultant reports reveal that the congregation has an idea of its identity within its context and surrounding community that is within its circumference but does not connect with its present reality. As a researcher, I am both an active member of the congregation as well as a participant-observer in the surrounding community by virtue of this ministry project. Therefore, the researcher is listed within the core as well as within the surrounding community concentric circle. The pastor and the Church Council are working closely with the congregation but are not centralized in the life of the congregation. The best way to explain the relationship between the congregation, the pastor and Church Council is comparable to the role of a nonprofit agency, executive director, and board of directors. While executive director and the board of directors help to keep the agency afloat

administratively, very seldom do they participate directly in the actual work of the

agency. In this instance, the work of the agency is comparable to the work of the

congregation in members' interaction with each other and the surrounding community.

Both the intervention of this research project and the work of the consultant within this

congregation have been met with both interest and skepticism. The congregation's lack

of participation in its environment may reflect the dynamics of pastoral leadership in a

pastoral-sized congregation. Recall that within a pastoral-sized congregation,

congregants are not as excited about the surrounding community and its concerns. They

are more concerned about what is going on in-house among those who they are familiar

with as revealed in this research. Further research on pastoral-sized congregation reveals:

> This size church may have problems with assimilation and recruitment because the pastor is limited in the number of newcomers he or she can bring in at a time. Many pastors who have served this size church say that members tend to be casual, even uninterested, about newcomers, and that it is up to the pastor to get them interested.[16]

All other influencers within the second and third circles seem to have a disposition

towards working for the congregation instead of working with the congregation. By this

I mean that the difference between the two is centered on ownership and participation.

When the work of the ministry is left solely in the hands of the leadership, some are

bound to feel left out of the life and ministry of the congregation. However, people are

not purposely left out of the planning and decision making process. Within the United

Methodist Church, the Church Council meetings are open to the entire congregation. It is

during the Church Council meetings that decisions are made and persons can be apprised

of what is going on in the church and cast their vote for or against the proposed plans.

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[16] Parsons and Leas, 126.

However, the Church Council meetings at the present seems to be attended by lay

servants and other ministry chairs. As a result, people's voices are not heard because

they are not showing up to the meetings to participate in the planning and deliberation

process. I am reminded of the definition of the self-fulling prophecy where beliefs are

followed by corresponding behavior. If the congregants feel that their voices are not

heard, they will not show up to the places where their voice could be heard and therein

lies the continuation of powerlessness. If the congregants are serious about change, and

growing, and becoming a stronger faith community, than the congregation would need to

take ownership of that vision and become engaged in the process of intentional prayer,

fellowship, and ministry planning and decision making that take place in the Church

Council meeting.

In order for this congregation to grow into its preferred future, a merger might

need to take place between the leadership and the congregation. Based on the dynamics

of a Pastoral-Sized congregation, the pastor needs to become present and engaged in the

life of the congregation and it activities.

> In a congregation of this size the pastor is usually, quite literally, involved in
> everything. The pastor attends all church meetings, goes to all public gatherings,
> and does most of the ministering. If people need to be called on, the pastor does
> it; if a couple need instruction on how to conduct and carry out a wedding and
> reception at the church, the pastor does it; if newcomers show up, the pastor calls
> on them. This is expected not only by the pastor but by the members and by the
> newcomers.[17]

It seems to me that most observations of congregational life take for granted that the

congregation and its leadership are intrinsically linked. However, this research

demonstrates the opposite. There is a lot of internal work that needs to take place within

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[17] Ibid.

the congregation to link the congregation with it leaders to ensure that its engagement

within the surrounding community is a testament to its reason for existence as a faith

community in downtown New Brunswick.

While tension is necessary for change, tension also has a way of triggering a flight

or fight response within those who are connected to the source of tension. Toggling

between my role as congregant and researcher has provided me with tension on both

ends. As a congregant, I am familiar with the longing for pastoral presence and

leadership and wanting to work side by side with the pastor towards the missional goals

of the congregation and not only as servant but also as a leader in the process. As a

researcher and lay servant, I found myself befuddled by a congregation that said it

wanted to connect with each other and the community and serve in ministry but when

opportunities were presented for these activities to take place, the participation of the

congregation was low to nonexistent. As a result of this tension on both ends as

congregant and researcher, I found myself having a desire to obtain a position within the

church that would give me more authority to impact change than I had a local lay servant.

The tension thereby sparked a flight instinct within me to go where I could practice the

ministry to which God was calling me.

In considering the intention of the pastor in hiring the consultant, I would say that

the intention was good but the timing might have been off. In addition, it seems as if the

work of the consultant might have replaced the work the pastor. It seems to me that part

of a pastor's new appointment to a congregation should include getting to know the

congregation through first-hand interaction. It would have been great for the pastor to

lead and facilitate listening groups with the assistance of the Church Council as this may

have begun the healing that needs to take place between the congregation and leadership in general. In hindsight, perhaps the consultant could have worked directly with the Church Council, lay servants and ministry chairs, guiding them in how to gather information from congregants and then interpret that data for ministry planning. Instead, it seems like the consultant became the surrogate in this important work of congregants and leadership and thereby created more tension and dissension within the congregation and leadership.

While some may argue that a pastor cannot be involved in every aspect of the function of the church, my counter argument is that in a Pastoral-Sized congregation, the pastor has to be all things to all people. Otherwise, the pastor would need to be matched with a different type of congregation. I am not sure if the current pastor had an idea of the type of congregation he was entering; and if he did, perhaps the action taken within the first year of being appointed to this congregation might have been different.

Conclusion

To answer an aforementioned question how did the faith community's ongoing story become intertwined with its preferred story and how did this new identity/knot transform its response to members of its faith community and its response to the community at-large? The congregation is having a difficult time accepting its present reality, identity, and social context which may be due in part to an ongoing lack of pastoral presence and leadership. This issue does not appear to be something new or beginning with the appointment of the current pastor. I could sense this deficiency when I first arrived at the congregation two years prior. Perhaps it was related to the fact that the pastor at that time was preparing for retirement and was beginning to release the reins

of the congregation. However, upon further reflection, I could remember congregants

speaking lovingly and affirmatively about the pastor prior to the last two pastoral

appointments.

The other side of the issue is the fact that congregants are not consistently

participating in ministries geared towards spiritual formation or practicing spiritual

disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and Bible study in community. In addition,

congregant's attendance at Church Council meetings is low to nonexistent.

The next question asks: does the congregation have a new idea of itself? The

congregation does have a new idea of itself but it's not a favorable one as this idea was

communicated through the consultant reports. At some point, we all need to take an

honest look at ourselves and acknowledge our strengths as well as our weakness. When

the consultant reports were presented to the congregation on two occasions, feelings of

trepidation surfaced as observed on each presentation. It seems as if the reflection of the

congregation in the reports was too grievous to bear and the opportunity for makeover

through the implementation of this research project was deemed either unnecessary or

useful for others who might be in need of the services the ministry events provided.

Finally, to answer the question, did the congregation remain as the Regional

Church or did it become the Resident Church, the answer remains to be seen. The church

is in flux and primed to move either forward into a new identity or in the middle of what

used to be and what might come. Transformation depends on the amount of tension the

United Methodist Church at New Brunswick congregation and leadership are willing to

endure as they learn to practice hospitality among themselves and surrounding

community; as well as how entangled they will become in the lives and of each other and

the lives and of those within the community at large.

> Then the man said, "your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have
> struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.
> Genesis 32:28[18]

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[18] Bible Gateway, Scripture Search, accessed online December 28, 2016, https://www.biblegateway.com

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