

A COMPLETE OVERHAUL OF THE GUESTS TO NEW DISCIPLESHIP  
ASSIMILATION SYSTEM AT ST. JOHN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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## ABSTRACT

### A COMPLETE OVERHAUL OF THE GUESTS TO NEW MEMBERSHIP ASSIMILATION SYSTEM AT ST. JOHN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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St. John Missionary Baptist Church, Boynton Beach, FL

St. John Missionary Baptist Church is a traditional African-American Missionary Baptist church that has continuously served the city of Boynton Beach for nearly one hundred and ten years. From its inception, the church has served as a major pillar in the community and currently boasts over one thousand members. It is a vibrant church that contains a full ministerial staff, board of deacons and trustees, a senior pastor, a social service agency, and a plethora of ministries. Although it continues to serve as a beacon of hope within the community, it undeniably lacks in extending the necessary attention needed to give to its guests and a strategic plan to maintain its new members.

I firmly believe through calculated observation that the lack of hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach has become the subject by which the church has had to endure the impact of individuals not experiencing the church as a place to belong. Therefore, while some would join based upon the proclamation of the Word of God, they would unfortunately after encountering the closeness, territorial ways, and on occasions the coldness of the church, they would eventually not return. This has become a major concern for the church as it seeks to maintain its influence within a diversifying community.

Therefore, in embracing the words of Albert Einstein, “significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them,” we developed a system to shift the culture of the church. This system has proven to be very effective. The church has witnessed considerable growth as a result of it and has experienced a large number of people express their appreciation for the hospitality they received while attending St. John.

DEDICATION

To Jordyn, Joshua and Jayden

## Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements	
Table of Figures	
Introduction.....	1
<b>Chapter 1. The Parish.....</b>	<b>7</b>
The History of the Black Church.....	11
The History of St. John Missionary Baptist Church.....	14
Challenges Within the Church.....	19
<b>Chapter 2. The Process.....</b>	<b>25</b>
The Unstuck Group.....	26
Lay Advisory Committee.....	31
Church Management Database System.....	32
Leadership & Ministry Buy-In.....	36
<b>Chapter 3. The Purpose: Theological Reflection.....</b>	<b>39</b>
Hospitality: Embrace the Stranger.....	40
Fellowship: Engage the Saint.....	49
Discipleship: Equip the Servant.....	54
Outreach: Evangelize the Sinner.....	57

<b>Chapter 4. The Project</b> .....	64
Communication Phase.....	66
Connection Phase.....	75
Foundations for Building Disciples.....	78
Biblical Houses.....	79
Commitment Phase.....	81
Implementation.....	86
<b>Chapter 5. The Performance</b> .....	88
Appendix.....	100
Spiritual Gifts Test.....	100
Spiritual Gifts Analysis Sheet.....	107
Analysis Instructions.....	108
Spiritual Gifts Reference Materials Definitions and Biblical References.....	109
Bibliography.....	129

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Furthermore, I would like to show my sincere gratitude to my advisors, Rev. Dr. Kevin Miller and Dr. Donna Ciangio. Your unwavering enthusiasm, expertise, and encouragement for ministry kept me constantly engaged. Thank you so much for all the wisdom you poured into me and your ongoing support throughout the course of my work.



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## TABLE OF FIGURES

1.1	Assimilation System Theological Focus Chart.....	40
1.2	St. John's New Assimilation System Structure Chart.....	66
1.3	Assimilation System Reach Cards.....	71
1.4	Assimilation System Gift Bag Items.....	72
1.5	Assimilation System Personal Notecards.....	73
1.6	Foundation for Building Disciples Members' Guide.....	78
1.7	REACH Life Groups System.....	84

## INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I found myself aimlessly walking through the aisles of a local Christian bookstore as a way of letting time pass by. Noticeably, as I was perusing through the aisles, I was amazed at the countless shelves that consisted of a multitude of interesting books that sought to characterize themselves as the defining means by which a church can experience the delight of mastering the aptitude of growth. Intrigued by the plethora of different books, I decided to take a more in-depth look at what the authors sought to communicate. In briefly doing so, I observed that the practical ideas of growth expounded upon, within these books, seemed to have unapologetically positioned the concept of growth into the confines of an absolute term, rather than in accordance with its relative nature. In other words, although there are different types of growth a church can experience, one was undeniably paramount amongst the others. Certainly, not to my surprise, the compelling focus of these books seemed to have been that of numerical growth and not on the matter of maturity. Now, please understand, I am by no means opposed to the reality of growing a church numerically. In fact, I wholeheartedly believe in the account recorded in the Book of Acts pertaining to three thousand souls being added to the early church,<sup>1</sup> and I further embrace the idea of extracting useful techniques and tools that are designed to aid in increasing the local assembly's membership; however, I definitely believe there ought to be a healthy balance of both.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:41

Indeed, in order to do so successfully, the work must first begin within the margins of the church walls before the impact from without can be genuinely realized. What I am simply trying to convey is that, the people within the church must first be willing to become more mature in the things of God in order to have an effective reach beyond the boundaries of its walls. A theologian by the name of Walter Brueggemann suggests that “if the church is to be faithful it must be formed and ordered from the inside of its experience and confession and not by borrowing from sources external to its own life.”<sup>2</sup> Regrettably, I have found all during my tenure as a pastor, and quite frankly throughout my involvement with “church” that, increasingly the problem today is that there are a host of churches which express a growing desire to increase spiritually and numerically, yet their actions and behaviors communicate otherwise. The church’s grasp on tradition, cultural standings, and uncompassionate personal characteristics do more to hinder, disrupt and interfere with the hand of God, than collaborate with it. With that being said, I am a strong believer in the theoretical mindset that church growth is measured in dollars, not cents. Strictly speaking, church growth has everything to do with spiritual maturity and not in the number of people that occupy a seat on a given Sunday. For the last time I checked, I found that it takes a hundred pennies just to equate itself with the maturity of a one dollar bill. I do not know about anyone else, but I would rather have a bunch of dollars, than a pocket full of pennies in my ministry, because pennies have a tendency to weigh you down.

I believe the catalyst by which a church can experience the maturity needed to produce necessary growth is based upon its willingness to embrace what I have come to

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 5.

learn as being the Baptist curse word, “change.” Now, the type of change I’m advocating is for the sort of change that focuses on enhancement, and not necessarily eradication. One of the things I appreciated learning from the vital principles that makeup the Emerging Church movement is its established affinity for adaptation and not abrogation. The word adaptation refers to the “modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment,”<sup>3</sup> whereas abrogation is the “act of abolishing by formal or official means; annul by an authoritative act; repeal, to put aside; put an end to.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in respect to these bookends, most growth seeking churches infer that the complete demolition of past practices is the best means towards expansion. However, the theoretical framework of the aforementioned movement challenges churches that it is the “reengaging of their best past”<sup>5</sup> with a sprinkling of change that serves as the catalyst for churches enhancing their atmospheric reach, thereby cultivating necessary growth.

Without any reservations, I concur that in this changing, pluralist, and post-Christian world, the church must be adaptable. It is the failure to adapt that catapults churches down the catastrophic road of extinction. Nonetheless, I favorably acknowledge that the church’s adaptability mustn’t lead to the compromise of biblical standards, but instead enhance the passage by which it is physically and verbally communicated. So that our objectives of disseminating the message of Jesus’ way, truth

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<sup>3</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “adaptation” accessed October 5, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adaptation>.

<sup>4</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “abrogation” accessed October 5, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abrogation>.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity For The Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 4.

and life are not only appealing to the villager and returnee, but it will also be appealing to the convert, exile, immigrant and spiritual nomad.

Unfortunately, this is what I perceive to be the great dilemma faced by many churches. We are forced to ask and answer the questions of: how do we accomplish this without compromise? How do we effectively articulate the ways and life of Jesus while still having our hand clinched to our past and our feet cemented in our present? These are both undeniably challenging questions but I believe the answer is embodied in what Diana Butler Bass calls the “creative third way.”<sup>6</sup> The creative third way is simply “a blended sort of Christian theology and spirituality that draws from deep wells of tradition and yet is generously open to change and the remaking of those very traditions.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, it is the intentional practice of bridging the old with the new. Churches’ embrace of this creative third way must do so cautiously, but purposefully. They must be cautious in so far that they don’t just consent to all changes, but are discerning in their acceptance of those changes, and purposefully, in that “they [are] selectively adapting to the cultural [and social changes] that are pressuring the practice of Christian faith”<sup>8</sup> in order to maintain a transformative presence within their communities.

This reminded me of the thought-provoking parable Jesus rendered in response to the Pharisees' question about His practice of fasting compared to their own and John the Baptist's. In this parable, Jesus concretely affirms His disagreement with the Pharisees' religiosity by equating it with the licentiousness of putting “new wine into an old

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 224.

wineskin.”<sup>9</sup> As ascribed in the customary practices of wine pressing in ancient Israel, new wine needs a new wineskin because as the new wine expands during the fermentation process, it stretches the wineskin. Skins that have already been used and stretched out ("old wineskins") cannot be used again since they cannot stretch again. If they are used again for holding wine that is still in the process of fermenting ("new wine"), they will burst. In essence, what Jesus communicated was that the gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus brings cannot be fitted into the Pharisees' pattern of living.

As a theologian, I totally comprehend the allegory of the story and fully connect with the non-adhesiveness of the Pharisees' religious lifestyle and the spiritual freedom of the gospel. However, in looking at this motif through the lens of church expansion, I would dare to equate the bursting effect with that of growth. Yes, again it is very clear that the newness of spiritual freedom could not fit into the old ways of ritualism, but I perceive that this is only relative to stiff-necked traditionalists, who fail to embrace the significance of change. It should yet remain our hope that churches will burst at the seams of exclusion, in order that the Kingdom of God might expand.

With that being said, in all of my occasions to analyze constructively both the historical and present operable ministry systems within churches and provide strategic advisement that will, in the long run, help transition churches into making better possible choices, it is in my tenure as pastor of St. John Missionary Baptist Church that I realized that one of our major dilemmas is centered around our lack of implementing a viable assimilation system. An assimilation system is a system that would strategically serve as the vehicle by which we successfully transition guest into disciples. Yes, truthfully it is

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 5:36-39

nothing new. The church has been welcoming people into ministry for well over 109 years. However, the current system, or the lack thereof, has proven itself to be antiquated, and in need of an overhaul. Therefore, in embracing the creative third way and reengaging St. John's best past with a sprinkling of newness, we have developed a system that strategically emphasizes hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach as the tenants by which the system will not only operate effectively but also grow us spiritually and numerically.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE PARISH**

In today's society, we have witnessed individuals and institutions alike, unapologetically, label and limit the church to the confines of merely being an organization, rather than accepting what I have come to believe as its true nature of being an organism. This mindset could easily stem from the growing tenacity to hijack the founding principles of the church with human directives that ultimately cloud its trueness. If we were to take into consideration the definitions of both organization and organism, we would clearly see that an organization is "the act of organizing or of being organized"<sup>10</sup> whereas an organism is "a whole with interdependent parts, likened to a living being."<sup>11</sup> Truthfully, both definitions fit perfectly around the temperament of the church; however there is the rich dissimilarity of lifelessness and life that distinguishes the two. For by nature, an organization is lifeless, whereas an organism possesses life. Therefore, I concur that its structure, assembly, and arrangement of functions and work dictate that its existence is that of an organized unit; however, I am also careful to observe the significant attribute that differentiates it from other systematized entities, in that it is also an organism. As communicated throughout Scripture, the church serves in the capacity of being the Body of Christ. Therefore, unlike a table that is comprised of organized lifeless materials, the church is comprised of a body of people who

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<sup>10</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "organization."

<sup>11</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "organism" accessed April 8, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/organism>.

acknowledges Jesus as Lord, accepts His salvation, aligns itself with His teachings and acts in accordance with His will.

Undeniably, the synergy of these two extremes brings harmony to the work and life of the church. The idea of organism and organization working hand-in-hand allows for systematized human interactions that ultimately minimize the frailty of inadvertently communicating that the church is a place where only certain individuals belong, but it is fair to say that the church is a place where all belong. Sadly, this occurs quite frequently because of the impact the abstracting nature of our silos have on silencing the splendor of hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach. It is without question that each and every Sunday, we verbally communicate with great intentions that the doors of the church are open; however our territorial ways have also caused the back door of the church to be situated in the open position. It's quite relative to an experience I encountered in the summer of 2016. For a good while, I hadn't engaged in the luxury of hand washing my car due to other matters taking precedence. Purposefully, this day I decided to carve out a sufficient amount of time to wash my car. In doing so, I gathered together the necessary items I needed to wash it. Not realizing that the bucket I was using had a crack in it, I immediately proceeded to fill the bucket with car wash solution and water. Much to my surprise, as I was in the midst of washing the car, a good portion of the contents I put into the bucket was inadvertently seeping its way through the inconspicuous crack that had stationed itself at the opposite end of the bucket. Consequently, this is very much like the problem the church continues to face today. The willfulness of those seeking to fill the church with believers and nonbelievers is losing the battle because of

the inconspicuous crack in the very foundation of the church that is causing the poured in to pour out.

Grievously, as the church we have painfully forgotten the beauty of being an open society dedicated to being transformational in our approach. We have soiled the conduit of hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach with religious intentionality rather than embracing Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainers' concept of relational intentionality.<sup>12</sup> Like the Israelites and the Pharisees we have positioned ourselves as the champions of religiosity. As Scripture dictates, the Israelites were highly critiqued by many prophets, including Hosea, who acknowledged that their motives for engaging in the religious practice of sacrificing precious animals were tainted. In lieu of practicing the God directed and appointed sacrament for the purpose for which reason it was intended, the Israelites sought to use it for substitutionary purposes. In other words, rather than using it as a sign of their willingness to give of themselves to God, the sacrifice became the alternative to their giving of self. For Hosea 6:6 says, "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."<sup>13</sup> In looking at the character traits of the Pharisees, they communicated a self-righteous demeanor that conflicted with the overall makeup of the church. The Pharisees took it upon themselves to establish themselves as extreme externalists. Like a cover of a book, they sought to communicate their essence by being prideful in their engagement of religious externals instead of the internals. They were operating in the appearance of holiness, but denying the power of true holiness. That is why my grandmother always taught us, "You can't

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<sup>12</sup> Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 102.

<sup>13</sup> Hosea 6:6

always judge a book by its cover.” It’s what is divulged inside that communicates the trueness presented on the outside. This exclusionary and pompous stance is what caused Jesus to rebuke the Pharisees. In the gospel according to Matthew, He exclaims, “but woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them who are entering to go in.”<sup>14</sup> I believe, like these Israelites and Pharisees, we too have consumed ourselves with the religious ambiance of Christianity. Hence, we have been experiencing the mirage of going through the motions, but we actually aren’t going anywhere. The elitism that we have erected in our hearts and minds has caused us to miss out on considerable opportunities to cultivate life-changing relationships.

In essence, we have lost sight of what the church represents and the mandate by which the church is called into action. This damaging conception is unmasked in Luke’s account of Jesus sharing the parable of the Lost Sheep with tax collectors and sinners. According to Luke, when Jesus readied Himself to share a few words with these people, the Pharisees and Scribes found fault in it. Unfortunately for them, the dominance of their religious mindset fogged the true essence of what ministry is all about. They, rather than seeing the occasion for transformation to take place in the lives of those who gathered, situated themselves to emphatically complain about how Jesus welcomed the tax collectors and sinners to eat with Him.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, there are attitudes like these which continue to allow a gaping hole within the church to be the impetus whereby people, every day, find justifiable reasons to leave the church. Our inability to embrace the task of changing lives is ultimately damaging lives.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 23:13

<sup>15</sup> Luke 15:1-2

Subsequently, as the church we have forgotten that “the purpose of relationships in the Transformational Church is to see lives changed through the power of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, if we avail ourselves, the power of God can be channeled through our committed efforts to formulate healthy relationships. For the idea of being intentional about nurturing relationships is the key to making space for new people to establish roots within their new church.

It is imperative that we always remember that from its conception, the purpose of the church has been centered on the notion of cultivating relationships. Like the intentional pursuit of building relationships noticeably observed not only throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, but also His followers, we as the church should implement intentional systems that allow for us to embrace, engage, equip and evangelize individuals. Indeed, the church was not designed to be stale, stuck or secluded, but a vibrant, unstoppable movement that serves as a repository for the religious teachings of Christianity. As a result, the church is able to fulfill its responsibility of being “a spiritual community that forms people in faith,”<sup>17</sup> as people are encouraged to yield themselves to the ongoing process and practice of their faith.

### The History of the Black Church

Even as we examine the birth of the Black Church, we understand that its inauguration stemmed from the many horrific decades of exclusion and slavery in America. At one point, slaves were forbidden to engage in spiritual gatherings with the dominant culture, which later prompted slaves to institute their own gatherings. These

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity For The Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 42.

gatherings served as a vehicle of spiritual stimulation, thereby generating an unceasing source of worry to many slave owners. For in their eyes, black religious meetings signified the eventual threat to white existence. Without question, it advocated for opportunities that would allow slaves to galvanize a more cohesive community driven by religious comradery which, in turn, could permeate a strength that would invoke the disturbance of slavery. Therefore, white slave owners took it upon themselves to diligently and closely monitor the religious exercises practiced by their slaves. This was done in order to minimize any effort to devise plans of escape or insurrection, especially since slaves were immediately intrigued by the powerful and emancipating story of Exodus as its thematic scenes of bondage connected them to the captives of the Pharaonic Era. More importantly, the scenes of liberation instigated by a just, merciful, righteous and powerful God communicated hope for them as they longed to one day be set free. It was in moments like these that the hope of one day being free energized a people once battered by the bonds of hopelessness.

Theoretically speaking, it is interesting that at the very core of the conception of the Black Church there is a defect. Now, by no means am I minimizing that impact and importance the Black Church has had since its dawning, but I want to take liberty in challenging our psyche. Could it be that the overarching reason for which the Black Church was conceived be the agitator by which its personality disturbs the weaving of God's intended purpose of the church? For I firmly believe that, by design, the church is supposed to be inclusive not exclusive. Yet, we severed the Body of Christ through purposeful intervention. Certainly, the institutionalizing of the Black Church served to intervene in the lives of African-Americans who were ostracized from spiritual

gatherings by the dominant culture; however, this intervention could very well be the plague that cripples the ongoing growth of the church as it is continuously recognized as the means by which Sundays are still classified as the most segregated day of the week.

Nevertheless, in response to the oppression liberally practiced by the white mainstream culture, the evolution of the Black Church began. It emerged from the grassroots of the religious, cultural and social experiences of black people. As the Black Church maintained its fluidity, more and more slaves found comfort in it, thereby relying heavily upon it. This reliance spawned during the inhumane diaspora of a people and continued even after the emancipation, where black churches became virtually the only place for black people to find refuge. It had become the best source of religious and non-religious enrichment and development. Blacks could go to church and find all the necessary resources needed to be able to cope with life, as the church prided itself of addressing the specific issues that negatively impacted its members. For the Black Church had become “their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, their conservatory of music. It was lyceum and gymnasium as well as sanctum sanctorum.”<sup>18</sup> As a result, Black Churches began to spread like wildfire throughout the South; a propagation led by the Baptist churches.<sup>19</sup> With its first church being established in 1794 by a slave named Andrew Bryan in Savannah, GA known as the Bryan Street African Baptist Church, which in the early 1800’s was reorganized and became known as the First African Baptist Church of Savannah.<sup>20</sup> This sparked other

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<sup>18</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1-23.

<sup>20</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1921), 42.

churches to follow like Second and Third African Baptist Churches. Unlike other denominations, Baptist churches recognized the autonomy of their congregation to make decisions, independent of a larger church body, which ultimately empowered a people who were once enslaved to find a place to belong.

### The History of St. John

Subsequently, because of the trailblazing acts of these forerunners of the Black Church, nearly a hundred years after “a group of African Americans (12 women and 4 men) who refused to accept segregated seating in the First Baptist Church of New York City formed The Abyssinian Baptist Church in lower Manhattan”<sup>21</sup> and before there was ever a Palm Beach County, two individuals, Mother Sarah Sims and Reverend James A. Butler recognized the need to no longer rely on the occasional traveling missionaries to sponsor church services as people from Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and the Bahamas migrated to the area seeking better economic opportunities. Therefore, these two pioneers in the faith, sixty-three years (1845) after the Florida Territory was admitted to the Union as the twenty-seventh state,<sup>22</sup> thirteen years after Major Nathan S. Boynton chartered a boat to explore the underdeveloped country on the newly opened canal and twelve years (1920) before residents incorporated the Town of Boynton,<sup>23</sup> decided in 1908 to establish the St. John Missionary Baptist Church within the coastal community of Boynton Beach, Florida. It is a city that is centrally housed in 16.5 square miles of Palm Beach County with four of the miles encompassing the Intracoastal Waterway.

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<sup>21</sup> “History,” Abyssinian Baptist Church, Inc., accessed August 23, 2016, <http://abyssinian.org/about-us/history/>

<sup>22</sup> “Florida,” The Library of Congress., accessed August 22, 2016, [http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/fl/es\\_fl\\_reform\\_3.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/fl/es_fl_reform_3.html)

<sup>23</sup> “Boynton Beach’s Founding,” The Boynton Beach Historical Society., accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.boyntonhistory.org/history/boynton-beachs-founding/>



Historically speaking, in a survey of churches conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1930-1940, the town of Boynton Beach had seven organized congregations with church buildings. Of those seven churches, St. John Missionary Baptist Church was the second oldest established church.<sup>24</sup>

Both Mother Sims and Reverend Butler, along with these migrants from the southeastern regions of the United States of America and the Caribbean Islands, who were affectionately called a "Peculiar People" because of the level of special reverence they showed to the cause of Jesus Christ, chartered the church. Even though they encountered many challenges, it was not unusual for them to assemble themselves together under "brush arbors" to worship and praise God. In fact, it was their noticeable tenacity, passion and strong desire to have a place to worship God that pricked the heart of a concerned landowner who willingly donated a portion of his property for the purpose of building a worship edifice. Through much prayer, faith and sacrifice, the people who had a mind to work were able to build a place on Federal Highway to which they were able to call their first home.

As their journey continued, the newly formed St. John Missionary Baptist Church was blessed to call Reverend Joseph E. Wells, a Holy Ghost filled preacher from Alabama, as its first pastor. Pastor Wells served faithfully for ten years. After his committed service, the church called Reverend Albert E. Williams as its next pastor. He was at the helm for seven years. During both of their tenures, the church ordained deacons, engaged in missions, and grew spiritually, numerically and financially. As time

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<sup>24</sup> Janet DeVries, "Boynton's Earliest Churches," Boynton Beach Historical Society, July 31, 2013, accessed August 23, 2016, <http://www.boyntonhistory.org/category/neighborhoods/churches/>

continued, St. John was blessed to have six other dynamic men of the faith to serve as pastors. They were Rev. David S. Lucas (three years), Reverend William Porter (seventeen years), Reverend James H. Harrington, Sr. (thirteen years), Dr. Randolph M. Lee (forty-two years), Reverend Lance Chaney (eleven years), and Reverend Jovan T. Davis (presently). All have been influential in moving the church forward.

From its inception, St. John has always been a prominent church. Not only does it continue to carry the prestige of being the second church ever formed in its vineyard but it continues to be highly recognized as being instrumental in leading the way towards empowering people and changing lives for over 109 years. In these 109 years, it has served as a beacon of hope for the residents and neighbors of its city. Being that it is located in the town of Boynton Beach, Florida and one of the richest counties in the United States of America, it sought to address the invaluable need to communicate God's love for a people who were rejected and limited by other cultural powers. As a church, it sought diligently to address the many social injustices being faced by African-Americans. They adamantly embraced the charge of being very vocal when it came to matters that sought to hinder the advancement of colored people. St. John was unquestionably noted as the church that possessed the doggedness to reach out through "transforming the inner spirit of all systems of injustice, violence and exclusion".<sup>25</sup> It was this doggedness that was captured by media outlets, politicians, and community stakeholders who all flocked to Federal Highway, North East 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and the church's current location, 900 N. Seacrest Boulevard for direction and support.

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<sup>25</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity For The Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 161.

Surprisingly, even after being invited to go to the same schools as whites, eat at the same restaurants as whites, ride on the same buses as whites, and live in the same communities as whites, the thirst and drive to address the issues, challenges and obstacles surrounding social injustices and racial inequalities for those on the margins, the poor, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised, St. John continued its fight for rightness. Oftentimes, in our ability to achieve some level of success, we selectively forget the journey taken to get us to where we are today, thereby extinguishing the biblical mandate to do and speak up for justice. Fortunately, the turn of events did not sway the great people of St. John from being in the position of serving as headlights for social justice, by inadvertently becoming its taillights. Yet, they courageously continued “enact[ing] justice through practices of hospitality, prayer, discernment, testimony and diversity.”<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, although it is nestled in the city that is known as “America’s Gateway to the Gulfstream,”<sup>27</sup> well known to the community for the resources and support that it offers, and serves as an open door church for everyone seeking a greater relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, it has undeniably experienced its fair share of struggles. Regrettably, the mesmerizing natural beauty, immaculate beaches of the city, and its prestigious recognition as a full service municipality uniquely positioned in the heart of southeast Florida’s Dade-Miami, Broward and Palm Beach metropolitan area did not cause it to escape from the pangs of hardships it has endured. Like the city in which it resides, St. John had succumbed to negative trends that halted its progression. Firmly cemented within the Heart of Boynton and 1,650 acres along the eastern edge of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>27</sup> “Boynton Beach,” Breeze Into Boynton, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.boynton-beach.org/>

the city, also known as the slum and blight region, St. John became engulfed by forces that increasingly impacted the ultimate growth and decline of its future. These forces have catapulted it into a realm of decline as this once prestigious and prominent church began to quickly lose its standing.

As I purposefully listened to the imaginative, unscripted and entertainingly complex stories exclaimed by the great people of St. John, and I examined closely the behaviors and actions they demonstrated, it became quite apparent that the church was residing in a holding cell of complacency. The people had become content with being a closed society who operated according to the outdated practices of yesteryear. It is because of this mentality that I surmise that the last seven words of the church are, “We have always done it this way.” Why? Because instead of realizing that “the church is one of the few organizations in the world that does not exist for the benefit of its members, [but] exist because God in His infinite wisdom and infinite mercy, chose the church as His instrument to make known His manifold wisdom in the world,”<sup>28</sup> we have redefined the church as personal rather than communal. Faithfully, we will arrive each Sunday morning, as if we were attending a hit Broadway show. We would come dressed in the finest of clothes and get ushered to our desired seat, only to sit comfortably in our upholstered pews, waiting patiently for the service (“performance”) to start in order that we might be in the position to receive a good word. Thereafter, we would noticeably isolate ourselves from the neighbor seated next to us, because of our unwillingness to transition a stranger into a friend, and more disturbingly, fail to understand that audience

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<sup>28</sup> Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 44.

participation is a staple in aiding in the delivery of God's word. Subsequently, after the curtain call of the benediction, we will arrive home, only to do nothing by way of advancing the Kingdom of God and only to repeat this religious behavior again the next time Sunday morning comes strolling in. This has caused us to fail considerably in embracing the fundamentals of the church. Therefore, we have been instrumental in misconstruing and misrepresenting the purpose of the church, as we have alienated ourselves from the auspices of hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach, all of which are necessary elements that should be operable within every church.

### Challenges Within the Church

Unfortunately, over the past several years, the church has landed itself in the position of having to challenge the growing perception that it has, in many ways, become cancerous to Christianity. The entity that has once functioned as the catalyst whereby the Christian movement flourished throughout cities like Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome and Philippi is now the source through which it is candidly now plummeting. Irrefutably so, the inclination that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against it" is combatted daily as more and more people no longer see the church as a necessary spiritual commodity along their Christian journey. This should not be so.

As the church has had to face a number of issues as widespread as the wavelengths of colors categorized on Sir Isaac Newton's spectrum, the church has progressively traded its glory for gloom as more and more Americans express distaste for organized religion. As a result, the understanding of church is increasingly being redefined as the rejection of traditional church continues to grow, due to the opinion that it is antiquated, erroneous and malevolent. This viewpoint has incited individuals to

become more content with worshipping God in the comfort of their own homes, than to succumb to the matters that have discolored the foundational radiance whereby Jesus established the church. Fortunately, the issues have not negatively affected the love and admiration that many of these same Americans maintain for Jesus; however, the dilemma that we are faced with is that their embrace of the oxymoron of “individual Christianity” doesn’t equate to having a love for His church. With already having to litigate the fact that more than half of Americans don’t attend church, this new nuance of a challenge has forced the church to continue its spiral in the direction of decline as more and more people “forsake the assembling of [themselves] together.”<sup>29</sup> In Vatican City, during his May 8, 2013 homily, Pope Francis passionately proclaimed during his reflection on the intrinsic relationship between the Church and the People of God that “it is an absurd dichotomy to think one can live with Jesus, but without the Church; to follow Jesus outside the Church; to love Jesus and not the church. One cannot do this. It is an absurd dichotomy.”<sup>30</sup> However, according to research conducted by the Barna Group, the group with the “love Jesus, but not the church” obviously believes otherwise as the position has grown to 10 percent of Americans today, which is up from 7 percent in 2004.<sup>31</sup> Regrettably, like some churches who have an uncompromising fondness for their pastor but a deep dislike for his wife, figuratively speaking, a growing number of Americans love Jesus but don’t like his wife (the church). This is a decapitating reality for the church.

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<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 10:25

<sup>30</sup> Frances Spilman, *A Step towards Heaven: An Introduction to Religion*, (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, Inc., 2015), 152.

<sup>31</sup> “Meet Those Who Love Jesus but Not the Church,” Barna Group, accessed May 23, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>

Now that we understand what the problems are, we have to ask ourselves the thought provoking questions: How did we get here and how do we fix it? Oftentimes, when life reveals a series of problems, our human tendency is to look in every direction besides our own. We tactically point the finger in the direction of others in order to safeguard our egos. However, as one of my favorite songs released by the King of Pop, Michael Jackson in 1987, *Man in the Mirror* puts it, our achievement of better is more likely obtainable if individuals would understand the significance of yielding to the process of self-examination. For in his words he stated, “I’m starting with the man in the mirror, I’m asking him to change his ways, and no message could have been any clearer, if you wanna make the world a better place, take a look at yourself, and then make a change.”<sup>32</sup> I surmise that if the church wants to become a better place, we must scrutinize the core of our existence in order to fathom what it is that obstructs people’s reengagement with the church. As the narrator at the onset of the film, *The Stories We Tell* profoundly explained,

when you’re in the middle of a story, it isn’t a story at all but rather a confusion, a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood, like a house in a whirlwind or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard are powerless to stop it. It’s only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all, when you’re telling it to yourself or someone else,<sup>33</sup>

we don’t always see the irritant that has disrupted the very nature of the church. In essence what I believe he was saying is that there is a tremendous difference between being nearsighted and in being farsighted. In looking at the definition of nearsighted, it

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<sup>32</sup> “Man In The Mirror,” Google Play Music, accessed November 5, 2017, [https://play.google.com/music/preview/Ttrkomx33wmonyhfvxvxsyhzum?lyrics=1&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-songlyrics&u=0#](https://play.google.com/music/preview/Ttrkomx33wmonyhfvxvxsyhzum?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-songlyrics&u=0#)

<sup>33</sup> *Stories We Tell*, Swank, directed by Sarah Polley (2102; National Film Board of Canada, Los Angeles, CA: Roadside Attractions, 2013).

simply means to be “unable to see things that are far away or able to see things that are close more clearly than things that are far away”<sup>34</sup> whereas, farsighted means “able to see things that are far away more clearly than things that are near.”<sup>35</sup> Expressly, when you’re on the inside looking out, it’s quite difficult to decipher what the problem or problems are; however, when you position yourself on the outside looking in, you are able to see it for what it is.

During my undergraduate studies as a pre-medicine major, one of my favorite subjects of study was biology. Biology is defined as the study of life and living organisms. I remember, at one point in my matriculation through biology class, that we had the opportunity of focusing our attention on organisms within the sea. It was during this time that I was privileged to learn a lot about marine life. One of the exciting things I had the opportunity to learn about was how pearls are formulated by oysters. It was interesting to learn that pearls are not intentionally made, but result from the intrusion of an irritant that enters into the oyster between the mantle and the shell. As soon as the oyster recognizes its existence it, like most people, it shifts into protective mode. It is during this time that, as a protective measure, it secretes a substance known as nacre to cover the irritant with several layers. This then formulates into a beautiful pearl that goes undiscovered until the oyster is unearthed and opened.<sup>36</sup> I believe, like the oyster, the church has been infiltrated by an irritant. Consequently, unlike the oyster, we have

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<sup>34</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “near sighted” accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nearsighted>.

<sup>35</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “far sighted” accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/farsighted>

<sup>36</sup> Bryner, Michelle, “How Do Oysters Make Pearls?” November 20, 2012, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.livescience.com/32289-how-do-oysters-make-pearls.html>



relegated ourselves to allowing the intrusion to suffocate our impact, rather than instituting the necessary nacre to transform it. I believe Thom Rainer, in his book, *I am A Church Member*, has boldly articulated exactly what the irritant is. For he suggests that

Congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. We join our churches expecting others to serve us, to feed us and to care for us. We don't like the hypocrites in the church, but we fail to see our own hypocrisies. God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give and in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel. Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down<sup>37</sup>

This is so true. We have traded in our garments of hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach for chains of separatism, elitism, narcissism and antagonism. As a result, individuals who attend seeking refuge, direction and love are walking away estranged, uninformed and abandoned. Both the feeling of being welcomed by the church and the satisfaction of their needs being fulfilled are null and void. This is incontrovertibly the reason as to why I strongly believe that the backdoor of the church remains open, which continues the ongoing splurge of membership declines throughout churches in America.

As I consider the vineyard I have been so graciously allowed to serve, I humbly assert that we have, in many ways, been found guilty of succumbing to the extinguishing pressures the aforementioned chains have knowingly and unknowingly entangled us in. We have suffered long enough from the disease of contentment, which has unapologetically altered our perspective of what are the foundational makings and actions of the church. Now, with a deep-seated conviction and passion to see our church escape the trappings of religiosity, we eagerly assert a new thrive. As a thriving church we now

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<sup>37</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *I Am A Church Member* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 5-6.

possess the capacity of having “clarity about the core commitments that are at the very center of [our ministry], and those commitments inform the choices [we] make about how to [serve].”<sup>38</sup> It is because of this new appreciation for ministry that we have made considerable strides toward injecting necessary components to propel us into a new era of ministry which will allow us to better serve the present age. For it is our hope that through the power of prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we, the St. John Missionary Baptist Church we remain committed to building the Kingdom of God, by empowering and equipping disciples who are reaching up to God, in to the church, and out to the world.

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<sup>38</sup> Matt Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry: Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2013), 12.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PROCESS

I have only had that distinct honor of serving in the role of pastor at *St. John* for almost two years therefore; I have had the unique opportunity to really position myself in the role of an observer and ethnographer. As an observer, I was granted the occasion to analyze constructively both the historical and present ministry systems that are in operation as well as provide strategic advisement that will, in the long run, help transition the church into making better possible choices. As an ethnographer, I was immersed “in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them.”<sup>39</sup> This required me to open my eyes and ears “to understand the ways in which people practice their faith.”<sup>40</sup> As communicated by Carl Savage and William Presnell in their book, Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Community,

our approach to ministry, then, requires that we have a layered portrait of our ministerial context. We are trying to grasp the “what is,” present in that context, and to understand how that moment is defined by its past and/or its future.”<sup>41</sup>

I was able to discover new knowledge about the ministry which in turn directed me to assemble a team that would aid me in implementing a system that would calculatedly modify the existing climate of our church. This process began by partnering with the

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 47.

Deacons in advocating for the church to embrace the idea of hiring an outside entity with expertise and experience in helping churches masterfully understand its current conditions, while strategically making strides towards becoming a more impactful ministry. This was undoubtedly an uphill journey as we had to work diligently and deliberately in order to get the membership to buy into what was sure to be a costly endeavor. Fortunately, after much consideration and the thorough and tedious task of researching the vitality of the variety of church consulting and coaching entities available, we cheerfully welcomed “The Unstuck Group” as our consult group of choice, with the much needed blessings of the congregation.

#### The Unstuck Group

We patiently learned, through our research, that The Unstuck Group worked tirelessly with a host of different calibers of churches. What intrigued us most about them was the diverse makeup of their team, the diversity of churches to which they served and the quality of work they performed. Therefore, we surmised that it was apparent that they were the best fit for us as a church. From day one, they unquestionably brought their expertise and experiences with them as they helped us to foster a fresh perspective on our strategies, systems and structure. It was because of their hard work that we were able to capture a current snapshot of our ministry’s health and gather a better understanding of how “outsiders” see our church when they visit us for the first time. As we worked closely with them for a little over a year, we committed ourselves to participating fully in their recommended four consulting phases. These phases were: the Discovery Phase, Ministry Health Assessment Phase, Strategic

Operating Plan Phase and the Staffing & Structure Review Phase.<sup>42</sup> In each of these phases, we were provided a total examination of our condition along with much needed accommodating next steps.

In the first phase, we had the responsibility of compiling background information about our church and our local region. We accomplished this by doing an 8 mile radius area study through an online database known as *First View* from a company called Percept Group.<sup>43</sup> This database instantaneously provided us with the necessary demographics and statistics we needed in order to better understand the community we were called to serve. In addition, we also compiled useful information about our church such as membership and financial data, ministries, attendance, facilities, leadership, and history. As communicated within the contract, The Unstuck Group was able to utilize this information to present useful metrics that were compared with data generated from churches of a similar demographic.

In the next phase, we were challenged with the responsibility of encouraging our membership to commit to filling out an online health survey generated by The Unstuck Group known as the Ministry Health Assessment. This survey was designed to help us better understand our church's health in five key areas. These areas included: Organizational Clarity, Strong Leadership, Outward Focus, Clear Discipleship Path and a Streamlined Structure.<sup>44</sup> The results were indubitably alarming. They, much to our surprise, communicated that we, the prestigious St. John Missionary Baptist Church, was

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<sup>42</sup> "Consulting," The Unstuck Group, accessed February 25, 2016, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/church-consulting/>

<sup>43</sup> "First View," Percept Group, accessed June 5, 2016, <http://perceptgroup.com/Products/FirstView/FVfront.aspx>

<sup>44</sup> "Ministry Health Assessment," The Unstuck Group, accessed March 13, 2016, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/assessment/>

unhealthy. We were gratefully made fully aware of a host of different unhealthy behaviors that we, ourselves, were unable to comprehend. We were informed of how we, as a church, struggle immensely with integrating a strong culture and compelling direction, which unfortunately causes individuals to lead in different directions based upon their own preferences and desires. We also became cognizant of our ongoing struggle with leadership not functioning with clear responsibilities and empowerment which has undesirably propelled us to engage in an increasing amount of internal conflict. We further had unknowingly failed in compiling well-defined and appropriate boundaries for decision making and accountability among the board, staff, and congregation which cultivated a culture of team members who are overstepping their boundaries, while passive personalities become hesitant to act. Moreover, our ministries' focus was only fixated on making decisions that sought to please and keep the current attendees happy, rather than to serve and reach our surrounding communities. Not to purposefully add more fuel to an already burning fire, but our discipleship pathway was deemed unclear. We had failed in establishing a clear discipleship path which ultimately serves as the cause by which people become underdeveloped in their spiritual growth due to missed opportunities to get involved. Without question, this survey was deemed fruitful as over 200 members openly and honestly participated.

In addition to the survey, this phase was also comprised of a one-on-one meeting with the pastor. This allowed for a representative from the consulting group and myself to come together to openly discuss our ministry history, future objectives, strategy, staff leadership, and vision for the church. The consultants also met with two other key staff leaders in one-on-one conversations about ministry strategy and personal leadership goals.

This then led to two group meetings; one of which was with the staff. That meeting was designed to assess the current ministry systems of the church, whereas the other meeting with key “lay leaders” was fashioned in order to discuss the ministry history and current health of the church. The consultants, subsequently, on a random Sunday came and served as “secret shoppers.” During this visit they observed, purposefully, every component of our weekend services, from the curb appeal to the benediction. The information that they gathered was later reported in an executive summary. This executive summary, like the survey revealed some painful truths that caused us to become more aware of some things that we had never perceived as being an issue. It was through this experience that the philosophy behind the technique, known as the Johari Window, rang true. Clearly, there was a distinctive difference in perspectives when it came to individuals viewing us through the lens of the inside looking out verses the one who views us from the outside looking in. We evidently needed to make some necessary changes in order to have an impact within our community.

As we transitioned to focus our attention on the next two phases of the process, we gathered together a cross section of leaders and laypersons to participate in this portion of the process. During these phases, we had to commit ourselves to meeting for several full day intensives, in order to produce a balanced strategy, implement selected action initiatives, and a staffing structure that aligns with the mission and vision of our church. Through this process, we participated in exercises and seminars that sought to clarify our mission, vision and core strategies and values. Each of these seminars and exercises were designed in such a way that they “logically and systematically built on the next, blending together the strategic (planning for tomorrow, today), operational

(managing today, today) and financial (funding it all) aspects of our ministry.”<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the Strategic Operating Plan Phase, we focused our attention on six sub-phases that addressed perspective, planning, action, structure, management, and renewal. While during the Staffing & Structure Review Phase, we engaged in group discussions to help facilitate a well-designed plan that would help us construct a team that best fits both the ministry and the individuals involved. In order to successfully achieve these goals, we were challenged to answer several questions like: Where are we now? Where are we headed? What’s important now? What form best facilitates our plan? How are we doing? What must change? As a result, we developed action initiatives that gave us clear focus and the needed responsibility of developing instrumental planning and management systems that addressed the necessary restructuring of our family ministries, weekend services, out-reach and discipleship pathway.

In an ongoing struggle to try to find a Doctor of Ministry project that would address the needs of my new community of believers, and fulfill my obligation as a student, I was secretly elated by the results of this experience. It provided for me the direction I needed to accomplish my study goal. As a result of the intense undertaking to which we availed ourselves, it was finally birthed within me the indispensable direction I needed to go into in order to complete my journey towards receiving my doctorate. It was through this process that my blinders were removed and binoculars were put on. It allowed myself to see beyond us, which ultimately helped me to learn that we were lacking a well-developed and operable assimilation system. Certainly, we were well

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<sup>45</sup> Mark Morgan, “Contract Between St. John Missionary Baptist Church and The Unstuck Group” (paper presented at Deacon’s Meeting, Boynton Beach, FL, March 11, 2016), 3.



equipped in the ability to keep the individuals that had served faithfully at St. John for years, as they were already rooted and grounded in the church, but because of the now recognized growth opportunities exclaimed through this consulting experience, the work of developing an organized, strategic and operable assimilation system was the key to help strengthen our areas of concern.

#### Lay Advisory Committee

Two years ago, when God extended the opportunity for me to serve as the pastor of the great people of St. John, I was blessed with the opportunity to have a group of people appointed by the Deacon's Ministry to serve as my Transition Team. This team consisted of a wide range of people who had an invested interest in the church and some executive level management experience. In order to serve, they had to also possess some special skillsets. These skillsets included: organizational, research, analytical, planning, computer, and writing skills. They also had to be people of vision, integrity, and talent. The deacons sought to solicit spirit filled individuals that would work tirelessly to insure that my transition into a new land would be one of ease. They were instrumental in introducing me to the variety of stakeholders within my new community. They aided my wife in getting things situated in our new home and aided us in finding a quality and adequate school for our children to attend. Aside from all of that, it was also deemed important that I would be comfortable with each member as confidentiality and relationship building were crucial to assisting me with implementing my vision for the church. The deacons stressed that this was not a hierarchy group; they worked exclusively for me and in many ways served as my "inner circle".

When instructed to select a group of individuals that would assist me in working diligently to develop, implement and evaluate the different components of my professional project, it was clear to me that I would solicit the members of my transition team to serve as my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). Therefore, I hosted an Exploratory Meeting on March 28, 2017 and invited each of them to attend. It was during this meeting that I presented a PowerPoint that addressed the purpose and responsibilities of the committee. I also provided them an overview of my professional project with the hopes that it would entice them to want to be a part of the process. Unfortunately, all of them could not commit to taking on the task of working diligently in assisting me with the planning, executing, and evaluating of all components of the professional project. However, those that could worked considerably hard in developing, preparing and implementing an assimilation process and evaluation that impacted our church greatly. I was excited to have the following people who agreed to serve on my Lay Advisory Committee for my professional project: Mr. Jice Stokes (Chairperson), Mrs. Kemberly Bush, Mr. Edwin Daniels, Mrs. Revie Lee, Mrs. Jamila Harley-Davis, Mr. Jim Boldon and Mrs. Florencia Boldon.

#### Church Management Database System

As St. John continued to grow and technology began to address many of the concerns centered on church administration, leadership reluctantly embraced the idea of shifting from manual record-keeping to computerized. This shift prompted the church to research a variety of different church management systems that sought to address its needs. In doing so, they decided to go with what was recommended by many other churches in the area. Therefore, they purchased PowerChurch Plus. PowerChurch Plus

“allows you to maintain Membership, Contributions, Accounting, Event Scheduling, and general Record Keeping in one complete church administration software package.” As you can see, the software possesses the capability to do so much. Unfortunately, during that time and even until this day, the church’s lack of interest in exploring all that the software has to offer has caused it to fail considerably in utilizing the software to its fullest capacity. It has and continues to only be used to serve our accounting needs and as our keeper of information. As has been our custom, when an individual makes that committed decision to join our church, his or her information is received and stored into this database (holding cell) which, in turn, generates a membership number that is only used to assist with monetary giving and identify an individual’s membership status.

Certainly, in order to have an effective and impactful assimilation system, the use of well-crafted church management software is crucial. The software should provide a means by which the operation of your system coincides with the functionality of the software. The two must work hand-in-hand in order to minimize the stress that can divulge from an already tedious and calculated system. In realizing this, the committee and I began researching a variety of well-known church manage software systems, including our current software. To our surprise, there were a plethora of management systems out there that focus on church management. As the search became overwhelming and very time consuming, we reluctantly decided to submit to the challenge of taking advantage of the database we already possessed. It was the cheapest route to take as we already occupied the software. Therefore, we began looking into what PowerChurch Plus had to offer in assisting us in managing our new assimilation system. Due to the fact that we all were novices to using this type of software, we found

it to be very cumbersome and complex. It didn't seem to fit as we had hoped and prayed it would. As we were drawing near the road of frustration, out of nowhere during the Lott Carey's *Thriving in Ministry Symposium*, a group of young pastors introduced me to a membership database system that they believed would be very beneficial for our church. Little did I know, this system was the answer to our prayers! With only nine years of service and birthed out of a local church, this system, known as the Planning Center, provided every component that we needed to ensure that our assimilation system would be successful. The system offers an "array of interconnected applications that are technologically designed to work together or alone. These applications include: Check-Ins, Registrations, Giving, Services, Groups, Resources, and People."<sup>46</sup> Of these seven applications we are currently utilizing three.

In an effort to get away from our tradition of manually keeping track of attendance, we decided to take advantage of the resources provided through the Planning Center's Check-Ins component. What excited us about this component is that it conveniently incorporated the necessary safety and ease we needed when it came to checking in our guests and members. This one application allows for individuals to check in through a variety of mediums. They have the options of checking in through a Manned, Roster or Self Stations when participating in small groups, services, church school and events. Resourcefully, this allows for us to statistically analyze the participation of our members, more strategically, those members who have joined our church in recent months.

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<sup>46</sup> "About," Planning Center, accessed May 28, 2017, <https://planning.center/about/>

Subsequently, just like the Check-Ins application, the Registration application also allows for us to keep track of people's involvement in the activities and events that take place throughout the calendar year. Nestled within the fabric of this application are resourceful modules that allow for you to customize the registrations according to the needs of your organization. Whether you are sponsoring Vacation Bible School, a leadership retreat or classes, Registrations once connected to your website permits opportunities for people to sign up and pay for the events. People within the database can easily sign-up with just the use of their email address and use the payment options of credit card, ApplePay, cash or check. What I like most about this application is that you can set up customizable pricing, capacities, questions and additional amenities. After the registration process has concluded, you can then assign individuals according to their registration categories, and print a pdf of the registration roster, or utilize Check-ins as the vehicle by which people are checked in. When we rolled out our Reach Life Groups, we directed the membership to register for the groups through this application. Through trial and error, we were able to effectively manage the registrations of over 75 people.

Although both of these applications have proven to be resourceful tools in helping us operate a functioning assimilation system, it is the People application that is the Godfather of them all. This application is what captured my undivided attention. The People application is the church membership management application, and the best part about it is that it is free. You can store your membership roster into the system as individuals or households. After correctly storing in their contact information, you can easily add their births and anniversary dates. You also have the option to customize fields of information that you might want to have as a part of the data collected. For

example, we customized a section in the data collected that allows us to store the results of members' *Spiritual Gifts Test*. Not only do you use this system to keep track of your membership roster, but also guests. You can strategically account for how many times a guests visits your church using this system.

Fortunately for us, the developers of this system took into account the need to have a Workflows Component. Workflows helps you “lead the people in your church so that nobody falls through the cracks.”<sup>47</sup> We use it as the main hub for our system. It allows us to systematically follow up with first time guests, second time guests, and new members. Assignments are delineated to staff members, who are informed through an email tracking system as to when their assignment is now ready to be fulfilled. Again, this allows for cracks to be cemented and accountability to be managed. In addition to this very creative asset to the system, they also have implemented a List component. Lists allow you to “filter your people based on their information and activity across all Planning Center applications.”<sup>48</sup> A more detailed explanation as to how we use these applications will be explained in the project section of this paper.

#### Leadership & Ministries Buy-In

As a team, we understood that, in order for this system to work, we had to get sufficient buy-in from leadership and the ministries that would be impacted by this new system. Therefore, on July 20, 2017 we conducted a St. John's Assimilation System Team Meeting. During this meeting we had over 10 ministries represented. We began

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<sup>47</sup> “People,” Planning Center, accessed May 28, 2017, <https://planning.center/people/>

<sup>48</sup> “Using List to Find Groups of People,” Planning Center, accessed November 4, 2017, <https://pcopeople.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/204462530-Using-Lists-to-Find-Groups-of-People>

the meeting by first informing them as to why they were there. We wanted to provide them with enough information that addressed a variety of questions. For instance, what is assimilation and why it is important. In order to address these questions, I provided a PowerPoint that communicated a clear definition of the word assimilation and some worthwhile statistics that highlighted how significant this system is to the life of the church. I also, through the use of the PowerPoint, embarked on the journey of answering the question: How do we do this? I pointed out, during this segment, that this system is accomplished through the operation of three sub phases. These phases include: the Communication Phase, Connection Phase, and the Commitment Phase. After emphasizing the varying mechanisms within each of the three sub-phases, I then went on to separate them into smaller groups where members of my Local Advisory Committee educated them on the specific roles they will play as it relates to their ministry. Out of all the ministries present, we did have one ministry that expressed discomfort in making the necessary changes we were encouraging. They didn't feel comfortable with having to make some much needed adjustments in order to advance, not only the ministry but also, the church as a whole. Thankfully, after providing adequate training and the opportunity for them to actually engage in the implementation of the system, they clearly recognized the benefits of making the essential changes.

Assuredly, after we were able to enlist the ministries and the leaders, we then turned to the congregation for their support. Although we did not go through the same process of dividing the congregation into different groups, we did go through the same presentation as we had with the ministries and leaders. In both instances, we were blessed by their embrace of the project, but more importantly, how they were able to add

to the overall execution of the system. Some things that we, as the team missed, others were able to provide. We, of course, welcomed anything that would serve as an additive to the already resourceful ingredients of this new system.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE PURPOSE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This past year, as a church, we collectively acknowledged that God was positioning us to embrace a new mission. This mission is:

Through the power of prayer, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the sharing and teaching of God's word, we, the St. John Missionary Baptist Church are committed to building the Kingdom of God, by empowering and equipping disciples who are reaching UP to God, reaching IN to the church, and reaching OUT to the world.<sup>49</sup>

In order to accomplish this mission, we further understood the importance of making the necessary adjustments to our ministry's focus that would allow us to be purposefully aligned with this new mission. As a result, we identified four key components by which our ministry will be centered around. They are hospitality, fellowship, discipleship and outreach. We recognized that if we are going to be successful in "reaching up to God, reaching in the church, and reaching out to the world,"<sup>50</sup> these four areas of focus must become the basis by which we engage in ministry. Therefore, in seeking to establish a new assimilation system, we deemed it necessary to take advantage of this opportune time to structure this system in alignment with these four components. In doing so, we identified hospitality as representative of our efforts to embrace the stranger, fellowship as our means to communicate our desire to engage the saint, discipleship as the vehicle by which we promote our willingness to equip the servant and outreach as the channel

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<sup>49</sup> Jovan T. Davis, "Vision Casting 2017." (PowerPoint presented at the St. John's 2016 Year End Church Conference, Boynton Beach, FL, December 10, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

that dictates our goal to evangelize the sinner(see figure 1.1). All of which is encompassed within our new assimilation system.

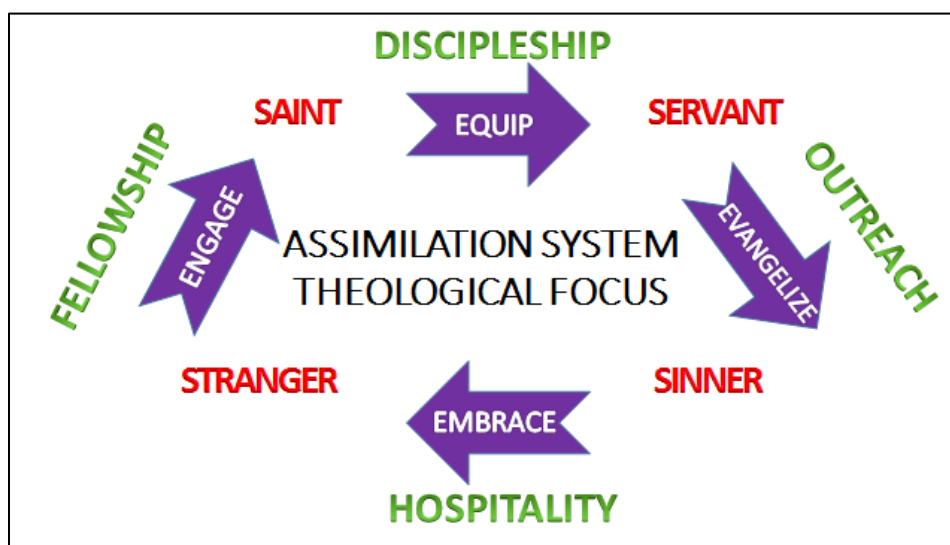


Figure 1.1. *Assimilation System Theological Focus*

### Hospitality: Embrace the Stranger

We believe St. John is to be a place where our guests and regular attenders feel welcome every Sunday. We make it our business to wholeheartedly value people and hold to the belief that every person (without exception) should be treated with the highest degree of love, care, dignity, respect, and honor.

--Jovan Davis, *St. John Vision Casting 2017*

Henri Nouwen, a well-known spiritual writer details about a time when he was going to a monastery for a retreat. In the story, he exclaimed:

The monks observed vows of silence and the retreat was to be meditative and prayerful. Nouwen was delayed and was late getting to the monastery on that miserable, rainy night. He rang the bell, well after bedtime, and was met at the door by one of the brothers. The brother warmly greeted him, took his wet coat, brought him to the kitchen and made him a cup of tea. They chatted in the late night hours and Nouwen began to relax and feel ready for the retreat. But he knew this monk was supposed to observe silence, so he finally asked him, "Why

are you willing to sit and talk with me?” The monk replied “of all the duties of the Christian faith and the rules of my order, none is higher than hospitality.”<sup>51</sup>

In many instances, the reality of just being hospitable without any intentions of getting something in return has become a lost art. This natural characteristic has painfully become diluted by humanity’s growing desire to be selfish, rather than selfless. As we carefully reflect on the truths associated with the world in which we now live in, we can almost unanimously agree that the human race has abandoned the beauty of community and erected an affinity for self. Particularly, within our Western culture, we have become more driven by narcissism, consumerism, and individualism than the compassion, love and respect our Christian faith demands of us. It is because of these self-centered ways that we have theoretically and practically been suffering from the severe case of reciprocity, tested positive for xenophobia, and diagnosed with the “it’s all about me” syndrome. These along with others have caused us to become “compassion fatigue”.<sup>52</sup> In other words, we have figuratively speaking changed our welcome floor mats into beware of dog and no trespassing signs. The unfortunate thing is that this behavior has also infiltrated the church, thereby situating it in the eyes of many as a not so welcomed place.

Hospitality is translated from the Greek word *philoxenos*, which derives from the two Greek words, *philo* and *xenos*. According to the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, *philo* is defined as meaning love and *xenos* is defined as meaning stranger, foreigner or

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<sup>51</sup> Irvin J. Boudreaux, “None Is Higher Than Hospitality,” *A Pastor’s Thoughts: Monastics, Mystics and More*, August 19, 2014, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://ijboudreaux.com/tag/henri-nouwen/>.

<sup>52</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2006), ix.

guest.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the word hospitality plainly means, “lover of stranger.” This in many ways suggests that the whole notion behind hospitality is the unswerving effort to embrace the stranger with the gift of love.

Although it is deemed difficult on a variety of levels to show love towards those that in many instances don’t love you back, it is still important that we understand that love is not a suggestion, but rather a commandment from God. For Jesus tells us in John 15:12 that “this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” It is undeniably clear that we as believers are charged with the responsibility of occupying and demonstrating love to others, regardless of who they are. It is equally important that we understand that love is central to the practice of hospitality and the true expression of love through hospitality is not predicated on what is gained in return. A perfect biblical example of this is when Ephron freely gave Abraham the property needed to bury his wife, Sarah. Although Abraham paid him for the land, Ephron asserted that his willingness to give the land was not grounded on getting something in return. It was a matter of his heart. Successively, this type of behavior is magnified continuously throughout scripture as love has been presented as a key ingredient of the practice of hospitality. Even the Apostle Paul, in Romans 12:9-13, acknowledges love as the passage by which hospitality is practiced. He suggested that love ought to be genuinely expressed to one another in order that hospitality might be extended. Furthermore, the Apostle Peter echoed the same sentiments when he articulated that “above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as

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<sup>53</sup> Koenig, John. “Hospitality.” Edited by David Noel Freedman. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”<sup>54</sup> Now in order to fully understand what the Apostle Peter is exclaiming within this text, one must ask themselves the theological question: what is the gift? The word gift in Greek is *charisma*, which is defined as “a favor with which one receives without any merit of his own; it’s something that we receive and not have; the source of the gift is God.”<sup>55</sup> The last time I checked, something that came from God, communicated His favor on us and dictates that we were undeserving of it is clearly identified as being grace, which is God’s benevolence on the undeserving and His favor toward the unworthy. So in essence what Peter was saying is that our ability to be hospitable to the stranger should be done without complaining because just as we have received grace, we ought to extend it to others by being hospitable.

It is essential that we also recognize that like grace, hospitality has selective vision. Both don’t focus on the distractions, but rather on the neighbor. In other words, they both don’t focus on whether a person is black or white, rich or poor, young or old, but they only see the person as a person. Therefore, their actions are designed not to be selective but attributed to everyone. Moreover, another Greek word for hospitality is the word, *xenodocheo*.<sup>56</sup> This again derives from two words. Those words are *xeno* and *dechomai*. Once again *xeno*<sup>57</sup> means stranger whereas *dechomai* is defined as receive, accept, take with the hand, give ear to, embrace, to receive into one’s family to bring up

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<sup>54</sup> 1 Peter 4:8-10

<sup>55</sup> Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Charisma" accessed November 2, 2017. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/charisma.html>

<sup>56</sup> Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Hospitality" accessed November 2, 2017. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/xenodocheo.html>

<sup>57</sup> Koenig, John. "Hospitality." Edited by David Noel Freedman. The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, vol. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

and educate.<sup>58</sup> In other words, like grace, hospitality does not allow a person's strangeness (differences) to interfere with them being accepted. I believe Palmer Parker said it best when he defined hospitality as, "valuing the strangeness of the stranger.....it means meeting the stranger's needs while allowing him or her simply to be, without attempting to make the stranger over into a modified version of ourselves."<sup>59</sup> The same way grace accepted us even when we were unacceptable, looked passed our faults and saw our needs, climbed over our mess and hit us with the sting of love, took us in even when we should have been left out, gave us a home and stepped in even when we stepped out is the same way hospitality should be given. True hospitality welcomes the stranger just as we have been welcomed into God through the love of Jesus Christ.

Now, by stranger I am not referring to the threatening and hostile cognition that we attribute to them today. However, by stranger I am referring to the one described by Dr. Lucien Richard, in his book, Living the Hospitality of God. He says,

A stranger can be defined for our purpose as someone who seeks to be accepted or tolerated by an individual or a group that he or she approaches. Examples for such a situation can be that of an immigrant, of a minority; strangeness can be brought about by race, gender, religion. The stranger is the one who does not share the "world," the cultural patterns, of the one who is being approached. The stranger is the one who has to place in questions nearly everything that is questionable to the host. The stranger is vulnerable. Strangers find themselves in an unfamiliar world, one differently organized than that from which they come—full of pitfalls and hard to master. Approaching strangers have to anticipate what they will find.... The stranger is a newcomer, vulnerable, an outsider and at times a marginal figure. The stranger is the one on the verge of two different cultures, not knowing where he or she belongs. The stranger is in a state of transition in a different land. Often the stranger has lost his or her bearings. The stranger is homeless.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Dechomai" accessed November 2, 2017. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/dechomai.html>

<sup>59</sup> Lucien Richards, *Living the Hospitality of God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

This concept of practicing and showing love to a stranger is clearly modeled throughout both the Old and the New Testament scriptures. In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, we become acquainted with Abraham's embrace of the Bedouin tradition of a "resident's obligation to nourish and protect travelers who find themselves in hostile environments."<sup>61</sup> It is in this chapter that while in the plains of Mamre, Abraham out of his commitment to extend the simple gesture of hospitality entertains three strangers who unbeknownst to Abraham are identified as the Lord and angels. This eagerness to assist these strangers was not on the basis of Abraham's recognition that these were actually heavenly beings, but on the premise that hospitality was recognized by the culture of that day as the emancipator of hostility. According to Bruce Arterbury:

In essence, the custom of hospitality in antiquity grew out of a desire to neutralize potential threats—both threats to strangers and threats to one's community. Not only were generous hosts protecting strangers from thieves along the road and from townspeople inclined toward mob violence, they were seeking to protect their household and community from the wrath of the stranger. In the event that a traveler had either military resources or "magical" powers, it was thought that a host's abundant generosity might neutralize the potential threat while cultivating the stranger's favor (see, for example, the story of Joshua's "spies" being hosted by Rahab in Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:22-25). As a result, the leading citizens of a community often bore the primary responsibility for hosting strangers.<sup>62</sup>

That is why Abraham rolls out the red carpet for these strangers. As the scriptures dictated he unselfishly provided the necessary refreshments to combat the fatigue, thirst, hungry and desert heat these strangers had to endure. He also willingly dedicated himself to wait on them literally hand and foot as he not only fed them but also washed their

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<sup>61</sup> Koenig, John. "Hospitality." Edited by David Noel Freedman. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts* (Waco, Texas: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2007), 21.

feet.<sup>63</sup> It is believed that this is what the Hebrew writer referenced when urging his readers to “let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”<sup>64</sup> This has become our ultimate approach to welcoming our guest. We anticipate that each and every one of them that enters into our presence, regardless of race, gender or ethnicity, is Christ. Therefore, we treat them with the utmost respect and serve as an act of worship not obligation. Stephen Carter said it best. He said:

To enter into the presence of another human being, then, is to enter into the presence of God in a new and different way. We are admonished in the psalm to come into His presence with thanksgiving (Ps. 95:2), not with suspicion, self-seeking, or disrespect. The great theologians Karl Barth and Martin Buber both arrived at this point along their different paths: our obligation is to see God in everyone, not merely as possibility, but as reality. So whenever we mistreat others, we are abusing our relationship with God<sup>65</sup>

Another biblical account that exemplifies within the Old Testament an unwavering desire to express love to the stranger is the story of the widow of Zarephath recorded in 1 Kings 17:8-16. This story, from my perspective, is the epitome of hospitality as it communicates the readiness and willingness of the widow to serve the stranger (Prophet Elijah), even at the expense of having to make necessary adjustments in her personal life in order to do so. Without question, this is a major factor associated with being hospitable. You cannot practice hospitality without possessing an untethering willingness to make sacrifices. Sacrifices and hospitality go hand-in-hand. For “hospitality to the stranger demands sacrifice: to surrender out biases; to make the

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<sup>63</sup> Genesis 18:1-15.

<sup>64</sup> Hebrews 13:1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Lucien Richards, *Living the Hospitality of God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2000), 15.



interests, joys and sorrows of others our own.”<sup>66</sup> This Zarephath woman not only provided Prophet Elijah with shelter but also provided him with the last remnants of her food supply. She literally gave him all that she had as a commitment to making sure he felt welcomed.

Interestingly enough, this same account is used strategically by Jesus during His inaugural address in Luke’s Gospel. When he was rejected by his own people He is recorded saying,

No Prophet is accepted in his own country, but I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the Heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman who was a widow.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to Jesus using this story to highlight how His own people refused to receive Him, He also emphasizes how God extends hospitality beyond His own.

I have come to grips with the fact that although *St. John* has been and continues to be an amazing pillar within the city of Boynton Beach, it is apparent that we have assumed a posture of status quo. We have become content with doing things the way we have always done it, failing to realize that the words of Albert Einstein still rings true today that “insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Therefore, as a way of mimicking the actions exemplified by this widow of Zarephath, who exemplified in her willingness to first welcome the stranger through service and secondly make the much needed changes that allowed for her to accommodate the stranger, we have progressively made the shift, through the

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<sup>66</sup> Lucien Richards, *Living the Hospitality of God* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>67</sup> Luke 4:24-26.

implementation of our assimilation system, towards thinking and acting with an outward focused mindset. We seek to resemble the behavior demonstrated by this woman who could have easily rejected his request, yet instead she availed herself in order that he might feel welcomed. This is important because again Hebrews 13:2 warns us about how we show hospitality to those who are strangers. These strangers could easily be angels unknown to us. Not only that, but in showing hospitality to strangers, we replicate the servitude exemplified by Jesus, who empathetically declared in Mark 10:45 that He came not to be served, but to serve. As Christians we are now called to serve as co-host with Christ to a world consisting of those who are “excluded from the citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise”.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, what amazes me most about this widow is that she shifts from operating in the norm to operating outside the norm. Most would agree that the normal reaction to the strangers request to feed him with the little that she had, prior to feeding her child and self would be, “absolutely not!” In this selfish, individualistic and egocentric world we live in today, it is realistic to think that many would purposefully take care of family first and cater to self before even thinking about attending to the needs of a stranger. Yet this woman abandons her own ways of normalcy. Like this woman, we are gradually getting to the place of abandoning our norm by relinquishing the behavior that suggest that we have to do things as we have always done it, thereby maintaining our tradition and remaining committed to the common practice of a Baptist Church and our disabling status of being an inward focused church. This woman’s willingness to step outside the box opened the door for her to experience an overflow of

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<sup>68</sup> Ephesians 2:12

blessings. I believe that we, too, will experience being recipients of encountering an overflow of blessings as a result of incorporating a hospitable assimilation system that addresses the needs of those who come as strangers but leave as family. Why, because hospitality has its side effects. Again, as we reflect on Abraham's willingness to show hospitality to the three visitors, it opened the door for his wife to conceive a child. His hospitality produced something that was beneficial to his household. I believe the same is going to be true for us. We will be blessed through the process of implementing this new assimilation system that resolutely communicates the beauty and purpose of God's desire that we be hospitable.

Fellowship: Engage the Saint

We believe St. John is to be a place that encourages worship through fellowship, compassion, support and care for God's glorification as well as share our time and talents to fulfill the needs of our church and community. Therefore, we strive to incorporate ministry opportunities that will allow us to experience *koinonia* - (community).

--Jovan Davis, *St. John Vision Casting 2017*

In continuing to look at the theological understanding of hospitality, it is necessary that we take into account that true hospitality prepares the table for fellowship. This is not only reflective in the examples of hospitality presented to us throughout the bible, but also in many cultures. For instance, in the country of Zaire, as a sign of welcoming guests into their homes they will literally place a special cloth on their table with hopes of engaging the guest in fellowship. The cloth represented that something and someone special is coming into their home.<sup>69</sup> Biblically, there is the story of the Shunammite family's embrace of Elisha in 2 Kings 4:8-11. Rather than having Elisha just

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<sup>69</sup> Delia Halverson, *The Gift of Hospitality: In Church, In the Home, In All of Life* (St. Louise: Chalice Press, 1999), 16-17.

pass by repeatedly without experiencing the beauty of hospitality, the Shunammite woman not only gave him something to eat, but she put together a room for him to be able to stay in every time he was coming through Shunem. Now I'm certain that this allowed opportunities for them to engage in fellowship with one another. I'm sure they didn't the intentions of being like a Motel 6 and just leave the light on for him, but to hear her say to her husband, "behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passes by us continually,"<sup>70</sup> there must have been some dialogues that produced the occasions to be able to get to know each other.

Equally, hospitality is further noted as the translation of the Latin noun *hospitium*, which is derived from *hospes* meaning both "guest" and "host", it is presumed that through true hospitality the position of a stranger has the potential to transition into that of a guest. In other words, through ongoing encounters with the stranger, their strangeness ceases to exist as *koinonia* is established through an ongoing commitment to build relationship. The Word of God tells us in Leviticus 19:33-34 that, "when a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God." A native, by definition is "a local resident; especially a person who has always lived in a place as distinguished from a visitor or a temporary resident."<sup>71</sup> With this understanding, it is apparent that at some point God expects for us to no longer view the stranger as an outsider, but to eventually come to the place where we identify them as a part of the family. This is clearly the

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<sup>70</sup> 2 Kings 4:9

<sup>71</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "native" accessed August 20, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/native>.

position the Shunammite family took in regards to Elisha. Although they perceived him to be a holy man of God, their inclination to also establish a place within their home expresses a relational connection they developed with him. He visibly became part of the family. As individuals began to position themselves as repeated guest, we should no longer associate them as strangers but begin to see them and treat them as if they are a part of the family. Another good biblical example of this is the story of Moses and Jethro. In observing Moses' first encounter with Jethro, the Midianite Priest, it was unmistakably that of strangeness. They were unfamiliar with one another yet Jethro extended the gift of hospitality to him when he was informed of Moses' ability to rescue his daughters from the shepherds. Jethro questioned his daughters as to why they didn't invite him to come with them and directed them to do such. As a result, Moses came and supped with them. As the story continues we learn that through the ongoing practice of hospitality, fellowship (its cousin) was cultivated which in turn buried the role of stranger and resurrected the role of guest. Eventually, Moses even relinquished the role of guest and became family when he married one of Jethro's daughters.<sup>72</sup>

As we look intently at the word "fellowship," it delivers the idea that a sense of togetherness is manifested and commonality is generated. This is made evident in observing the Greek usage of the word. The Greek word for fellowship, it is the word *koinonia*, which originates from the word *koinonos*. Although *koinonos* by definition means partner, associate, comrade and companion; it is the derivative of the word *koinos* which actually means common. So in essence, the act of fellowship is the process by which community (common-unity) is established. Certainly, when you observe the early

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<sup>72</sup> Exodus 2:11-25

church as recorded in Acts chapter two, we notice how true this is. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, makes it abundantly recognized that after the adding of thousands of souls to the Body of Christ, one of the five foundational acts that held the church together was their complete and utter willingness to engage in fellowship. For Acts 2:42 says, “and they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s Doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” Again, in understanding fellowship as togetherness, verse 44 goes on to tell us that “all who believed were together.” The notion that the believers were together highlights the magnitude of understanding that the early church had as it pertains to the benefits of meeting together. They engaged one another religiously because it served as a bonding mechanism that also opened the door for opportunities to provide the support that was needed. This is further expressed by the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 10:25, when he emphasizes the fact that we should “not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.” When engaging the saints through fellowship, we generate an environment that encourages and uplifts. Now by saint, I am not referring to the Catholics definition of a canonized saint, but the biblical implication that all who are in Christ are saints.<sup>73</sup> It is also important to note that in many instances Jesus’ manifestation of hospitality is viewed through the lens of fellowship. In just taking a good look at the language used to communicate about the Kingdom of God, He is seen displaying images that represent meals. For instances, in Luke 14:16-24, the kingdom is equated to that of a great supper and when Jesus concluded His ministry, He does it with a meal. In fact, He says in Mark 14:25, “verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the

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<sup>73</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2

fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.” I know in today’s world, particularly in the homes of many American’s the idea of mealtime being a source used to commence an opportunity to fellowship with family is nearing obsolescence as social media, television and other distractions have interfered with the dinner table but meals were always a tool used to cultivate togetherness.

Fellowship also denotes partnership and partnership is essential to ministry. In fact, Paul makes this abundantly clear in Philippians chapter one when he communicates to the church of Philippi his thankfulness for the ongoing partnership they have in the gospel. In verses 3-5, Paul declares, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy for your fellowship in the Gospel from this first day until now.” The word fellowship here actually refers to the partnership that remained between Paul and the church of Philippi. Regardless of where Paul was, the church deemed it necessary to continue their support of Paul’s ministry. Actually, this is magnified in their endeavors to support him when he was starting a church in Thessalonica. The church of Philippi took liberty in demonstrating their ongoing support to Paul’s ministry through their generous giving and receiving.<sup>74</sup> I believe this is extremely important to recognize and highlight because it paints a pictorial viewpoint of fellowship not just that of developing commonality and togetherness, but it dually excavates the hope that the togetherness will lead to the application of shared efforts. Strictly speaking, it is the focus of the assimilation system that through the enactment of fellowship, strangers who then become guest and eventually saints, will be encouraged to become so entrenched in the church that they move from being not-

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<sup>74</sup> Philippians 4:15-16.

engaged members to engaged members. A not-engaged member is a member that “may attend regularly, but they do not have strong psychological or emotional connections to their congregation; their connections are more social than spiritual,”<sup>75</sup> whereas an engaged members refers to those members who are “loyal and have strong psychological and emotional connections to their church or parish.”<sup>76</sup> This is important because “it is belonging (engagement) that leads to believing (commitment).”<sup>77</sup> If individuals don’t feel a sense of connection to the church it can be a detriment to the church. I believe fellowship opens the door to combating this reality. I believe as a church; it should be our committed goal to witness everyone that joins develop such a strong relationship with God and the church that it compels them to want to become fully involved in a ministry. This level of commitment then fosters the opportunity for discipleship.

#### Discipleship: Equip the Servant

We believe St. John is to be a teaching institution that equips and empowers the body of Christ to do the work of the ministry. Therefore, we strive to coordinate ministry opportunities which serve the Christian educational needs of the members, and to promote orderly progression from one state to another in the Christian’s spiritual growth.

--Jovan Davis, *St. John Vision Casting 2017*

Although discipleship is not necessarily a term used throughout scripture it is abundantly recognized as a central theme of both the Gospels and the Book of Acts. It derives from the word, “disciple” which describes those who are followers of Christ. A

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<sup>75</sup> Albert L. Winseman, *Growing An Engaged Church: How to Stop Doing Church and Start Being the Church* (New York: Gallup Press, 2006), 68.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 72.



follower of Christ is one who willingly, “den[ies] himself, and takes up his cross, and follows [after Christ].”<sup>78</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer states that

The disciple is [one who is] thrown out of the relative security of life into complete insecurity (which in truth is absolute security and protection in community with Jesus); out of the foreseeable and calculable realm (which in truth is unreliable) into the completely unforeseeable, coincidental realm (which in truth is the only necessary and reliable one); out of the realm of limited possibilities (which in truth is that of unlimited possibilities) into the realm of unlimited possibilities (which in truth is the only liberating reality).<sup>79</sup>

In order to be a successful disciple of Christ, one must commit himself/herself to the Word of God in the Bible. That’s why the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”<sup>80</sup> It is through this committed study that discipleship is able to take place. That is why “he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”<sup>81</sup> When discipleship doesn’t take place it allows for hypocrisy to contaminate the seriousness of the role of disciple/servant.

One of the many ways in which we learn about discipleship in the bible is through Jesus’ ability to connect hospitality with discipleship. This is profoundly observed throughout the many instances in which Jesus is given opportunity to provide instructs to His followers. The Gospel according to John highlights for us the journey by which the first disciples are called. In this first chapter, after having been identified by

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<sup>78</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Reader’s Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 18-19.

<sup>80</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15

<sup>81</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12

John the Baptist as “the Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world,”<sup>82</sup> Jesus assumes the role of host. As He is walking, discreetly two of John’s disciples began to follow Him. Jesus noticing them on His trail turns around and poses a penetrating question that sought to unmask the true intentions of their journey. For He said, “What do you seek?”<sup>83</sup> The followers’ response was probing but yet revealing as they inquired about where He was staying. Jesus who could have easily responded with an address of some sort, captured the deeper meaning of the inquiry and invited them into His space. We can only speculate as to what the three of them shared in their time together and make a theological presumption that much of what was discussed was relevant to the fact that He was the expected Messiah. However, in their discourse, Jesus must have talked about the journey that was set before him as well as equipping them for the journey as they are seen in the periscope as coming into the house as mere followers, but leaving the house as committed disciples. For the scriptures let us know that they proudly exclaimed, “We have found the Messiah.” This same behavior of exercising hospitality in collaboration with discipleship is further viewed through Jesus’ willingness to educate His disciples through moments when He extend hospitality to others. This is recorded in the account described by Matthew when Jesus feeds the five thousand.<sup>84</sup> Instead of adhering to the advice of His disciples to send them away, He positions Himself as Host and invites the multitude to partake of the five loaves and the two fishes. In this He demonstrates to His disciples what compassion looks like. He realizing that the people

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<sup>82</sup> John 1:29

<sup>83</sup> John 1:38

<sup>84</sup> Matthew 14:13-21

haven't eaten all day was not grounds to dismiss them but to address the need they had in that moment.

Aside from Jesus, other biblical characters also used hospitality as an opportunity to disciple others. Peter and John used it at the Gate called Beautiful when they engaged the lame stranger and educated him on the fact that rather than alms, there was something better he could receive through Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup> Also, the opportunity that was afforded Philip to witness the transformation of Ethiopian Eunuch. Being obedient to the command of God, Philip traveled south towards Gaza and came in contact with the eunuch. In that moment, Philip served as the guest, which according to Sutherland, "hospitality requires both guests and hosts and cannot exist without the two working together."<sup>86</sup> As guest in the shared space, Philip ministers to the eunuch by proclaiming the good news to him. As a result, the eunuch gave his life to the Lord.

All of these encounters and many more highlight the comradery that is present between hospitality and discipleship. Utilizing discipleship as an entity within the realm of the assimilation system cultivates the necessary energy that is needed to prepare individuals for embracing the Great Commission.

#### Outreach: Evangelize the Sinner

We believe St. John is to be a place that shares the gospel of Jesus Christ with all who are in a state of eternal separation from God. We have accepted the mandate from Jesus to, "*Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20) Furthermore, we strive to take the good news of the Gospel, of the redeeming love of Christ into all the earth, and to give a bold witness in both local and global

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<sup>85</sup> Acts 3:1-11

<sup>86</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 41.

communities by meeting the physical and spiritual needs of both the saved and the unsaved

--Jovan Davis, *St. John Vision Casting 2017*

We have now arrived at the last yet an essential module within the theological framework and focus of the St. John's Assimilation System. That module is what we come to understand as being outreach. As we have come to learn throughout various scriptures that dictate the need for engaging in outreach, outreach is incontestably a very important component to the life and wellbeing of the church. In fact, it is one of the purposes for which the church exists. According to Howard Synder, "evangelism is the first priority of the church's ministry....The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted."<sup>87</sup> Biblically, outside of nurturing and worship, the church is positioned to take on the responsibility of reaching out. For Matthew 28:19 clearly communicates that we have the charge of "go[ing] ye therefore and mak[ing] disciples of all nations".<sup>88</sup> This is achieved through the church's committed efforts to evangelize the sinner. The word, evangelize simply means to engage in the activity of proclaiming the good news. It is the verb form of the word evangelism which is a biblical concept that is expressed through a Hebrew verb, *basar* and the Greek verb and noun *euangelizo* and *euangelion*. *Euangelion* is normally translated "gospel," denoting the content of the good news. But it can also be a noun of action, describing the activity of telling that news.<sup>89</sup> This truth was expressed by Jesus when He taught in the

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<sup>87</sup> Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 13.

<sup>88</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>89</sup> W.J. Larkin, Jr. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 216.

Synagogue and stood before the people to read from the book of the Prophet Isaiah. He declared,

the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them who are bruised, to preach the acceptable Year of the Lord.<sup>90</sup>

Definitely, this was not just an exclamation of the content of the good news, but a transparent discourse of His call to action. Subsequently, it is not just a call to action that was reserved for Him, but one that was also instituted to the church. This is something that is soundly conveyed throughout scripture. From Jesus' relinquishment of the Spirit into the church in order that the church might be released into the world in Acts 1:8 to Paul's declaration to the church in Corinth. Where he said,

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.<sup>91</sup>

In continuing to examine hospitality through the theological lens, we can further see that it not only partners with fellowship and discipleship but it also serves in partnership with outreach. It functions in this capacity because as it is with hospitality, outreach is an important activity of the church that seeks to embrace outsiders. By outsiders, I am referring to those individuals who are not a part of the culture and can be theoretically identified as strangers, foreigners, enemies and for the purpose of outreach, sinners. When closely examining Luke's account of Jesus commissioning His seventy

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<sup>90</sup> Luke 4:18-19

<sup>91</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

disciples to go into the various towns to share the good news, He provides them some instructions that reveal the partnership that is established between hospitality and outreach.<sup>92</sup> After instructing them to travel in pairs, He instructs them to depend on the hospitality of the people they encounter. As a result, they were forbidden to carry any personal items with them in order that they might experience the gratitude extended to them by the hosts who would extend hospitality to them. He further forbade them from travelling from house to house as a way of seeking more admirable accommodations. It was their obligation to willingly accept the provisions and accommodations they received. But more importantly, Jesus commissions the seventy to minister to their host families and communities. Rather than merely receiving provisions and protection, the traveling missionaries are to meet the needs they encounter along the way and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. For Jesus said, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”<sup>93</sup> It is clear through this biblical example that hospitality masterfully opens the door of opportunity for the blessing and work of the Lord in the lives of people. The disciples willingness to participate in the customary practices of hospitality cultivated the fertile ground needed to sow the seed of God’s word into these not yet disciples lives.

As we have learned through our in-depth study of hospitality, etymologically it is understood as the act of being a lover of strangers. Again, the Greek word for hospitality; *philoxenos* confirms this to be true. Not only does the etymologically understanding of the word hospitality confirm this to be so, but it is also confirmed through the cultural practices of hospitality. In understanding that the word hospitality also derived from the

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<sup>92</sup> Luke 10:1-16

<sup>93</sup> Luke 10:16

Latin noun *hospitium*, which is derived from the words *hospes* (meaning host) and *hostis* (meaning enemy), from which our word hostile stems, many cultures used hospitality as a way of overcoming tension by making a stranger, foreigner or enemy a friend. In essence, the custom of hospitality in antiquity grew out of a desire to neutralize potential threats—both threats to strangers and threats to one’s community. The generous hosts were not only protecting the outsider from attacks rendered by potential thieves, but they were also adamant about seeking protection for themselves and their household from the probable wrath that can erupt from an outsider. In other words, they would rather have them become their friends than to have them as enemies. While in some cultures the practice of hospitality was seen as a badge of honor bestowed upon these outsiders, others like ancient Romans who perceived outsiders as having magical powers that could be potentially used against them as weapons, identified hospitality as the means of beguiling the outsiders. Also, according to Sutherland, “the Middle Eastern setting of the bible assumes that strangers are always potential enemies and hospitality was one means of adumbrating fear and making peace.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, by carefully examining scripture, we have come to learn that hospitality has strategically served as a vehicle that aided in strangers becoming guests, foreigners becoming natives, and enemies becoming friends. Some biblical examples of this are when Rebekah’s family welcomed Abraham’s servant into their home,<sup>95</sup> when the islanders of Malta showed kindness to Paul when he was shipwrecked,<sup>96</sup> and when Lot entertained strangers.<sup>97</sup> In all these instances, there was a

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<sup>94</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>95</sup> Genesis 24:22-25

<sup>96</sup> Acts 28:1-10

<sup>97</sup> Genesis 19:1-29

transformation that occurred in the relationships. The strangeness subsided as relationships developed. In The Gospel of Life, John Paul II stated,

A stranger is no longer a stranger for the person who must become a neighbor to someone in need, to the point of accepting responsibility for his life, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows so clearly. Even an enemy ceases to be an enemy for the person who is obliged to love him, to do good to him and respond to his immediate needs promptly and with no expectation of repayment.<sup>98</sup>

This is also representative of outreach. The idea of reaching out is coated in the passion one must have for those not a part of the Kingdom of God. Outreach is about reaching those who are strangers, those who are foreigners, those who are enemies of “the Way”.

For Jesus said in Luke 14:12-14,

Bade him, when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

It is through this committed effort to reach out that relational statuses are changed, allowing for those same opportunities one can experience through hospitality, to be able to experience through outreach. Unlike discipleship, which deals with the equipping of those that are already apart of the Kingdom, outreach seeks to grow the Kingdom through extending an invitation to the lost.

I firmly believe that the successful alignment of these components would prove favorable as we continue seeking diligently to be the place where we are “committed to building the Kingdom of God, by empowering and equipping disciples who are reaching UP to God, reaching IN to the church and reaching OUT to the world. As hospitality

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<sup>98</sup> John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)* (New York: Random House, 1995), 72.



seeks to change a stranger into a guest, fellowship seeks to change a guest to a member and discipleship seeks to change a member into a disciple, outreach seeks to change an outsider into an insider. Without question, these are necessary instruments that allow for the assimilation system to operate as it is intended, as they are strategically positioned to communicate the church as a welcoming place.

## CHAPTER 4

### **THE PROJECT: THE ASSIMILATION SYSTEM**

Oftentimes when we think about church, we think exclusively about those that attend on a regular basis. We think about their needs and their wants, which of course isn't necessarily a bad thing, especially since they are the natural sources of the church's financial strength. However, I surmise that the aforesaid does present a deterrent to which the church has to grapple with. Painfully speaking, it minimizes the impact a church can foster, if its focus is solely inward. One of the common threads that Thom Rainer expresses in his book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church, is that a lot of churches that are on life support are those churches that have mastered the art of being more "inward focused" than "outward focused." The churches were more concerned with their own comfort and preferences (buildings, programs, needs) than with reaching out to those around them and meeting their needs. For he stated, "the ministries and programs for these churches tend to be shifting more and more for members of the congregation rather than those on the outside. In simple terms, the church is moving from an outward focus to an inward focus."<sup>99</sup>

As a pastor for over ten years now, I have come to learn that ministry is meeting the needs of people through the gift of connection. As more and more people are looking for relationships and a place to belong, we must take a good look at ourselves, and

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<sup>99</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 87.

we must understand that a part of growing as a church, is realizing what it is that we are presenting. If we do not possess a vehicle by which we can connect with others, the threat of being impotent is more and more realized as less and less people come walking through and stay within our doors. In order to minimize this from continuously happening at St. John, we executed a new system known as the St. John's Assimilation System. By definition, an assimilation system is "a process, not an event that transforms our programs, services, and events into connection points to foster human interactions that become the genesis of authentic community."<sup>100</sup> According to Nelson Searcy, an assimilation system guru, it is also "the process used to encourage first-time guests to continue coming back until they see and understand God's power, accept Jesus as their Savior and commit themselves to the local church through membership."<sup>101</sup> In other words, it is a process designed to move people from first-time guests to being fully devoted members of our church.

Like tornados, I believe the operation of an assimilation system has the unyielding potential to have a phenomenal impact on the church's overall makeup. Therefore, after having researched and considered other assimilation systems, we developed three different phases that are designed to give attention to the four different stages an individual tends to go through on their journey towards finding a place to belong. The three phases are: Communication Phase, Connection Phase and the Commitment Phase

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<sup>100</sup> Dave Bair and Steve Caton, *The Assimilation Engine: Four Processes that Drive How People Connect with Your Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Church Community Builder, 2013), 3, accessed September 3, 2017, [https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/857538/CCB/\\_docs/eBooks/ebook-assimilationengine.pdf](https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/857538/CCB/_docs/eBooks/ebook-assimilationengine.pdf) .

<sup>101</sup> Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Fusion: Turning First Time Guest into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 28.

(see figure 1.2). Each phase possesses its own distinct responsibilities that interconnect with the varying stages within a person's journey what we recognized as being from first time guests to evangelists. Let's take a closer look at each stage.

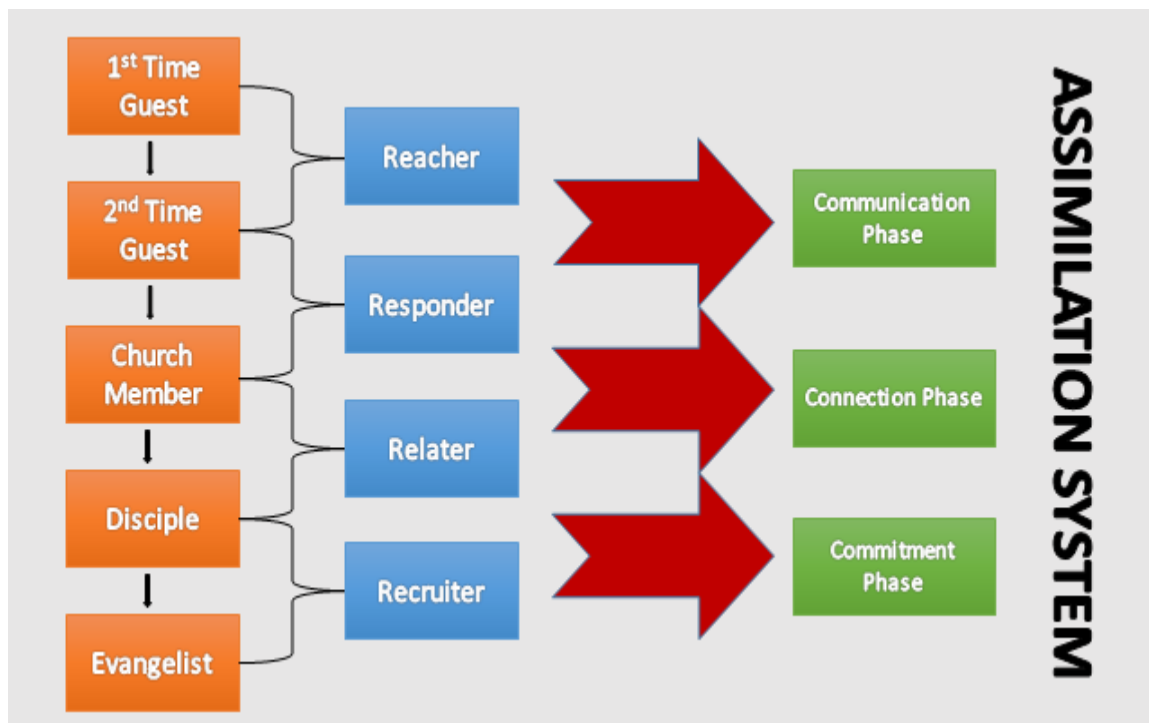


Figure 1.2. *St. John's New Assimilation System Structure*

### Communication Phase

According to Gary McIntosh in his book, *Beyond The First Visit*, he states that “everyone wants to have first-time guests, but few really plan for them.”<sup>102</sup> The Communication phase is designed to do just that. As it goes without saying, communication is a very viable component within any relationship. It is, in many instances, the thread that strategically holds varying facets of the relationship together. Failure to communicate can lead to unwanted outcomes that hinder the progression of the

<sup>102</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Beyond The First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 13.

relationship. In fact, it is statistically understood that one of the leading causes behind a couple's willingness to terminate their relationship is due to a lack of communication.<sup>103</sup> Failure to communicate effectively can cause a lasting strain on any relationship as many perceive communication as a crucial factor to the hallmark of marriage. When there is no communication, problems surface, thereby sabotaging the intent of marriage, and resentment and frustration begin to unravel the intertwined fabric of the relationship. On the other hand, good communication creates the necessary cohesiveness that enables the foundation of the relationship to remain strong and intact. This aids in potentially alleviating the threat of separation, and it enhances the likelihood that the relationship or marriage will survive.

I firmly believe this holds true for the church. Figuratively speaking, the church and the individual in search for a place to belong are like a courtship that is caught in the web of potential marriage. The church, at this moment, needs to see itself as the pursuer rather than the chased. Therefore, it must purposefully present an untainted image of itself that communicates an unbending desire to be in this new found relationship. If the church fails to communicate effectively, it can easily lead the individual astray, thereby ruining its chances of developing a long-lasting and healthy relationship with the individual. That is why we affirmed the importance of this phase because it is the leaning post by which all the other phases are able to stand.

The Communication Phase focuses on those individuals whom we consider to be "Reachers." Reachers are those individuals whom we've identified as being in search for

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<sup>103</sup> "Poor Communication Is the #1 Reason Couples Split Up: Survey," Huffpost, accessed November 2, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/20/divorce-causes-\\_n\\_4304466.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/20/divorce-causes-_n_4304466.html)

a church to call their home away from home. They are typically recognized as first-time guests, or second time guests. These are those individuals who pay close attention to what is presented to them within the first fifteen minutes of their stay. Not only that, but we have come to learn that “on average, people make eleven decisions about us in the first seven seconds of contact.”<sup>104</sup> This indicates that a good portion of this Communication Phase must begin prior to the start of the service, emphasizing the importance of hospitality. For it is without question that first impressions are everything! That is why we’ve divided this phase into three different sections. These sections include: Pre-Service Communication, Service Communication and Follow-Up Communication. Like Nelson Searcy, we recognized that in the Pre-Service Communication section emphasis must be placed on four areas of contact. They are the greeted, directed, treated and seated.<sup>105</sup>

It is during the greeted and directed components of this section that everything from esthetics, signage and people must be communicated effectively; for up to the minute guests drive onto our lots, they are making decisions about us. It is clearly noted that we cannot effectively extend “hospitality if we do not make our buildings inviting from the curb. [Yes], we can be loving and caring to others inside our buildings, but unless we make the outsides inviting no one will come in to discover our warmth.”<sup>106</sup> It’s sort of like the selling of a home. Mostly every realtor would tell you that the best way to attract people to even contemplate the idea of purchasing your home, you have to make

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<sup>104</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Beyond The First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006),

<sup>105</sup> Nelson Searcy, “The Assimilation Intensive Workshop” (lecture, Walt Disney World, Orlando, October 20-21, 2016), 31.

<sup>106</sup> Delia Halverson, *The Gift of Hospitality: In Church, In the Home, In All of Life* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 1999), 19.

certain that your curb appeal is inviting. Because a poor curb appeal can potentially prevent a prospective buyer from even coming into the house. This is why we took the necessary measures to address our grounds, accessibility to our buildings, parking and bathrooms. We also are in the process of purchasing the necessary signage to communicate to our guests the location of our facilities. Now, for us who are members of the church, we didn't see the need for them; but as our consultants pointed out, guests are unfamiliar with our facilities.

Keeping in mind that “in reality, communication is seven percent verbal content, thirty-eight percent tone of voice, and fifty-five percent body language,”<sup>107</sup> we educated our Greeters, Security Team, Parking Attendants and Ushers how important it is for them to be hospitable and knowledgeable. Not to frighten them in any way, but only to encourage them, as they are in many ways the combustion that ignites the fire in this system. We informed them that they are in many ways the pivotal piece of this entire Communication Phase. If they fail to show hospitality to those who come as seekers, they jeopardize our opportunity to welcome them as family. That is why we stressed to them the importance of recognizing that “hospitality is recognizing Christ in everyone we meet and acting accordingly.”<sup>108</sup> We instructed everyone to be on post at least fifteen minutes prior to the start of service and to be prepared to greet everyone with a smile, a “hello” and a “welcome to St. John.” We also informed them how imperative it is for them to be well aware of the facilities, activities and whereabouts of programs that are taking place. As they will more than likely be the source by which our guests would seek

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 16.

to gather information. And when directions are needed, they have the obligation to not only direct the individual, but also to take them to the desired location.

In unveiling the characteristics of both the treated and seated areas of contact, it is apparent that there must be a willingness to over perform. In fact, according to Ken Blanchard, in his book, Raving Fans organizations that get return customers deliver on what they promise plus one percent”<sup>109</sup> We must communicate through our actions that we are expecting guests to arrive thereby, in many instances, we must roll out the “red carpet” of welcome! This means that not only are we welcoming them upon their entrance onto our campus, but we plan to insure that, as they prepare to enter into the sanctuary, they are not needlessly wandering around trying to find a seat on their own, but are strategically seated next to members who are charged with the responsibility of showing themselves to be hospitable. This is done because we recognize how important personal connections are in aiding in a person’s decision to join. In fact, statistics suggest that “newcomers must have seven-plus friends in the church within the first six months to become fully assimilated.”<sup>110</sup> If not, they will eventually leave. We seek to minimize that, hopefully presenting at least one at the onset of their visit.

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<sup>109</sup> Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, *Raving Fans* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 101.

<sup>110</sup> Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 74.



Again, gleaned from Nelson Searcy's assimilation process, we recognized that during the Service Communication section of the Communication Phase it was essential for us to strategically find a way to get and store information about our guests. Therefore, modeling after Nelson Searcy's Connection Cards,<sup>111</sup> we put together Reach Cards (see figure 1.3). The Reach Cards are used to

**REACH CARD**  
WE'D LOVE TO CONNECT WITH  
**YOU**  
SIMPLY FILL OUT THE BACK OF THIS CARD TO RECEIVE A FREE GIFT AND GET CONNECTED

**Welcome to St. John! REACH CARD**

Circle one: Dr. / Rev. / Mr. / Mrs. / Miss / Ms.  Change in contact information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Birthday(mm/dd): \_\_\_\_\_

Are you looking for a church family? Circle Yes or No

Would you like to learn more about St. John? Circle Yes or No

How did you hear about St. John Missionary Baptist Church?

(Name of person who invited you, postcard, mailer, website, social media, etc.)

Prayer Request: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check all that apply:  
 1<sup>st</sup> time Guest  
 2<sup>nd</sup> time Guest  
 Returning Guest  
 Member  
 Please send me text updates (approx. 1 per month)  
 Please send me email updates (approx. 1 per month)

*"We are committed to Reaching UP to God, IN to the Church, and OUT to the World!"*

Figure 1.3. Assimilation System Reach Cards

receive the contact information of all of our guests in order that we might be able to conduct a follow-up. After a welcome is extended to our guests during our worship services, our "We Care Team," greets our guests and gives them the Reach Cards that request information, such as names, emails, addresses, phones and birthdays.

<sup>111</sup> Nelson Searcy, "The Assimilation Intensive Workshop" (lecture, Walt Disney World, Orlando, October 20-21, 2016), 38-42.

The cards also ask the questions: Are you looking for a church family? Would you like to learn more about St. John? How did you hear about us? Do you have any prayer requests? Finally, the Reach Cards ask that guests identify for us as to whether they are first-time guests, second-time guests, or returning guests. After the guests complete their cards, we encourage them to come visit with us in our Welcome Center. In the Welcome Center, they will have the opportunity to once again be greeted by members of our “We Care Team,” presented with one of our Welcome Gift Bags and receive a special

one-on-one

greeting from me

(pastor). Within

our Gift Bags, we

present them

with, a CD or

DVD of a

service, mints

and a bottle of

water with our logo on them, a brochure and a notepad (see figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4. *Assimilation System Gift Bag Items*

After the information is received, then we transition into the Follow-Up Communication section, where the information from the Reach Cards is inputted into our new membership database (Planning Center) by our Office Assistant. The Office Assistant has to input that information from the cards into the system by 2:30pm each Sunday. On that same Sunday, he or she will then appropriately assign each individual

that was inputted into the system into the appropriate workflow, as well as change the statuses of the individuals if necessary. For instance, if someone was a first-time guest last week, he or she will then be changed from a first-time guest to a second-time guest. Additionally, if the individual is a first-time guest, he or she will be assigned to the First-Time Guest's Workflow. If he or she is a second-time guest, he or she will be assigned to



Figure 1.5. Assimilation System Personal Notecard

the Second-Time Guest's Workflow. Any guest that has returned beyond the two visits are not included into a workflow, but statuses are changed to indicated that they are no longer second-time guests but rather "in progress." All those added to the workflows are then checked by the Executive Secretary on Monday mornings to ensure that the transcribing of information from the cards was accurately done. After identifying that her assignment was completed through Workflows, the system will then send an email to me (pastor) indicating that it is now time for me or my designee to write personal note cards (see figure 1.5) for all of our first-time guests. This task is to be completed by 1:00pm on Tuesdays, following the Sunday the guests visited. When all the personal note cards are

done. After identifying that her

completed, the Workflows component within the People application will then send an email to the Executive Secretary informing him or her that it is now time to prepare the notecards for mailing. This must be done by 3:00pm on the Tuesdays following the Sunday in which the guests visited. A benefit that comes with the Planning Center is that all labeling can be done through it. Following this, using the snooze feature within the Workflows component, after two days, the application will send an email to the Executive Secretary on Thursdays informing her that it is now time to send all of our first-time guests our First-Time Guests' Email. The email which comes from me is another opportunity for me to thank them for their visit and to provide an avenue for them to express their experiences at St. John through an online survey. Using [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) we ask six meaningful questions. They are: Which service did you attend? Did you feel welcomed? What did you like most about your first-time experience at St. John? Did you have an opportunity to visit our Welcome Center? How could we improve your experience? Are there any other questions, comments or prayer requests? The last step in our First-Time Guests Workflow is the "30 Day Letter" we send out. Again, utilizing the unique snooze feature in the Workflows component after a period of twenty-five days the system will alert the Executive Secretary via email that it is now time to send out the "30 Day Letter." The "30 Day Letter" is our way of celebrating the guest's one month anniversary since his or her first visit to our church. As a way of celebrating it, we enclose within the letter an Anniversary Certificate which allows the guests the opportunity to pick up a special gift from our Welcome Center. It also grants me the opportunity to once again introduce myself to them and thank them for coming. The letter also highlights several of our ministries and activities for that particular month.

For those who have been identified as our second-time guests, we follow the same protocol for inputting their information into our database; however, instead of them being placed into the First-Time Guest Workflow, they are inserted into the Second-Time Guest Workflow. This workflow is a little different than the First-Time Guest Workflow. During this workflow, the second-time guests are sent a Second-Time Guests' Email. Within this letter, we seek to invite our guests to come and experience all that St. John has to offer. We share with them our mission, vision, and core values. They receive a picture of my family and me, as well as some information about who I am as a person. Our goal in the near future is to make this email into a video that we can send communicating the same information. Undeniably, this first phase is tedious yet essential to the overall makeup of the Assimilation System as communication is indisputably an essential medium in the overall success of the system.

### Connection Phase

According to the Law of Connection, “the more rapport you have with somebody, the stronger your connection with that person. The less rapport you have with someone (or when the rapport is broken) the weaker your connection is with that person.”<sup>112</sup> The ability to establish this rapport is centered on how well we communicate. As we know, communication is a key factor in developing rapport which ultimately cultivates connection. This is why we strategically emphasized the importance of communication within the Communication Phase; we understood that without it, we wouldn't be able to trigger the much needed connection we seek to establish with all of our guests.

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<sup>112</sup> Michael J. Losier, *Law of Connection: The Science of Using NLP to Create Ideal Personal and Professional Relationships* (New York: Wellness Central Hachette Book Group, 2009), xiii.

The Connection Phase is the part of the Assimilation System that serves to address the process an individual undertakes in making the transition from a second-time guest to a church member, and closely embarking on the shift to becoming a disciple. The individuals that fit into this category are known as Responders and Relaters. They have responded to the call to unite with us as their church family and have begun the process of becoming involved in the church. Within this phase, the New Members' Team, Christian Education Department, Deacons' Ministry, Deaconess' Ministry, Ministers, Ministers' Spouses, and Missionaries all play a very vital role in the success of this phase. For in this phase, our main objective is to move second-time guests into engaged church members.

The first step in this process focuses on what to do after a person has decided to join. After an individual joins the church, just like in the Communication Phase, the Office Assistant is responsible for either inputting the new members' information into the database for the first time (that's if they join during their first visit), or to just change the status of the individual from either first-time guest, second-time guest or in progress, to member. Once the status has been changed, the Office Assistant will then add the individual or individuals to the New Members Workflow in the Workflow's component of the People application in the Planning Center. This will then prompt the Executive Secretary, on behalf of the pastor, to put together the appropriate, "Welcome to the Family" letter to be distributed Monday afternoon following the Sunday the new member or members join. Purposefully, we have developed two different types of letters. One letter is addressed to those new members who are new converts and the other letter is addressed to those new members who joined under Christian Experience. In each of the

letters, a personal welcome from me as their new pastor is extended to all who have joined, as well as information pertaining to the fitting *Foundations for Building Disciples* classes they are encouraged to attend as new members. We are also in the process of developing a map of the campus to send with the letter, so that the new members are aware of the ins and outs of their new church home.

Upon completion of the welcome letter, the Executive Secretary will identify the task as “completed” within the New Members Workflow. After a period of seventy-two hours, the Biblical House representative assigned the task of making welcome phone calls to the members within their Biblical House, will make the necessary phone calls. This concept of Biblical Houses will be explained later in the chapter. The purpose of the calls is to first, afford Biblical House representatives the opportunity to introduce themselves and welcome the new member to the church, as well as to their new Biblical House. During this call, they will also communicate the purpose for which the Biblical Houses exist and what they can expect from their house. In addition, they will provide important information pertaining to baptism and the Foundations for Building Disciples classes. The representative is also prepared to answer any questions the individual may have, and they are directed to always end each call with a word of prayer. Let us take a closer look at these different entities that make up the Connection Phase in greater detail.

## Foundations for Building Disciples

The *Foundations for Building Disciples* (see figure 1.6) classes are designed to once again add another layer of connectedness. We have decisively restructured our



Figure 1.6. *Foundations For Building Disciples Membership Guide*

classes in such a way that they purposefully present the opportunity for individuals to first of all explore what it means to be saved, but it also provides the occasion for them to become acquainted with the life of *St. John*, by communicating who we are, what we believe, and the vision God has entrusted us to fulfill within His Kingdom. Not only that, but we also added a class that is intentionally incorporated to allow for us to be able to initiate the Commitment Phase of our

Assimilation System. The class we now incorporated into the new members' class structure is *Spiritual Gifts*. During this class, members will be informed of what spiritual gifts are and also given a *Spiritual Gifts Test*. I will further explain the benefits of this in the Commitment Phase.



### Biblical Houses

Being that we are a fairly large church, with over 1,000 members, it is undeniably impossible for me, as the sole pastor, to be able to provide the necessary pastoral care to all the members. When I, as the pastor, have to take on the responsibility of visiting every sick person, do every wedding and funeral and make regular house calls, attend every meeting, and conduct every Bible study, I become unable to do almost anything else. As a result, message preparation falls by the wayside and providing organizational leadership for the future is almost obsolete. In recognizing that good pastoral care is also a tremendous aid in growing a church and the reality that this type of work isn't realistically achievable through the operation of one person, we deemed it necessary that as a part of this assimilation system, it was important that we structure ourselves in such a way that will allow for us to provide spiritual and emotional support to every member. Therefore, we decided to incorporate Biblical Houses. Similar to the small church, Biblical Houses are designed to provide personal attention to each member. As the spiritual leaders of the house, the Deacons were charged with the responsibility of developing a team of individuals to assist them in supporting the vision for these houses. These individuals include: Deaconess, Missionaries, Ministers and Ministers' Wives. Together they are instrumental in establishing the much needed connection with those who are already members of the church and those who are newcomers. They work diligently towards being available to the members in order to nurture, comfort and encourage those who are in need of pastoral care. And they also commit themselves to providing help, healing, information and inspiration to all members of the congregation.

This concept is certainly not new. In fact, it's not just practical but it is biblical. In reflecting back during the time in which the children of Israel had accomplished the mass exodus from Egypt and Pharaoh's command, there came a time when Moses was trying earnestly to provide the needs of all Israelites. Certainly, this behavior diminishes the effective capabilities one would have in trying to lead well. Thankfully, Jethro, his father-in-law spoke words of wisdom into his life. He stated,

And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Harken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. (Exodus 18:17-23)

Currently, we have four Biblical Houses that are named after the Synoptic Gospels. The membership is divided according to their last names. For instance, the House of Matthew consists of those members whose last names begin between the alphabets "A" through "F." The leadership structure allows for there to be at least 10 leaders within each house. In order to allow for our current members to become acquainted with their Biblical House leaders, as well as, have an opportunity to meet others within their house. We conducted a Meet and Greet for each Biblical House on consecutive Thursdays in the months of October and November. During the meetings, we familiarized each attendee with the what, why and how of the Biblical Houses. We had icebreakers to allow individuals to

get to know one another, and we allowed the attendees to offer suggestions on how their Biblical Houses should function. We had members fill out the Update Membership Database forms and we had all the leaders of the houses introduce themselves. Although we didn't reach our goal, we did have close to 300 members to attend. We are planning to have additional sessions on other nights to allow for those members who didn't attend to still have an opportunity to meet their leaders. As communicated in the Connection Phase, as new members join the church, they will be entered into the New Members' Workflow. Within the workflow, the Biblical House representative from the particular house the new member will be a part of, will be informed of the new member in their house and they in turn will have to reach out to the new member within 72 hours from when they joined to welcome the new member to St. John, to introduce themselves as their Biblical House leader and also welcome them to their new Biblical House. They will also give them information pertaining to any questions they may have and also encourage them to attend their *Foundations for Building Disciples* classes. Throughout the year, each Biblical House will have get-togethers for opportunities of fellowship, whether it's a potluck, bowling outing or a prayer service. Also, whenever someone within the house has a death, representatives from the house will together, meet at the members' houses to have prayer with them, bring a dish and offer their condolences.

### Commitment Phase

After the Communication and the Connection Phases, we then transition to the Commitment Phase. The Commitment Phase is what I consider to be a very important phase. It is the phase that is designed to be the means by which we close the back door. This is the phase in which we hope to not only strengthen the level at which the Relater is

actually positively relating to the church, but that that Relater then takes on the role of becoming a Recruiter. In other words, our goal during this phase is to move the individual from just being a church member to actually being a disciple then ultimately an evangelist. By disciple, I'm referring to the fact that the individual who once was a guest has now become a church member, but not just a church member but a member that has become actively involved in the church. They have explored the various ministries that we have to offer and decided to be a part of at least one of them. The evangelist, which is the role we strive to see all of our guests become, are those individuals that have identified St. John as their place of belonging, and because they are so excited and happy to have found this place, they freely express it to others with the intent of wanting them to come and experience what is taking place at their new church. In other words, they become the spokesperson for the church. Publically, inviting people to come and be a part of it.

In order for them to get to the aforementioned stages, we have to provide the path that gets them there. Calvin Ratz says, "newcomers don't come with Velcro already applied. It's up to the church to make them stick."<sup>113</sup> It is within this phase that we have developed steps that will hopefully be the landing stripe towards Recruiter. The first step as explained within the Connection Phase is the *Spiritual Gifts Test*. The *Spiritual Gifts Test* is important to us because we recognize it as the catalyst by which we are able to assist the new member in finding a ministry that will aid in their growth. Often times, we will have people take the test but never have any follow-up attached to it. We have put something in place to eradicate that. After a new member has completed their test, it is

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<sup>113</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Beyond The First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 131.

then recorded in our membership database for recordkeeping and also communicated to a member of our Connections Team. The Connections Team is a group of volunteer engaged church members who have a love for people and St. John. They are warm, welcoming and exemplify a tremendous love for God and His church. Having been trained, they are responsible for reviewing the test results of the *Spiritual Gifts Test* in order to draw a connection. In other words, they are charged with the responsibility of meeting with the new members to discuss their test results with them. In discussing their test results with them, they will, in turn, identify for them, possible ministries that they can be a part of that will allow them the opportunity to share their gifts with the congregation. Within this discussion, they will reveal the meeting times and days of the particular ministry or ministries and encourage them to attend one of the meetings. They will also inform the new members that they will personally reach out to the servant leader of the ministry to inform them of the new members' interest in the meeting, and let the new members know that they should expect a call from them. This is the part of the phase that we identify as Ministry Alignment. The Connections Team member will then follow-up on their promise and reach out to the ministry leader who, in turn, will have to reach out to the new members within 48 hours. That ministry leader will passionately invite the new members to come to their next gathering, and inform them that they will purposefully arrive early to the meeting just to have an opportunity to physically introduce themselves to the new member, prior to the start of the meeting. This actually accomplishes two purposes. One, of course, is to match the faces with the voices, but also to give the new members a sense of comfort knowing that when they walk into the

room that may be full of people, they have at least one person they had an opportunity to already met and become acquainted with.

Also, within this phase we have come to recognize the importance of developing small groups. Small groups as defined by Albert Winseman “offer opportunities for members [and nonmembers] to form deep and lasting friendships, have their spiritual needs met, learn and grow, be encouraged in their spiritual development, feel cared about, and see spiritual growth in others.”<sup>114</sup> In realizing we didn’t want to just be like 90% of the churches in America who are just front door churches, and that methods of delivering the Gospel can change just as long as the message remains the same, we decided to implement our small groups which we call Reach Life Groups. Our Reach

Life Groups are designed around five E’s. They are: excite, engage, edify, empower and effect (see figure 1.7).

We understand that in order for people to buy-in to the idea of embracing this new concept, our Reach Life

Groups have to excite the

consciousness of the people. Therefore, we sought to develop Reach Life Groups that



Figure 1.7. REACH Life Groups System

<sup>114</sup> Albert L. Winseman, *Growing An Engaged Church: How to Stop Doing Church and Start Being the Church* (New York: Gallup Press, 2006), 138.

spoke to the interests and desires of the members and our community. We also wanted to make certain that our Reach Life Groups were engaging. That they allowed for our participants to share in community and build relationship. Not only that, but because we are committed to seeing lives transformed through God's word, the core of our Reach Life Groups is to ensure edification. We want the participants of these groups to learn more about God and deepen their relationship with Him. Furthermore, it is our desire to empower all participants to the point where they are encouraged and equipped, as a result of participating in the Reach Life Groups, to share beyond the community of believers and effect change in the lives of others by becoming disciples of Christ, which allows us to have an impact on the larger community.

Being that this was our first time instituting Reach Life Groups, we decided to conduct them only on Wednesday Nights and Sunday Mornings. We provided a total of eight Reach Life Groups. We had Reach Life Groups for adults, youth and young adults. Some of the Reach Life Groups we offered were: *Eating For Your Body, Not Your Hunger*, *Financial Peace*, *Griefshare*, *A Young Man After God's Own Heart*, *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, and *The Dark Side and Second Nature: Choosing Christ-Centered Living in a Self-Centered World*. We had a total of 102 registrants which, based upon attendance, more than sixty percent remained committed to their groups.

Outside of the Connections Team involvement in the Commitment Phase and the implementation of Reach Life Groups, we also saw fit to incorporate Stewardship Projects throughout the year. Stewardship Projects are community outreach projects that allow for us to serve beyond the four walls of our church. This year we only had one Stewardship Project. We planned the project for the Wednesday after Thanksgiving. At

first the project was planned to provide a luncheon for the Boynton Beach Public Works Department. We wanted to show our thanks to the men and women of that department, who often times go unnoticed for the hard work they provide to our city. Everything was planned and ready to go. We had received the approval from the City Manager, who had expressed her gratitude and recognized that it was a great idea. However, only days prior to the event, the City Manager reached back out to us to inform us that she received word from the legal team that we could not host the luncheon because it was against policy. Certainly we were disappointed but we decided we had to still do something. Therefore, we contacted the *Lord's Place*, two days prior to the luncheon and informed them of our desire to feed their residents in our fellowship hall. That day, we had close to fifty people come to the luncheon. We fed them, prayed with them, spoke with them and encouraged them. The twenty volunteers that came did a fantastic job. We were elated to be able to show the love of Christ to these men.

### Implementation

On the first Sunday in September in the year 2017, we were elated to roll out the new system. We were excited about the opportunity to share with the masses all the hard work we had labored in developing what we believe is a rich and meaningful system. On that particular Sunday, we made certain that everyone was in place and ready to go by the start of the first service. It was during this time that we also learned a few things that questioned our preparedness. Consequently, the time in which the greeters were supposed to have positioned themselves at the entry ways to the church, they had unknowingly gathered for a brief meeting. Although they presumed that the meeting was of importance, a representative from the Lay Advisory Committee professionally



reminded them of the importance of being in position prior to the arrival of others. They understood and made a commitment not to hold a meeting prior to service in the future. Another issue that we faced on this first day of implementation was the fact that the air conditioning units in several of our Reach Life Groups meeting rooms were not functioning. This caused us to have to make some necessary adjustments to find appropriate space for the groups.

Outside of these small setbacks the overall system was put into operation. The database was used successfully and the staff was mentally prepared for the new responsibilities that they were assigned. Since that first Sunday, we have been committed to the process and have witnessed the fruits of it. It's amazing how the small act of showing hospitality to others can have such a huge impact on the overall ministry of the church. Since the implementation we have experienced growth and most of the congregation and leaders have notice the influence the system has had on the church.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PERFORMANCE

In carefully evaluating the new St. John Assimilation System, I recognized the importance of strategically examining the changes that have occurred as a result of its employment. Although most people are reluctant to change, afraid of change and just outright don't like change it is apparent that change is indispensable. It is the vehicle by which an organism experiences the essential growth it needs to encounter in order to survive. When something stops changing or stops growing it in many ways will find itself on a slippery slope towards its potential death. With the hopes of us not becoming that type of church, we embarked on a change that has through varying trials and errors proven itself to be valuable. Although at its onset, many had made up in their minds that an assimilation system wasn't necessary; most of the congregation are now recognizing the significance of the system. In fact, in the words of one of the members, who has been a recognized champion for status quo, went on record expressing how impressed she has been with how the assimilation system has been functioning. She said, "I know I often come across as a negative person, but I see what you are doing with this whole assimilation thingy you got going on and I must say I like it." I believe she voiced these words because she has noticed that despite some of the hiccups at the beginning of its enactment, for the most part the system has proven itself to be a positive, purposeful and professional system that is truly needed within our church.

As a way of further evaluating the system effective, I judged it essential to utilize Savage and Presnell's strategies for examining renewed post-projects. Of the five perspectives they outlined in their book, Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities, I believe for the benefit of this project both the functionalist and structuralist approaches would be instrumental in providing the critical lens needed to have a resourceful evaluation. The functionalist approach studies diligently how the joining narratives of the particular context fit together pre-and post-project. In other words, this perspective "seeks to discern how parts of the context might fit together differently now,"<sup>115</sup> then what they did in the past. It understands the importance of looking backwards in collaboration with the present. This approach has aided me in being able to effectively compare and contrast previous narratives with the current narratives. The structuralist approach presents a whole other perspective of evaluating. The structuralist approach "looks for unconscious patterns that may shape the context."<sup>116</sup>

In utilizing both of these approaches and the gifts of those that make up my Lay Advisory Committee, we worked tirelessly at getting input and feedback from individuals that have been on either side of the system. Those who are responsible for making sure the system is operating and those who were recipients of what the system has had to offer. We even solicited the wisdom of our current membership in regards to their thoughts about the system in comparison to how things operated in the past. Therefore, in an effort to gather this much needed insight, we engaged in open dialogues with a variety of

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<sup>115</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 128.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 129.

individuals that represented each grouping. We are proud to say that overall the responses were favorable. However, we did also learn a lot as well. Thankfully, many have noticed the benefits of the system and therefore have pledged their support to the entire workings of the system to which we were truly grateful. However, the funny thing that we had to grapple with is the notion that even though we are called to be a people of faith, we are often times not. It is unfortunate that at times we, as the Body of Christ, still function in the capacity of having to see it before we believe it. Yet, as we reflect on Hebrews 11:1 we recognize that faith is identified as “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” History dictates that this is actually not something new for *St. John*. Even when my predecessor sought to establish something new and different, a lot of people hesitated to accept it because of their fears or the inability to operate in the capacity of faith. For many of them, things needed and still needs to be tangible rather than intangible, visible rather than invisible, and concrete rather than abstract. Even during the plans to erect a new edifice, many people fought tooth and nail over it because they weren’t able to see the forest for the trees. More recently, prior to the actual execution of the project, several members could not see the need for us to go after surrounding property in order that we might not become landlocked. Opponents to the venture were adamant about we not needing more land to do ministry. They felt that we should be content and satisfied with what we currently have at our disposal. This unfortunately throughout the years has limited the overall impact the church could have had if faith and not sight was the source by which it functioned.

In looking back at some of the difficulties that resurrected during the introduction phase of the system, there were those who resisted the change who are now the biggest

champions of the change. Why? Because they had to see it, experience it and witness it, before they believed in it. Sadly, some still don't get the reasons as to why so much emphasis is placed on the "not yet." In other words, they took issue with us going the extra mile in order to extend a heartfelt welcome to those who are "not yet" members of the church. They often felt that as a paying member of the church, emphases should be placed on them rather than on "Sister Nobody." Clearly, these individuals have missed the true meaning of what the church represents and have established themselves as fruit bearers of exclusion rather than inclusion, which is the message of the Bible. This communicated the reality that we have become very territorial instead of welcoming.

It is because of this territorial behavior that many on the outside have come to view St. John as an unwelcoming church. Although they have had loving and caring pastors who opened their hearts and minds to everyone, in many instances the members' demeanor diminished it, thereby interfering with the potential growth the church could have experienced. People would come in large droves to experience the true essence of God, but unfortunately the atmosphere was on occasions contrary to the love exemplified by Jesus to the "whosoever will"<sup>117</sup> crowd. This behavior had developed in the minds of the surrounding communities the notion that St. John is a closed church. That the church was not open to the people within the community. That it was in many instances a social club and that you had to be of a certain status in order to be associated with the church. This was undeniably far from the truth; however because of the way in which people experienced St. John, this perspective became reality for them. Our new system sought

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<sup>117</sup> John 3:16

to combat this perspective with the notion that we are a loving church, whose doors are open to receiving all.

In looking intently at the Communication Phase of the system, I can honestly say that every component of the phase, despite some of the obstacles, has functioned successfully. From the moment individuals enter the grounds until they leave; we have purposefully sought to shift the culture and perspective of *St. John*. In making the necessary changes, we have witnessed people express some wonderful news about our hospitality. Now, although we have had the concept of hospitality in operation in the past with Greeters greeting our guest, the restructuring of it has proven fruitful. You see, in the past the Greeters alone would be responsible for welcoming our guest when they entered into the church, but now we have a plethora of ministries that are accountable for sharing in the responsibility of greeting individuals. Our Parking Attendants, Security, Ushers and members now partner with our Greeters in showing hospitality to our guest. But not only do the aforementioned ministries have a responsibility to embody hospitality, but the membership as well. We recognized how valuable it is for the membership to also exemplify a hospitable nature particularly when a guest is seated next to them during service. In continuing to reflect on the past, we would actually have the Greeters stationed in a certain area of the church that was away from the entrances. While standing there, they would with good intentions hold a bowl of mints that they would actually hand deliver one (literally just one) mint to whoever expressed a desire to have one. I literally cringed when I saw that, because for me it just communicated that we were stingy and cheap. For me, it was like going to one restaurant that as you exit they allow you to take at your leisure mints offered at hostess desk, compared to that

restaurant that as you are leaving the hostess only hands you one mint from the bowl that is placed on the table in front of her. The latter approach would seem very tacky to me and would have me questioning whether or not I would want to eat at that restaurant again. I didn't want that to be the case for St. John. Also, the act of holding the bowls in my opinion prevented the Greeters from being open. By that I mean, the bowls restricted them from being able to extend a physical welcome because their hands were occupied by the bowls. In making a necessary change, we purchased stands for the mints that allow individuals to take as much as they wish and we also positioned the Greeters at the entry ways of the church so that they can be the first contact our members and guests receive. I received one comment from a member who stated how excited she was about seeing that the Greeters have come from behind the bowls and are more visible at the entry ways. I also received another comment that actually came from a pastor friend of mine. He said he was so impressed with the Greeters that he was going to take that back home to his church in New Jersey. I am truly pleased to say that this change has helped cultivate the dawning of our shift.

Another major player in this phase is the fact that now our Ushers are charged with the responsibility of thanking each and every one of our attendees for their presence during our services. In the past, unbeknownst to me, the Ushers would leave with the attendees instead of waiting until the attendees have left before they relinquished their post. This was especially after first service as they wanted to have ample time to go get something to eat before the next service. Now not only do they stand at the door and greet the attendees as they leave but I, too, position myself at the conclusion of the benediction so that I can have personal contact with the attendees. It's amazing how a

simple touch can go so far. The smiles that come across the faces of the people when they see someone have the courtesy and decency to take the time to say thank you is heartwarming and fulfilling. It speaks to how important it is to take the time to show people that you care and appreciate them.

Furthermore, the membership database element of the system is incontestably phenomenal. It has been for us the icing on the cake. Despite the trials of learning the ins and outs of the system and training the staff on how to use it, it has served as the lifeline of the Communication Phase of the system. We have been able to effectively operate the post-service module of the phase with ease and deliver on our efforts to show our guests our commitment to be hospitable even after their visit. In the past four months (September 2017 - December 2017) we have sent out one hundred and forty personal notecards, seventy-nine first time guest emails and thirty-seven second time guest emails. Of the one hundred and forty personal notecards, ninety-eight of them are local. The others were from out of state or more than 30 miles away. Of those ninety-eight guests, forty-four of them became members of the church. That means at least ten people joined the church per month. Now, in looking at our records prior to the implementation of the system, we are looking at a monthly increase of about four individuals per month. That may seem like a small number but it is truly significant considering the system has only been in place for four months. If we continue in this vein, each year we can average an additional one hundred and twenty new members a year.

Those who on the receiving end of the system articulated their pleasure in being treated so kindly by everyone from the moment they entered into the parking lot. They were amazed by the level of hospitality we exemplified and appreciated our willingness



to make them feel welcomed. There were also moments in which individuals expressed that their entire perspective of the church has shifted. In fact, in one of the responses to our First-Time Guest's Questionnaire, a guest said:

I have lived in this city for several years now and each time I would inquire about a church to attend I would always hear people say, don't go to St. John. Of course I would find issue with that therefore I would probe the individuals for more information as to why I shouldn't attend. Almost consecutively, people would say because they are an uppity church that only cares about themselves and mean. If you ain't got no money, then they frown on you because most of them got money and don't even live in our community. After hearing that repeatedly, I never made an effort to attend. But I must say, after attending service this past Sunday, I have come to understand that you can't believe everything somebody else says. I truly felt at home and could feel the love and genuineness of those that greeted me and welcomed me. I will be back, God willing!

Another guest responded to our First-Time Guest Email with these words,

Dear Rev. Davis, thank you for the personal notecard and email. I had a pleasure of being a visitor at St. John's Church on two Sundays in December. I was a guest of my friend Mary Mackey, and I would like to thank you for the welcome I received, and to let you know how much I enjoyed your services. I look forward to attending services at St. John's the next time I visit Mary in Florida. Thank you again!

Its words like these that help push us to continue to serve faithfully as a church committed to exemplifying the love of God through hospitality.

Unfortunately, unlike the Communication Phase, the Connection Phase has not experienced as much success. Although we have made considerably strides in this area, the overall makeup of this phase still needs considerable work. The bulk of the issue stems from the lack of our new members' participation in our *Foundations for Building Disciples* classes. The *New Disciple's Reception*, *Fun Fellowship Activities*, and *Stewardship Projects* are all functioning satisfactory. It's just the classes that have not been attended by our new members. It's not that they aren't attending the services; they are just not attending the classes. Out of the over forty members that have joined in the

last four months we have only twenty-two members actually attend the classes. Of those twenty-two members, only thirteen have completed their classes. Five of the twenty-two have attended at least one class and four we have not had the opportunity to make contact. As a result of this, we now have to take the initiative to reevaluate what it is we are or are not doing in order to gather a better understanding as to why our newest members aren't attending their classes. We do know that in today's society the church has found itself having to compete with so many other activities on a Sunday that was nonexistent in years past. Things like little league sports activities and shopping. When I lived and pastored in Bergen County, New Jersey the shopping wasn't an issue as they had the Blue Law still in effect, but here in Florida it remains a source of competition. Knowing this, we have considered possibly conducting the classes on a different day of the week, which fosters another dilemma of making certain we have committed volunteers to teach the classes. Another possible solution is to utilize the Biblical House leaders as a support team. They can assist by making follow-up calls to those within their houses that have yet to complete their classes. The other thing we may just have to consider as well is whether or not the teachers are functioning at the level needed. It could very well be that they are interested in attending the classes, but because of their one experience with a teacher they may have lost interest. All of these factors need to be considered and evaluated as we move forward. Certainly, one of the things we felt would at least help in encouraging those who join under Christian Experience attend the classes is the decrease in the required classes they had to attend. We felt that those who have been in the church may very well already have the foundational teachings of the universal church but just needed to learn the inner workings, beliefs and practices of St. John. Therefore, they

only had to engage in those classes. Again this is something that we have to work diligently on because of the ripple effect it causes with the other entities within this phase. For instance, the lack of involvement with the classes by the new members prevents the Connection Team from being able to operate as it is assigned to do so, which hinders the goal of aligning the new members into ministries that reflects the results of their test. It isn't until after the new member completes his or her *Spiritual Gifts Test* (which is given during the last class of the *Foundations for Building Disciples*) that the team gets involved. Their involvement is what we believe will be the mechanism by which the back door of the church would be closed.

As far as the REACH Life Groups, most of the classes have been successful. People seem to be enjoying the opportunity to have a variety of options to choose from on their Christian journey. Surprisingly, most of the classes' attendance was steady. There was expressed concern by the membership pertaining to REACH Life Groups taking place during bible study. Many people didn't like that because it prevented them from having the opportunity to attend bible study. Therefore, during the next semester of classes we will not have the groups on Wednesday nights.

Since the implementation of the Biblical Houses, members are taking a more personal stake in successfully transitioning new members into the St. John family. It's amazing how individuals outside of the leadership of the houses have positioned themselves to volunteer their time and energy to serve in various capacities to ensure that the houses are a success. This lets me know that they have bought into the significance of the houses in assisting the pastor in attending to the spiritual needs of the church. When our houses met for the first time, we had a total of two hundred and eighty-seven

members attend. The next time the houses met the attendance grew by ninety-two people. We attribute that to those who came to the first one, communicating their excitement about the houses, thereby encouraging others to come and experience what the houses have to offer. One of the glitches in this sub-phase of the system is that fact that in the past the church kept poor records of the membership. A lot of the members' information wasn't available or incorrect, which negatively impacted our ability to reach out to them. Therefore, we also used this meeting time as a way of receiving our memberships correct contact information. On the other hand, the testimonies that I am receiving from the membership pertaining to their spiritual needs being met now sings the praises of the Biblical House concept. This is what it is all about. Although we would be committed in the past to visit with members during crisis, illnesses, graduations, etc., we didn't have any structure in place which caused only some people to experience the benefits of support and others not. We typically only visited those we knew which is unfair and misrepresentative of what the church should be about. This structure helps to alleviate that. In fact, last year a new member returned to St. John after being gone for a number of years. She shared with one of the leaders of the Biblical Houses that one reason she left the church was because the church never followed up with calls, visits, or assistance. However, as a result of us having our Biblical Houses in place, she recently reached out to the church office to let us know that her sister was very ill and asked for prayer and a hospital visitation for her sister who was in Hospice. The secretary did as instructed through the system to reach out to the Deacon whose house she would be in because of her last name. That Deacon then reached out to the member. After reaching out to the member, he along with the rest of his staff visited with the sister and prayed with her.

The member communicated her appreciation and expressed that after their visit, her sister had several improved days, a smile, a better appetite and a better spiritual feeling from the prayer. Though her sister passed a week later, the member had a good feeling about the follow-through from St. John, which is a very different feeling than the one she had before. She has since been coming regularly. When other leaders heard this story they were motivated even the more to serve. They recognized how this structure covers all areas, making sure that no one goes unnoticed.

Overall, I believe the system is going to continue to be a tremendous asset to the church. To be able to witness in such a short period of time the impact the system has had on the church, I firmly believe that with some minor adjustments the system will provide the necessary elements needed to shift the culture of the church and ultimately be the catalyst by which the back of the door would remain closed.

## APPENDIX

### Spiritual Gifts Test

God has blessed each believer with Spiritual Gifts. Do you know what Spiritual Gifts God has given you? This Spiritual Gifts Test will help you determine what Spiritual Gift(s) and/or Special Talent(s) God has given you. The test evaluates 28 Gifts and Talents. Do NOT look ahead to see what these Gifts and Talents are because that will influence your results!

#### Instructions:

This Spiritual Gifts Test consists of 140 statements (pages 2-5) that you are to respond to by entering in a number for each on the Analysis Sheet (page 7). Depending on how you feel about each statement, enter a number between 1 and 10 where 1 means that the statement does not describe you at all and 10 means that the statement describes you perfectly.

This test is designed for Christians. If you have been a Christian for at least a few years, you should use your personal experiences as the basis for your Responses. If you consider yourself to be a new Christian, then your Responses should be based on how well each statement describes the desire of your heart (even if you have not yet done what the statement talks about).

Please keep in mind that this test was written by people, not by God, and as such it is certainly imperfect. It should be used as a starting place to begin to discover how God has gifted you, but not as an absolute indicator. The test may not always indicate your true Spiritual Gift(s). It is just one tool in what should be a life-long search for how God has blessed you so you can bless others.

#### **Read this VERY CAREFULLY!**

1. Before you start the test, find the Analysis Sheet (page 7) and fold it along the gray line that runs down the middle of the sheet. Fold it so that you can see the 140 numbered boxes, but cannot see the names of the Spiritual Gifts and Talents.
2. Place the five Test pages (pages 2-6) on top of the folded Analysis Sheet so that you can see the Response 1-28 column.
3. As you take the Test, enter a Response (number from 1 to 10 indicating how well the statement describes you) in each of the pre-numbered boxes.
4. After entering your Responses in the boxes numbered 1-28, flip to the second Test page and position it over the Analysis Sheet so that it covers up the column of Responses you just entered.

5. Now enter your Responses for this page of the test.
6. Continue this process for all five Test pages. The test will take about an hour to complete.
7. Respond to each Statement quickly with your first feeling. Don't be too modest, however, unless you can walk on water, you will probably have many more low number Responses than high number Responses.
8. Are you ready to start? Take a deep breath and begin . . .
9. When you are done, read the Analysis Instructions on page 8.

### Spiritual Gifts Questions

1. People come to me when they need help in desperate situations, and I am able to recommend a ministry that can help.
2. I feel empowered to stand-alone for Christ in a hostile, unbelieving environment.
3. I readily identify with Paul's desire for others to be single as he was.
4. I enjoy using my artistic talents to make things that bring glory to God.
5. It is easy to me to perceive whether a person is honest or dishonest.
6. I have spoken words of hope that God confirmed in others by the Holy Spirit.
7. I am attracted to non-believers because of my desire to win them to Christ.
8. I have urged others to seek Biblical solutions to their affliction or suffering.
9. I hold fast to my personal belief in the truth even in the presence of ridicule, apparent failure, or pain.
10. I can give sacrificially because I know that God will meet my needs.
11. I feel strongly that my prayers for a sick person effect wholeness for that person.
12. When I serve the Lord, I really don't care who gets the credit.
13. Our home is always open to whomever God brings to us.
14. I find myself praying when I possibly should be doing other things.
15. I have had insights of spiritual truth that others have said helped bring them closer to God.
16. Others are willing to follow my guidance to accomplish tasks for our church.
17. I feel great compassion for the problems of others.
18. I believe that God can miraculously alter circumstances.
19. I am able to relate well to people of different cultures.
20. Christian music always lifts my spirit and makes me want to praise and worship God.
21. I have a heart to help Christians who have lost their way.
22. I choose to live a simple lifestyle so I will have more time and money to devote to God's service.

23. I sometimes feel that I know exactly what God wants to do in a ministry at a specific point in time.
24. Studying the Bible and sharing my insights with others is very satisfying for me.
25. I have interpreted tongues so as to help others worship God without confusion.
26. Sometimes when I pray, it seems as if the Spirit steps in and prays in words I cannot understand.
27. I have felt an unusual presence of God and personal confidence when important decisions needed to be made.
28. Sometimes, I express my love for God by writing poems, songs, prayers, or devotionals.
29. I have been responsible for guiding tasks in my church to success.
30. I feel God has called me to go forth to establish new churches where people have never heard the gospel.
31. I am single and enjoy it.
32. I like to make gifts for others that will remind them of God or Jesus.
33. I can sense whether a person is moved by the Holy Spirit, an evil spirit, or by their own flesh.
34. It is a joy to speak uplifting words to people who are discouraged.
35. I have led others to a decision for salvation through faith in Christ.
36. I can challenge others without making them feel condemned.
37. I am totally convinced God will fulfill his word even if He is not doing so yet.
38. God has used me to meet someone's financial or material need.
39. When I pray for the sick, either they or I feel sensations of tingling or warmth.
40. The Spirit sometimes leads me to do a simple thing for someone that touches him or her deeply.
41. I enjoy greeting and welcoming people to our church or our home.
42. I seem to recognize prayer needs before others.
43. I am able to understand difficult portions of God's word.
44. I am able to delegate tasks to others to accomplish God's work.
45. I have a desire to work with those who have physical or mental problems to alleviate their suffering.
46. Others can point to specific instances where my prayers have resulted in what seems impossible happening.
47. I would be willing to leave comfortable surroundings if it would enable me to share Christ with more people.
48. Singing, dancing to, or playing songs of praise to God for pure enjoyment is personally satisfying.
49. God has shown fruit in my life in the effective discipling of other believers.
50. My desire for spiritual riches always outweighs my desire for money or material possessions.



51. I sometimes have a strong sense of what God wants to say to people in response to particular situations.
52. People have told me that I have helped them learn Biblical truths.
53. Sometimes when a person speaks in tongues, I get an idea about what God is saying.
54. I can speak to God in a language I have never learned.
55. Sometimes God gives me an insight into the proper course of action others should take.
56. I am able to take complex spiritual matters and write them down in a way that others can understand more easily.
57. I can serve others by organizing and harnessing their gifts to solve a particular problem.
58. I have little fear in leading people where God wants them to go.
59. I am glad I have more time to serve the Lord because I am single.
60. I like to work with my hands to make things to serve God.
61. The difference between truth and error is easily perceived by me.
62. I can effectively motivate people to get involved in ministry
63. I seem able to determine when the Spirit has prepared a person to receive Jesus Christ.
64. People will take correction from me because they know I am on their side.
65. My hope in God, against all odds, is inspiring to others.
66. I have been willing to maintain a lower standard of living in order to benefit God's work.
67. I enjoy praying for sick people because I know that many of them will be healed as a result.
68. I have enjoyed doing routine tasks that have led to more effective ministry by others.
69. I try to make everyone feel welcome and comfortable at church suppers or social events.
70. When I hear a prayer request, I pray for that need for several days at least.
71. Through study or experience I have discerned major strategies God seems to use in furthering His kingdom.
72. God has given me an ability to "rally the troops" in giving aid to others.
73. I enjoy spending time with a lonely shut-in person or someone in prison.
74. God has used me personally to perform supernatural signs and wonders.
75. The thought of beginning a new church in a new community is exciting to me.
76. People have said they see the love of Jesus on my face when I sing, dance, or play music.
77. I feel that I am responsible to help protect weak Christians from dangerous influences.
78. A big house, a fancy car, or a large bank account are NOT important to me.

79. Sometimes I have a burning desire to speak God's word even if I know it will not be well received.
80. Teaching a Bible Class is one of the most enjoyable things I do (or could do).
81. When others have prayed in tongues, I felt that I understood the meaning of their prayer.
82. Praying in tongues has been meaningful to me in my personal prayer life.
83. When a person has a problem I can frequently guide him or her to the best Biblical solution.
84. I love to study God's Word and write down what I have learned.
85. I can recognize talents and gifts in others, and find ways of using these for God.
86. God has given me a position of authority over a number of groups of Christians.
87. I am single and have little difficulty controlling my sexual desires.
88. I am able to show the glory of God's creation through my art.
89. I can judge well between the truthfulness and error of a given theological statement.
90. I have verbally given confidence to the wavering, the troubled, or the discouraged.
91. I minister better to the spiritually unborn than to believers.
92. It is enjoyable to motivate people to a higher spiritual commitment.
93. I am ready to try the impossible because I have a great trust in God.
94. I have strongly sensed the Spirit leading me to give money to a specific person or cause.
95. Sometimes I have a strong sense that God wants to heal someone through my prayers or words.
96. I would rather work in secret than have my work recognized publicly.
97. I do NOT feel uncomfortable when people drop in unexpected.
98. Praying for others is one of my favorite ways of spending time.
99. I sometimes find I know things that I have never learned, which are confirmed by mature believers.
100. It is a thrill to inspire others to greater involvement in church work.
101. I enjoy visiting in hospitals and retirement homes, and feel I do well in such a ministry.
102. The Holy Spirit leads me to pray for impossible things that really come true.
103. More than most, I have had a strong desire to see peoples of other countries won to the Lord.
104. People have told me they were moved spiritually by my singing, dancing, or playing music.
105. I feel a call from God to be the spiritual leader of a group of Christians.
106. I am NOT jealous of those who have more material possessions than I do.
107. People have told me that I have communicated timely messages that must have come directly from the Lord.

108. I devote considerable time to learning new Biblical truths in order to communicate them to others.
109. When I hear others speak in tongues, I am compelled to explain the meaning.
110. When I give a public message in tongues, I expect it to be interpreted.
111. I feel that I have a special insight in selecting the best alternative in a difficult situation.
112. People say they have been touched spiritually by things I have written.
113. People sometimes look to me for guidance in coordination, organization, and ministry opportunities.
114. God has used me to bring the gospel to people who have never heard.
115. I am single and feel indifferent toward being married.
116. I feel compelled to use my hands to craft things that show the beauty of God's creation.
117. I can quickly recognize whether or not a person's teaching is consistent with God's word.
118. People who are feeling perplexed sometimes come to me for comfort.
119. I'm troubled when salvation is not emphasized.
120. I can identify with weakness and temptation so as to encourage people to repent and believe.
121. I have believed God for the impossible and seen it happen in a tangible way.
122. I strive to find ways to give to others without calling attention to myself.
123. I have prayed for others and physical healing has actually occurred.
124. If someone is facing a serious crisis, I enjoy the opportunity to help them.
125. When people come to our home, they often say they feel at home with us.
126. Others have told me that my prayers for them have been answered in tangible ways.
127. God has given me words to say in witnessing situations that surprised even me.
128. I can motivate others to obey Christ by the living testimony of my life.
129. Sometimes I am overcome with emotion for the person I am praying for.
130. People have told me that I was God's instrument to bring supernatural change in lives or circumstances.
131. People of a different race or culture have been attracted to me, and we have related well.
132. I enjoy using my musical talents to sing, dance to, or play Christian music much more so than secular music.
133. God has given me the ability to teach and preach spiritual truth.
134. I feel that I can best fulfill God's calling on my life by living simply.
135. Through God I have revealed specific things that will happen in the future.

136. I feel I can communicate Biblical truths to others and see resulting changes in knowledge, values, or conduct.

137. My interpretation of tongues has been confirmed by mature believers.

138. When I speak in tongues, I believe it is edifying to the group I am with.

139. People with spiritual problems seem to come to me for advice and counsel.

140. I sometimes prefer to write down my thoughts about God rather than speaking them out loud.

<b>Spiritual Gifts Test - Analysis Sheet</b>							
Response 113-140 Enter 1 - 10	Response 85-112 Enter 1 - 10	Response 57-84 Enter 1 -10	Response 29-56 Enter 1 - 10	Response 1-28 Enter 1 - 10	Sum of first 5 columns	Rank in order highest to lowest	Name of Spiritual Gift / Talent
113	85	57	29	1			Administration / Guidance
114	86	58	30	2			Apostle
115	87	59	31	3			Celibacy
116	88	60	32	4			Craftsmanship / Artisan
117	89	61	33	5			Discernment / Distinguish
118	90	62	34	6			Encouragement
119	91	63	35	7			Evangelism
120	92	64	36	8			Exhortation
121	93	65	37	9			Faith
122	94	66	38	10			Giving
123	95	67	39	11			Healing
124	96	68	40	12			Helps / Service
125	97	69	41	13			Hospitality
126	98	70	42	14			Intercession / Prayer
127	99	71	43	15			Knowledge
128	100	72	44	16			Leadership
129	101	73	45	17			Mercy / Compassion
130	102	74	46	18			Miracles
131	103	75	47	19			Missionary
132	104	76	48	20			Music
133	105	77	49	21			Pastoring / Shepherding
134	106	78	50	22			Poverty (voluntary)
135	107	79	51	23			Prophecy
136	108	80	52	24			Teaching
137	109	81	53	25			Tongues (interpreting)
138	110	82	54	26			Tongues (speaking)
139	111	83	55	27			Wisdom
140	112	84	56	28			Writing

## Analysis Instructions

### Analysis:

1. First, look over the Analysis Sheet to make sure you have entered a number from 1 to 10 in each of the 140 pre-numbered Response boxes. If you left any of the boxes empty, go back to the corresponding question(s) and enter your Response.
2. Now, unfold the Analysis sheet. Calculate the sum of the 5 Responses in each horizontal row and enter it in the Sum column. You need to do this for each of the 28 rows of Responses. Each sum should be a number between 5 and 50.
3. Next, look over the 28 numbers you have just entered in the vertical Sum column. Look for the highest number you can find (for example 47). Now, place an "A" in the Rank column for the row with the highest Sum. If there is more than one row with this same high number, place an "A" in the Rank column for each.
4. (If you placed an "A" in 3 or more Rank boxes, then skip this step) - Look for the second highest number (for example 43). Place a "B" in the Rank column for each row with this number.
5. (If you placed an "A" or "B" in 3 or more Rank boxes, then skip this step) - Look for the third highest number and place a "C" in the Rank column for each row with this number.
6. Now look at the names of the Spiritual Gifts / Talents beside the Rank boxes where you entered "A", "B", or "C". These are the Spiritual Gifts and Talents that it seems God has given to you.
7. You can find out more about your Spiritual Gifts and Talents by reading the Spiritual Gifts Reference Material on the following pages. If you are reading this document on a computer with Internet access, clicking on any Bible verse reference will open a window containing that Bible verse. After reading the verse, you can close the Bible window to return to this document.

This Spiritual Gifts Test is also available on the Internet at

<http://www.kodachrome.org/spiritgift> .

The Internet version performs an automatic analysis so you don't have to do any calculating.

This Printable test can be downloaded at

<http://www.kodachrome.org/spiritgift/download.htm> .

This material is made available by Ken Ellis.

# Spiritual Gifts Reference Material

## Definitions and Biblical References

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### Introduction

The main places in the Bible where we learn about Spiritual Gifts are:

- [1 Corinthians 12-14](#)
- [Romans 12](#)
- [Ephesians 4](#)

From Scripture, we learn the following key information about Spiritual Gifts:

### Biblical Summary about Spiritual Gifts

1. Every Christian has at least one Spiritual Gift ( [1 Peter 4:10](#) )
2. No Christian has all the gifts ( [1 Corinthians 12:28-30](#) )
3. We cannot choose our gifts; God does that job ( [1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#) )
4. There is no gift that every Christian possesses ( [1 Corinthians 12:29-30](#) )
5. Believers will account to the Lord for how they use their gifts ( [1 Peter 4:10](#) )
6. Spiritual Gifts indicate God's call and purpose for a Christian's life ( [Romans 12:2-8](#) )
7. Gifts used without love do not accomplish God's intended purposes ( [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) )
8. Spiritual Gifts are for the common good to build up the Body ( [1 Corinthians 12:27](#) )

### Biblical Guidelines for using Spiritual Gifts

1. Usage of the gift(s) conforms to Biblical teaching ( [2 Timothy 3:16](#) ; [Romans 12](#) ; [1 Corinthians 12-14](#) ; [Ephesians 4](#) ; [1 Peter 4](#) )
2. There is affirmation and positive feedback within the Body of Christ for the expression of the gift ( [1 Corinthians 12:7](#) ; [Ephesians 4:16](#) )
3. There is agreement within the Body of Christ that the Holy Spirit is at work ( [1 John 4:1](#) ; [1 Thessalonians 5:21](#) )
4. The Holy Spirit provides peace in our spirits as we offer our gift(s) to the Body of Christ ( [John 15:26](#) ; [Romans 8:16](#) )
5. There is evidence of godly fruit in the life of the Body ( [John 15:8](#) ; [Matthew 7:16-20](#) )
6. Believers offer their gifts for the common good as others have need ( [Acts 2:44-45](#) ; [1 Corinthians 12:7](#) )
7. Unless gifts are offered in love, they have no worth ( [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) )
8. We should strive to live a life worthy of our calling ( [Ephesians 4:1](#) )

## How Many Different Spiritual Gifts Are There?

There is little agreement among Christians as to exactly how many different Spiritual Gifts there are.

- Some people look at the key Bible passages on Spiritual Gifts and limit the Gifts to the ones listed there:
  - [Romans 12](#) - Prophecy, Service, Teaching, Encouragement, Giving, Leadership, and Mercy
  - [1 Corinthians 12](#) - Message of Wisdom, Message of Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miraculous Powers, Prophecy, Distinguishing between spirits, Speaking in Tongues, and Interpreting Tongues
  - [Ephesians 4](#) - Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher
  
- Some say that the Gifts of Administration and Leadership are the same Gift.
- Some say the Gifts of Service and Helps are the same Gift.
- Some add the Gifts of Craftsmanship and Music because of the skills that God gave to people to help with the Old Testament Tabernacle.
- Some see Craftsmanship as a vehicle to exercise the Gift of Service.
- Some stick to the gifts listed in the New Testament.
- Some believe that certain Spiritual Gifts were only given to people by the direct laying on of hands of the original Apostles and that these Gifts ceased to exist after the first century.
- Some add the possibility of other gifts:
  - [1 Corinthians 7:1-9](#) - Celibacy
  - [1 Peter 4:9-10](#) - Hospitality
  - [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) - Martyrdom (not included in this test!)
  - [Ephesians 3:6-8](#) - Missionary
  - [1 Corinthians. 13:1-3](#) - Voluntary Poverty
  - [Ephesians 6:18](#) - Intercession / Prayer
  - [Luke 1:1-3](#) - Writing
  
- Some see Prayer and Intercession as a vehicle through which the Gifts of Faith, Healing, and Miracles operate.

Some of these "gifts" are obviously Spiritual Gifts. Others are debatable. However, it is not particularly important whether a certain ability is a Spiritual Gift, a blessing from God, a God given talent, an inherited trait, a natural human ability, or something learned. The thing that is important is that we discover what Gifts are more pronounced in us and to learn how to use them to serve God. God is just as pleased when we use a learned ability to serve Him as He is when we



use a Spiritual Gift to serve Him. The key is to discover our abilities (Spiritual Gifts and Talents) and learn to use them to Love, Worship, and Serve God.

Please EMail comments to [spirit-gift@kodachrome.org](mailto:spirit-gift@kodachrome.org) .  
We would also like to know if you found this information helpful.

God Bless!  
Ken Ellis

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## Spiritual Gifts Definitions:

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### Administration

Administration (Serving Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to steer the body toward the accomplishment of God-given goals and directives by planning, organizing, and supervising others.

The divine enablement to understand what makes an organization function and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that accomplish the goals of the ministry.

People with this gift:

- develop strategies or plans to reach identified goals
- assist ministries to become more effective and efficient
- create order out of organizational chaos
- manage or coordinate a variety of responsibilities to accomplish a task
- organize people, tasks, or events.

(See also Leadership)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Luke 14:28-30](#)

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### Apostle

Apostle (Leadership Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to exercise general leadership or oversight over a number of churches with an authority in spiritual matters, which is readily recognized. In the strict sense this gift was confined to the twelve apostles. The New Testament does, however, give this title to a number of others, e.g. [Romans 16:7](#) and [Acts 14:14](#) . It is the gift whereby the Spirit appoints certain Christians to lead, inspire, and develop the

churches of God by the proclamation and the teaching of true doctrine.

The divine ability to start and oversee the development of new churches or ministry structures.

People with this gift:

- pioneer and establish new ministries or churches
- adapt to different surroundings by being culturally sensitive and aware
- desire to minister to unreached people in other communities or countries
- have responsibilities to oversee ministries or groups of churches
- demonstrate authority and vision for the mission of the church.

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

[2 Corinthians 12:12](#)

[Matthew 10:1-8](#)

[Acts 2:42-44](#)

## **Celibacy**

Celibacy - The special ability God gives to some to voluntarily remain single without regret and with the ability to maintain control over sexual impulses so as to serve the Lord without distraction.

Celibacy is a state totally opposed to all of the biological, social, and emotional needs built into man or woman by God. Only God is able to overrule instincts and by grace control them so that a person can remain unmarried.

Being unmarried is not necessarily the same as having this gift. Those who have this gift remain single because they feel they can serve the Lord better that way.

People with this gift:

- remain single so as to be able to devote themselves completely to ministry
- have other gifts that they are able to use more effectively because they are celibate.

[1 Corinthians 7:1-9](#)

[1 Corinthians 7:32-35](#)

[Matthew 19:10-12](#)

## Craftsmanship / Artist

Craftsmanship / Artist - The gift that gives the believer the skill to create artistic expressions that produce a spiritual response of strength and inspiration. Skilled Craft - the gift that enables a believer to create, build, maintain, or repair items used within the church.

The divine enablement to creatively design and/or construct items to be used for ministry or the divine enablement to communicate God's truth through a variety of art forms.

People with this gift:

- work with wood, cloth, paint, metal, glass, and other raw materials
- make things which increase the effectiveness of other's ministries
- design and build tangible items and resources for ministry use
- work with different kinds of tools and are skilled with their hands
- use the arts to communicate God's truth
- develop and use artistic skills such as drama, writing, art, music, dance, etc.
- use variety and creativity to captivate people and cause them to consider Christ's message
- challenge people's perspective of God through various forms of the arts
- demonstrate fresh ways to express the Lord's ministry and message.

[Exodus 28:3-4](#)

[Exodus 31:1-11](#)

[Exodus 35:30-35](#)

## Discernment / Distinguishing Spirits

Discernment / Distinguishing of Spirits - The special ability God gives to some to know with assurance whether certain behavior or teaching is from God, Satan, human error, or human power.

The divine enablement to distinguish between truth and error, to discern the spirits, differentiating between good and evil, right and wrong.

People with this gift:

- distinguish truth from error, right from wrong, pure motives from impure
- identify deception in others with accuracy and appropriateness
- determine whether a word attributed to God is authentic
- recognize inconsistencies in a teaching, prophetic message, or interpretation
- are able to sense the presence of evil.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[1 John 4:1-6](#)  
[1 Corinthians 2:9-16](#)  
[2 Chronicles 2:12](#)  
[Psalms 119:125](#)  
[Proverbs 3:21](#)  
[1 Kings 3:9](#)  
[Hebrews 5:14](#)

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## **Encouragement**

Encouragement (Speaking Gift) - The special ability God gives some to offer comfort, words of encouragement, hope, and reassurance to discouraged, weak, or troubled Christians in such a way that they are consoled.

People with this gift:

- come to the side of those who are discouraged to reassure them and give them hope
- emphasize God's promises and confidence in his will.

(See also Exhortation)

[Romans 12:6-8](#)  
[Titus 1:9](#)  
[Acts 11:23-24](#)  
[Acts 14:21-22](#)  
[1 Thessalonians 2:11-12](#)  
[1 Thessalonians 5:9-11](#)

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## **Evangelism / Evangelist**

Evangelism / Evangelist - The special ability God gives to some to proclaim the Gospel of salvation effectively so that people respond to the promises of Christ through conversion to Christianity.

The divine enablement to effectively communicate the gospel to unbelievers so they respond in faith and move toward discipleship.

People with this gift:

- communicate the message of Christ with clarity and conviction
- seek out opportunities to talk to unbelievers about spiritual matters
- challenge unbelievers to faith and to become fully devoted followers of Christ
- adapt their presentation of the gospel to connect with the individual's needs

- seek opportunities to build relationships with unbelievers.

[Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

[Acts 2:36-40](#)

[Acts 8:5-6](#)

[Acts 14:21](#)

[Acts 8:26-40](#)

[2 Timothy 4:5](#)

## **Exhortation**

Exhortation (Speaking Gift) - The special ability God gives some to help strengthen weak, faltering, and fainthearted Christians in such a way that they are motivated to be all God wants them to be.

The ability to help others reach their full potential by means of encouraging, challenging, comforting, and guiding.

The divine enablement to present truth so as to strengthen or urge to action those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith.

People with this gift:

- come to the side of those who are weak in spirit to strengthen them
- challenge or confront others to trust and hope in the promises of God
- urge others to action by applying Biblical truth
- offers advise, an outline for a solution, or a program for progress
- motivates others to grow.

(see also Encouragement)

[1 Timothy 5:1-2](#)

[Hebrews 3:13](#) (King James Version)

[Hebrews 13:22](#)

[1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) (King James version)

## **Faith**

Faith - The special conviction God gives to some to be firmly persuaded of God's power and promises to accomplish His will and purpose and to display such a confidence in Him and His Word that circumstances and obstacles do not shake that conviction.

The divine enablement to act on God's promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God's ability to fulfill his purposes.

People with this gift:

- believe the promises of God and inspire others to do the same
- act in complete confidence of God's ability to overcome obstacles
- demonstrate an attitude of trust in God's will and his promises
- advance the cause of Christ because they go forward when others will not
- ask God for what is needed and trust him for his provision.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[Mark 5:25-34](#)

[Acts 27:21-25](#)

[Hebrews 11](#)

[Romans 4:18-21](#)

## **Giving**

Giving (Serving Gift) - The gift that enables a believer to recognize God's blessings and to respond to those blessings by generously, sacrificially, and cheerfully giving of one's resources (time, talent, and treasure) without thought of return.

The divine enablement to contribute money and resources to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality. People with this gift do not ask, "How much money do I need to give to God?" but "How much money do I need to live on?"

People with this gift:

- manage their finances and limit their lifestyle in order to give as much of their resources as possible
- support the work of ministry with sacrificial gifts to advance the Kingdom
- meet tangible needs that enable spiritual growth to occur
- provide resources, generously and cheerfully, trusting God for His provision
- may have a special ability to make money so that they may use it to further God's work.

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

[2 Corinthians 9:6-15](#)

[2 Corinthians 8:2-5](#)

[Mark 12:41-44](#)

[Matthew 6:3-4](#)

## Healing

Healing (Sign Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to serve as a human instrument through whom it pleases Him to cure illness and restore health (physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually) apart from the use of natural means.

The divine enablement to be God's means for restoring people to wholeness.

People with this gift:

- demonstrate the power of God
- bring restoration to the sick and diseased
- authenticate a message from God through healing
- use it as an opportunity to communicate a Biblical truth and to see God glorified
- pray, touch, or speak words that miraculously bring healing to one's body.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Acts 3:1-10](#)

[Acts 14:8-10](#)

[James 5:14-16](#)

[Luke 9:1-2](#)

## Helps / Serving

Helps / Serving (Serving Gift) - The gift that enables a believer to work gladly behind the scenes in order that God's work is fulfilled. The special ability God gives to some to serve the church in a supporting roll or to invest their talents in the life and ministry of other members of the body enabling them to increase their effectiveness.

The divine enablement to accomplish practical and necessary tasks which free-up, support, and meet the needs of others.

People with this gift:

- serve behind the scenes whenever needed to support the gifts and ministries of others (without having to be asked)
- see the tangible and practical things to be done and enjoy doing them
- sense God's purpose and pleasure in meeting every day responsibilities
- attach spiritual value to practical service
- enjoy knowing that they are freeing up others to do what God has called them to do.
- would rather do a job than find someone else to do it.

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Romans 16:1-2](#)

[Acts 9:36](#)

[Mark 15:40-41](#)

[Galatians 6:2](#)

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

[1 Peter 4:11](#)

[Philippians 2:19-23](#)

[Luke 22:24-27](#)

[John 13:14](#)

## **Hospitality**

Hospitality (Serving Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to provide an open home and warm welcome to those in need of food, lodging, and fellowship. It involves a readiness to invite strangers to your home (or church) for the sake of the Gospel.

The divine enablement to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter.

People with this gift:

- provide an environment where people feel valued and cared for
- meet new people and help them to feel welcomed
- create a safe and comfortable setting where relationships can develop
- seek ways to connect people together into meaningful relationships
- set people at ease in unfamiliar surroundings.

[1 Peter 4:9-10](#)

[Romans 12:9-13](#)

[Acts 16:14-15](#)

[Luke 10:38](#)

[Hebrews 13:1-2](#)

## **Intercession / Prayer**

Intercession / Prayer (Serving Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to their prayers to a degree much greater than that which is expected of the average Christian.

The divine enablement to consistently pray on behalf of and for others, seeing



frequent and specific results.

People with this gift:

- feel compelled to earnestly pray on behalf of someone or some cause
- have a daily awareness of the spiritual battles being waged and pray
- are convinced God moves in direct response to prayer
- pray in response to the leading of the spirit, whether they understand it or not
- exercise authority and power for the protection of others and the equipping of them to serve.

[Ephesians 6:18](#)

[1 Timothy 2:1-2](#)

[1 Kings 13:6](#)

[Luke 11:1-10](#)

[Matthew 6:6-15](#)

[Mark 11:22-25](#)

[James 5:14-16](#)

[Colossians 4:12-13](#)

[1 Thessalonians 3:10](#)

## **Knowledge**

Knowledge (Speaking Gift) - The special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to understand in an exceptional way the great truths of God's Word and to make them relevant to specific situations in the church. Also, the desire to seek out and learn as much about the Bible as possible through gathering much information and the analysis of that data.

The divine enablement to bring truth to the body through a revelation or Biblical insight.

People with this gift:

- receive truth which enables them to better serve the body
  - search the scriptures for insight, understanding, and truth
  - gain knowledge which at times was not attained by natural means
  - have an unusual insight or understanding that serves the church
  - organize information for teaching and practical use.
- (See also Wisdom)

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[2 Chronicles 1:7-12](#)

[Colossians 2:2-3](#)

[2 Corinthians 11:6](#)

[Daniel 2:20-21](#)

[Proverbs 2:6](#)  
[Proverbs 9:10](#)  
[Psalms 119:66](#)  
[Jeremiah 3:15](#)

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## Leadership

Leadership (Serving Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to set goals in accordance with God's purpose and to communicate these goals to others in such a way that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish these goals for the glory of God.

The divine enablement to cast vision, motivate, and direct people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God.

People with this gift:

- provide direction for God's people or ministry
- motivate others to perform to the best of their abilities
- present the "big picture" for others to see
- model the values of the ministry
- take responsibility and establish goals.

(See also Administration)

[Romans 12:6-8](#)  
[Hebrews 13:7](#)  
[Hebrews 13:17](#)

(Use your Browser's 'Back' button to return to the Spiritual Gifts Test Analysis)

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## Mercy / Compassion

Mercy / Compassion (Serving Gift) - The special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to feel exceptional empathy and compassion for those who are suffering (physically, mentally, or emotionally) so as to feel genuine sympathy for their misery, speaking words of compassion, but more so caring for them with acts of love that help alleviate their distress.

The divine enablement to cheerfully and practically help those who are suffering or are in need by putting compassion into action.

People with this gift:

- focus upon alleviating the sources of pain or discomfort in suffering people
- address the needs of the lonely and forgotten

- express love, grace, and dignity to those facing hardships and crisis
- serve in difficult or unsightly circumstances and do so cheerfully
- concern themselves with individual or social issues that oppress people.

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

[Luke 7:12-15](#)

[Luke 10:30-37](#)

[Matthew 20:29-34](#)

[Matthew 25:34-40](#)

[Mark 9:41](#)

[Matthew 5:7](#)

## **Miracles**

Miracles (Sign Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to serve as a human intermediary through whom He pleases to perform acts of supernatural power that are recognized by others to have altered the ordinary course of nature and authenticated the divine commission.

People with this gift:

- speak God's truth and may have it authenticated by an accompanying miracle
- express confidence in God's faithfulness and ability to manifest Christ's presence
- bring the ministry and message of Jesus Christ with power
- claim God to be the source of miracles and glorify the Lord
- represent Christ and through this gift, point people to a relationship with Christ.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Mark 16:17-18](#)

[Acts 9:36-42](#)

[Acts 20:9-12](#)

[Hebrews 2:4](#)

[Romans 15:17-19](#)

[Acts 8:13](#)

[Acts 19:11-12](#)

## **Missionary**

Missionary (Leadership Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to minister whatever other spiritual gifts they have in another culture.

Those with this gift find it easy or exciting to adjust to a different culture or community. Missionaries find great joy working with minorities, people of other countries, or those with other distinct cultural differences. Those with this gift have a stronger-than-average desire to be a part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission around the world.

People with this gift:

- have an intense spirit of unease at the thought of all the unsaved people in the world
- adapt themselves and core Biblical principles to different surroundings by being culturally sensitive and aware
- have the ability to reach out people groups of a different ethnicity, language, or cultural background
- can establish meaningful relationships with people of other nationalities or cultures
- desire to minister to unreached people in other communities or countries.

[Ephesians 3:6-8](#)

[Mark 16:15](#)

[Acts 1:8](#)

[Acts 13:2-5](#)

[Acts 22:21](#)

[Romans 10:14-15](#)

[1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#)

## **Music**

Music - The gift that gives a believer the capability to present personal witness and inspiration to others through instrumental music, singing, or dancing.

The special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to praise God through music in such a way as to enhance the worship experience of other believers. It gives the believer the desire and capability to express personal faith and provide inspiration and comfort through the playing of a musical instrument, singing, or dancing. The spiritual aspect of the gift is revealed as the gift bearer gives witness to love and praise for the Lord, and thus glorifies God. Those listening or watching become inspired to feel the presence and majesty of God when music, song, or dance uplifts their soul in a manner that brings them closer to their Lord.

People with this gift:

- sing or play a musical instrument quite well, and enjoy it
- have special joy singing praises to God, either alone or with other people
- feel secure in the fact that their musical ability will be of benefit to other people

with whom they come in contact

- can use their musical ability to help and inspire others to worship God
- see that their singing or instrument playing is a spiritual encouragement for others.

[1 Samuel 16:14-23](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:26](#)

[Psalm 33:1-3](#)

[Psalm 96:1-2](#)

[Psalm 100:1-2](#)

[Psalm 149:3](#)

[Psalm 150:1-6](#)

[Colossians 3:16](#)

[2 Chronicles 5:12-13](#)

[2 Samuel 6:14-15](#)

## **Pastor / Shepherd**

Pastor / Shepherd - The special ability God gives to some to assume a long-term personal responsibility for leadership and the spiritual care, protection, guidance, and feeding (teaching) of a group of believers.

The divine enablement to nurture, care for, and guide people toward on-going spiritual maturity and becoming like Christ.

People with this gift:

- take responsibility to nurture the whole person in their walk with God
- provide guidance and oversight to a group of God's people
- model with their life what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus
- establish trust and confidence through long-term relationships
- lead and protect those within their span of care.

[John 10:1-16](#)

[Acts 20:28](#)

[Ephesians 4:11-15](#)

[1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)

[2 Timothy 4:1-2](#)

[1 Timothy 4:11-16](#)

[1 Peter 5:1-4](#)

## Poverty (voluntary)

Poverty (voluntary) - The special ability God gives to some to purposely live an impoverished lifestyle to serve and aid others with their material resources.

The special ability that God gives to some members of the body of Christ to renounce material comfort and luxury and adopt a personal lifestyle equivalent to those living at the poverty level in a given society in order to serve God more effectively.

People with this gift:

- will often choose to live among people who are considered poverty-stricken
- live at a poverty level although they have the means to live at a higher standard
- choose this lifestyle in order to minister more effectively to people through identification.

[1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#)

[2 Corinthians 8:9](#)

[Acts 2:44-45](#)

[Acts 4:32-35](#)

## Prophet / Prophecy

Prophet / Prophecy (Special Gift) - The special ability God gives to some to proclaim the Word of God with clarity and to apply it fearlessly with a view to the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of believers and the convincing of unbelievers. The special gift whereby the Spirit empowers certain Christians to interpret and apply God's revelation in a given situation.

The divine enablement to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner for understanding, correction, repentance, or edification. There may be immediate or future implications.

People with this gift:

- expose sin or deception in others for the purpose of reconciliation
- speak a timely word from God causing conviction, repentance, and edification
- see truth that others often fail to see and challenge them to respond
- warn of God's immediate or future judgment if there is no repentance
- understand God's heart and mind through experiences He takes them through.

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

[Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Deuteronomy 18:18-22](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:1-5](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:24-25](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:30-33](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:37-40](#)

## **Teaching / Teacher**

Teaching / Teacher - The special ability God gives to some to explain the truths of the Word of God clearly and to apply them effectively so that those taught understand and learn. To instruct others in the Bible in a logical and systematic way so as to communicate pertinent information for true understanding and growth.

The divine enablement to understand, clearly explain, and apply the word of God causing greater Christ-likeness in the lives of listeners.

People with this gift:

- communicate Biblical truth that inspires greater obedience to the word
- challenge listeners simply and practically with the truths of scripture
- focus on changing lives by helping others understand the Bible better
- give attention to detail and accuracy
- prepare through extended times of study and reflection.

[Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[Hebrews 5:12-14](#)

[Acts 18:24-28](#)

## **Tongues (interpreting)**

Tongues (interpreting) - The special ability God gives to some translate the message of one who speaks in tongues.

If a tongue is spoken without an interpretation, the speaker is edified. If the tongue is interpreted, it is for the edification of the body.

People with this gift:

- express with an interpretation a word by the Spirit which edifies the Body
- enable the gift of tongues to build up the church by interpreting God's message for the people.

(see also Tongues (speaking))

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:1-40](#)

## **Tongues (speaking)**

Tongues (speaking) - The special ability God gives to some to speak prayer or praise in a language they have never learned or to communicate a message from God to His people. The special ability God gives to some to speak in a language not previously learned so unbelievers can hear God's message in their own language.

If a tongue is spoken without an interpretation, the speaker is edified. If the tongue is interpreted, it is for the edification of the body.

People with this gift:

- may receive a spontaneous message from God which is made known to His body through the gift of interpretation
- communicate a message given by God for the church (if there is someone to interpret)
- speak in a language they have never learned and do not understand
- worship the Lord with unknown words too deep for the mind to comprehend
- experience an intimacy with God which inspires them to serve and edify others
- speak in tongues as a private prayer language
- when used in a group setting, an interpretation must take place, or else the one speaking the tongue should remain silent.

(see also Tongues (interpreting))

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#)

[1 Corinthians 14:1-40](#)

[Acts 2:1-12](#)

[Acts 10:44-46](#)

[Acts 19:1-7](#)

[Mark 16:17](#)

[Romans 8:26-27](#)

[1 Corinthians 13:1](#)



## Wisdom

Wisdom (Speaking Gift) - The gift that allows the believer to sort through opinions, facts, and thoughts in order to determine what solution would be best for the individual believer or the community of believers. The ability to apply knowledge to life in such a way as to make spiritual truths quite relevant and practical in proper decision making and daily life situations.

The special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how knowledge may best be applied to specific needs arising in the body of Christ.

People with this gift:

- focus on the unseen consequences in determining the next steps to take
- receive an understanding of what is necessary to meet the needs of the body
- provide divinely given solutions in the midst of conflict and confusion
- hear the Spirit provide direction for God's best in a given situation
- apply spiritual truth in specific and practical ways.

(See also Knowledge)

[1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#)

[James 3:13-18](#)

[2 Chronicles 1:7-11](#)

[Acts 6:3-10](#)

[1 Corinthians 2:6-13](#)

[James 1:5-8](#)

[1 Kings 3:16-28](#)

## Writing

Writing - the gift that gives a believer the ability to express truth in a written form; a form that can edify, instruct and strengthen the community of believers.

The special God-given ability to formulate thoughts and ideas into meaningful written forms so that the reader will find courage, guidance, knowledge, or edification through the words shared with them.

The Bible was written by people with this gift.

People with this gift:

- may write stories, sermons, devotions, histories, prayers, songs, or poetry to be used to build up the body of Christ
- may be inspired by the Holy Spirit in what they write
- may teach God's word to others through what they write

- may use writing to express other gifts
- may be better at expressing their thoughts in written form than in verbal form.

Luke 1:1-3

1 John 2:1

1 John 2:12-14

1 Timothy 3:14-15

Jude 1:3

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