

TRAINING AND EMPOWERING LAITY FOR DIVINE HEALING PRAYER

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## ABSTRACT

### TRAINING AND EMPOWERING LAITY FOR DIVINE HEALING PRAYER

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This dissertation addresses a project implemented to educate and train laity to practice divine healing prayer. The project explores the relationship between Christian identity and the practice of divine healing prayer. Divine healing prayer is defined as looking to God to provide healing through a person's act of prayer. Praying for healing is not limited to physical illness, but it is for all types of conditions of the mind, body, soul, as well as our relationships with others, our social realities, and church ministry life.

The following are key theological foundations in this exploration. First, salvation is healing. The word "salvation" in the Greek is *sózo*, which means wholeness and healing. The practice of divine healing prayer is biblical. Second, every believer in Jesus Christ by their baptismal identity has been given authority and empowerment to pray for healing. The practice of divine healing prayer is participatory for all believers. Third, death gives way to the final healing. The practice of divine healing prayer is not limited to miraculous activity taking place on this side of death, but is actually most fulfilled for the believer in entering glory.

At the time of the project implementation and dissertation writing, I was the senior pastor of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church, with whom I implemented the project. The project implementation included a sermon series, devotional series, and

small group curriculum that took place during the season of Lent in 2020. One thing to note is that most of the project implementation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and the national crisis on racial justice. The sermons were focused on the different types of ailments we face, and the ways in which Jesus heals. The devotionals were stories written by congregation members and myself as testimonies of the many diverse ways God had brought healing in our lives. The purpose of the devotionals was to provide inspiration to the congregation that God still heals and God does so in many different ways. The small group curriculum was written as a training curriculum on how laity can participate in divine healing prayer. Through this project, the people of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church became more aware of salvation as healing, and more active practitioners of divine healing prayer.

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pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree. To my mother-in-law who prays daily for me and always reminds me, “Your prayers are powerful.” Never have I felt so actively supported and strengthened. To my late father-in-law who was always proud of me and believed that I could do anything I put my heart and mind to. Thank you for being one to always pray with me. To my children who are the treasure and heartbeat of my soul. Jubilee, Promise, Elisha, and Israel. Every day is an adventure. I hope and pray that the treasure of Christ is your crown and glory all the days of your lives.

Most of all, to my beautiful wife, Isaiah. I love you. You are my co-pastor, my life partner, my best friend and true soulmate. You have my heart and life. You are my fire. You are my love. You supported me all the way through this journey. I could not have done this without the incredible sacrifice you made for me to get here in education, ministry, and life. The greatest healing that I have experienced in life is through the journey we have been on since I met you.

In all this, to God be the glory, the healing and salvation of Jesus Christ be given to all, and the Holy Spirit’s healing power and presence manifest in all. Onward to final healing, final salvation. Amen.

## PROLOGUE: SETTING THE COURSE

### **Divine Healing Prayer: A Story**

Ever since I was a child, I would read stories of the way Jesus healed people wherever he went. From the Gospel of Luke, we find John the Baptist's question about whether Jesus is the awaited Messiah. Jesus answers, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Luke 7:22). Jesus' messianic identity is deeply tied with healing. It always drew my curiosity and I wondered if those miracles still happened today. I would hear stories from my family members and in various church experiences that God does answer prayers for healing. I wanted to experience them first hand, and I wanted to see the stories of healing in the Bible to be normative in the church, and I wanted to see the practice of praying for healing be done not only among pastors or lay leaders, but among the congregation as a whole. Furthermore, as God's church would pray, that it would be normative to experience healing of all kinds. Would there be a way? Throughout my spiritual formation and ministry life, I came to understand that healing is central and important to the life of the church, as well as the gospel message itself.

"Jesus heals! Yes, he does, and we can participate in his healing ministry." I declared this before the congregation of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church at the beginning of the season of Lent in 2020. After fifteen years of full-time pastoral ministry experience, I decided to take a step of faith and invite the congregation to be active and regular practitioners of praying for healing. I would teach on it, I would demonstrate it,

and I would equip people to participate in what I would call: divine healing prayer. It was the beginning of implementing the project I was working on for my Doctor of Ministry degree, and more importantly a new chapter of spiritual growth and practice for the congregation of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church.

### **Definition: Divine Healing Prayer**

It is essential to define “divine healing prayer” to understand the project and dissertation work. I use the three words specifically to communicate that divine healing prayer is the practice of looking to God to provide healing through a person’s act of prayer. I address this definition at greater length in chapter three on theology.

### **Purpose of This Dissertation**

How can the laity be trained and equipped for the ministry of healing prayer? The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry dissertation is to present the weaving of the backstory of my pastoral identity and my current ministry context in regards to training laity for the ministry of divine healing prayer. For the project described in the dissertation, I implemented a sermon series, small group study, and devotional series at Chesterbrook United Methodist Church during the 2020 Lenten Season. The purpose of the project was to train the laity for the ministry of divine healing prayer. While much of my experiences in healing revolve around prayers for physical healing, it springs forth from the context of holistic healing of the mind, body, and soul. It also comes from healing much needed in communities. The project addressed in this dissertation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and the national crisis on racial justice. This written work will also address

how the times we live in have shaped the ministry we are doing regarding healing. My goal is to use my particular context to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how our identity intersects our ministry context and in the practice of healing prayer ministry.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Ministry does not take place in a vacuum, void of people, life, and circumstances. It takes place in the reality of the lives of those who are in the ministry. This dissertation reflects this reality. Therefore, it is vital to understand my identity formation and how I came to have this curiosity for divine healing prayer. Followed by this is the context of the people and ministry I currently serve as the lead pastor. It is also essential to explore the theological conversations that affect my ministry's context regarding divine healing prayer. Lastly, it is important to address the project itself, how I implemented the project and the findings and conclusions from this work. Therefore, I have organized this dissertation in the following way:

Prologue: Setting the Course

Chapter One: Identity

Chapter Two: Context

Chapter Three: Theology

Chapter Four: The Project

Chapter Five: Findings and Conclusions

Epilogue: Where do we go from here?

Appendix A: Sózó Sermons: How We Hurt, How God Heals

Appendix B: Sózó Small Group Study: Our Salvation That Enables Us To

## Practice Divine Healing Prayer

### Appendix C: Sózó Devotional: Inspirational Stories of Healing

The hope is for this dissertation to contribute to the ongoing conversation and exploration of how God always heals and the part we play in experiencing its wonder.

## CHAPTER ONE: IDENTITY

### **The role of identity**

Identity is the key to understanding how one engages in ministry. This dissertation asserts that knowing one's identity in Christ is critical to the practice of divine healing prayer. Understanding one's own identity in Christ involves the backstory and personal circumstances that contribute to the particularities of how his or her identity in Christ has been formed. How an individual has experienced Christ's salvation and healing shapes how one will understand and participate in ministry. This chapter explores the role of identity. In particular, it explains the formation of my pastoral identity, especially regarding the area of practicing divine healing prayer.

### **The event that changed it all for me**

"Pray for healing tonight." I heard this "voice" deeply pressing on my spirit on the final morning of the youth conference in December 2012. There was a mighty move of God's grace from the first night of a four-day retreat. An invitation to receive Jesus Christ as Savior that often takes place by the final night of a youth conference took place the first day. By the time the morning of the third day came around, the Holy Spirit's presence and movement were very noticeable in every gathering. That morning, when I was getting ready to preach at the morning session, I felt God's voice pressing on my spirit to have an altar call for healing.

"No, Lord! I cannot do such a thing!" I spoke loudly into the atmosphere of the room where my wife and I were staying. It was not because I had not prayed for healing

before at other retreats. It was a practice that I had done in the past two years prior, and many people had received healing of various kinds. However, this particular conference was different. From the first day, I noticed that a woman was sitting in a wheelchair, and I had never prayed for someone who was a wheelchair user before. What would happen if I made an invitation for healing, and she would start wheeling her way forward to the front of the auditorium? Oh, how I was so afraid of what would happen if I prayed for her healing, and she did not get healed! I said it aloud once more, "No, Lord, I cannot do such a thing!" I finished getting ready, left the room, and headed to preach for the morning session.

The Holy Spirit's presence was noticeably stronger that morning than even the previous night. As we entered in praise and worship, the gathered people were full of great joy and sang with such fullness of adoration. I preached the sermon and led people in prayer afterward. There was an outpour of zeal in prayer that morning as I noticed people responding to the sermon. On this third day, there were afternoon workshops. I was leading two, and my wife was leading two as well. It happened that after I finished leading both workshops, I headed over to the classroom where my wife was leading her workshop and noticed that there were still people remaining behind to ask her questions. I walked in, and to my surprise, the woman in the wheelchair was sitting there. When it was her turn, she looked at my wife and me and said, "Can you pray for me? I fractured my foot for the fourth time." I could no longer run away from God's calling to pray for healing.

We prayed together. I laid hands on the woman's foot. Oh, how we prayed together with such fervor for her to receive healing! Afterward, I asked her how we could

measure if God healed her. She was in a cast, so it was not like she could just get up and walk on it. However, she said, "As we were praying, I felt this incredible warmth come over the part of the foot that was fractured, and all of the pain went away. I won't know for sure until I see a doctor, but I believe that I am healed." What a joy and delight! To add humor to all this, my hand was entirely on the wrong side of her foot when I laid hands on her foot to pray! It was indeed a God-moment.

With this incident, my fears for leading an altar call for healing that night were cast aside. On December 28, 2012, the final night of the youth conference, we had a three-hour healing prayer time after I finished preaching. "In Jesus' name, be healed! Be made whole!" These were the words I said over and over again during the entire length of that prayer time. They were words that the gathered people learned to speak and practice as well. I had no idea how those words would permanently change my life and my practice of ministry. Springing to life from the pages of Scripture, hearing and reading stories of mass miraculous healing through prayer, I witnessed many people receive healing for various sickness and conditions during that youth conference. At a typical retreat, I would lay hands, and other people would gather around as prayer support for the person receiving prayer. However, we did things differently that night.

With the size of the gathering, I decided to invite people who wanted to receive healing to bring friends who would help pray for them. While on previous occasions, I had made the same invitation, it was for prayer support, not teaching people how to pray for healing. This time, it was "on the job training." It was about training laypeople how to boldly pray and proclaim healing over the sick.

That night, we had many people healed of all kinds of sicknesses, joint and bone-related problems, a form of partial paralysis healed, and even a young man who had been born deaf in the left ear was healed. All of this happened in mass, not one at a time. It happened as people who wanted to receive prayer came up, and they were trained on the spot. I trained people by explaining to people that they can be bold in their prayers, that they have been given authority to pray for healing because of all that Christ had done for them through the cross and resurrection. I told them to fix their thoughts not on the ailment itself, but on the divine exchange of sickness and healing that took place on the cross of Christ. After encouraging them to speak boldly and declare healing over their friends, they were sent off to a section in the auditorium to pray for healing. For three hours, I witnessed a multiplying effect of healing prayers and its effectiveness to encourage the laity to pray and receive answers in prayer. What a glorious night!

I left that conference with many questions on how to make sense of the magnitude of healing that took place as well as the movement of the laity. I look back, and this event was the primary catalyst that prompted me to think about training and equipping the laity for the practice of divine healing prayer. I wanted to know how to bring such a movement into the local church and raise the laity to be a moving force of healing prayer in this world. Over the last eight years, I continued to see the Holy Spirit's manifestation in healing prayer ministry in all the revivals and retreats where I preached. As I continually experienced this as the "norm" in retreats and revivals, I asked myself, "Is it possible to have this be the norm in the local church?" In 2019, I took a bold step to introduce it as a regular ministry to my current congregation: Chesterbrook United Methodist Church. I began to have altar call prayers on the first Sunday of each month after the benediction.

People with various kinds of illnesses and conditions began to seek prayer, and God began to answer the prayers we would pray. As God continued to answer prayers of healing and restoration, I became convinced about equipping the laity on how to pray for healing.

### **How did I get here?**

I do not have a "gift of healing" as recorded in 1 Corinthians 12:9, or the way Jesus and the apostles exercised a powerful measure of healing the sick. It happened because of learning how to pray for healing by faith. My curiosity and passion for healing prayer come from four different contexts in which I live and have been formed in my identity. The first is being conscious of my own wounding in life. The second is being consistently around my loved ones who need physical healing. Third, is my identity formation as a third-generation Methodist pastor of Korean descent and the various roles of healing in the different legacies I inherited. Fourth is the context of ministry in which I am facing the realities of a shame culture, collective identity, and how that intersects the practice of healing prayer.

#### *First Context of Identity Formation: My Wounded Journey*

"Where are you from?" A group of young teenagers asked as they surrounded me. I was thirteen years old and walking home from school. Growing up as a second-generation Korean American in the borough of the Bronx in New York City was a challenging experience in my life. I was a racial and ethnic minority, trying to figure out my identity and path in life. In a school of approximately seven hundred students, I was

one of perhaps fifty people who identified as being of Asian descent. Among all of my Korean American friends, I was the only second-generation Korean American. Everyone else had come to the United States from South Korea. I was born in New Jersey and raised in New York City. Yet, socially I was bunched together with the Korean Americans who did not speak English well or primarily identified themselves as Korean. However, the only home I ever knew was the United States.

"Where are you from?" The group of teenagers asked me again. I did not know exactly how to answer the question. Finally, one of the boys said, "Are you Chinese?" I said, "No." Another boy said, "Are you Japanese?" I said, "No." Finally, another boy said, "Then what the hell are you?" I said, "I'm Korean." Another boy said, "What the fuck is that shit?" Goodness. I never thought of my racial or ethnic identity as something to be referenced by profane words. One time, I was in the school library, and some other classmates wanted to know where Korea was. I proudly showed them on the globe my parents' and grandmother's country of origin. They saw how small the Korean peninsula is. I remember one of them saying, "That's it? Look at our country. Your country is so small compared to ours." The other students proceeded to laugh. I remember thinking, "But the United States is my country too."

Growing up as a second-generation Korean American in New York City, my search to belong and have an identity was deeply about my race and ethnicity. At home, all I did was speak the Korean language with my parents. With my older brother, I spoke only English. I attended a Korean-speaking Methodist church, of which my father was the founding and senior pastor. Outside of the family and church, I was in a diverse world of English-speaking folks, among which I was indeed a minority. I grew up learning how

to navigate through two cultures, two languages, and two different expectations. I despised and hated the process. There was a great deal of pain and hurt that I experienced. I did not know that God would use these experiences to shape me and call me to be proficient as a multicultural person and to have a heart for healing ministry.

As mentioned earlier, I grew up as a Methodist pastor's son. My identity formation involves my family background that has deep roots in the Methodist movement in Korea, through the Methodist missionaries that were sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Korean peninsula. My family had been deeply affected by the missionaries' work in Korea. I did not only grow up as a pastor's son. I grew up knowing that I belonged to an entire clan full of pastors. Upholding the honor of my family's reputation was both a source of pride as well as significant pressure. Psychological sciences, especially internal family systems label this the "legacy burden."<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy write in *Internal Family Systems Therapy* that they call the burdens we carry "that were absorbed from family, ethnic group, or culture legacy burdens."<sup>2</sup> Wrestling with how I fit into my family's grander narrative and what that means as I learned to navigate the secular and the sacred dynamics of life was part of my identity formation. This part of my journey was also crucial in contributing to my desire to practice healing ministry.

Dave Gibbons, the pastor of New Song Church, writes about "third culture people" in *The Monkey and the Fish*. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2020), 163.

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz and Sweezy, 55.

Third culture is a term used by sociologists and by foreign-service workers whose children are immersed in foreign cultures because of their parents' work. Sociologists observe that children in such circumstances feel compelled to come to terms with their indigenous culture but also must assimilate into the new culture their parents have plunged them into. When third-culture kids become adults, they possess a heightened sensibility and intelligence about embracing and bridging cultural differences wherever they go. They're accomplished "culture-nauts."<sup>3</sup>

My experience of growing up in a bicultural environment was quite stressful and at times hurtful. I did not know it then, but my experiences shaped me to excel at navigating American culture and Korean culture. Furthermore, those experiences became a foundation, enabling me to navigate other cultural landscapes as well. I did not realize then, but I was being trained or, better yet, healed to become an accomplished "culture-naut."

As a culture-naut, I would enter into a particular field of pastoral ministry, primarily ministering to second-generation Korean Americans. What did it mean to minister to the generation who experienced Christianity through a Korean cultural interpretation in the Korean American immigrant church context? As a second-generation Korean American, I thought my first-hand experiences would make it easy. However, as the second generation would grow older and the third generation would be born and raised, the culture of Korean American church ministry would shift and begin engaging the greater American culture and society much different than the first-generation Korean American immigrant church.

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<sup>3</sup> Dave Gibbons, *The Monkey and the Fish: Liquid Leadership for a Third-Culture Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 20-21.

How vital is it to make sure identity, context, and culture weave together well?

Dave Gibbons uses an Eastern Parable of the Monkey and Fish as a backdrop for this idea in his book. The following is the parable:

A typhoon stranded a monkey on an island. In a protected place on the shore, while waiting for the raging waters to recede, he spotted a fish swimming against the current. It seemed to the monkey that the fish was struggling and needed assistance. Being of kind heart, the monkey resolved to help the fish. A tree leaned precariously over the spot where the fish seemed to be struggling. At considerable risk to himself, the monkey moved far out on a limb, reached down, and snatched the fish from the waters. Scurrying back to the safety of his shelter, he carefully laid the fish on dry ground. For a few moments, the fish showed excitement but soon settled into a peaceful rest. – An Eastern parable<sup>4</sup>

When identity, context, and culture do not intersect, death happens. Healing does not happen. Life does not happen. The woundedness of my experiencing in bicultural identity formation led to my search for healing and thereby positioning me to explore healing for others.

*Second Context of Identity Formation: The Wounds of My Loved Ones*

"Mom! Mom! What's going on?" I knew my mother had been struggling with chronic pain in her feet for a while. In the midst of my own woundedness in middle school, I had neglected to pay attention to just how much my mother was struggling. But there she was being placed on a stretcher. The EMT workers had arrived to take her to the hospital because she was in too much pain. Though conscious, my mom could not answer me because she was moaning in her pain. I looked at my father and said, "Dad! What's going on?" My father looked at me and said, "We're not sure what's going on. I'll be back later with mom. Stay with your older brother and take care of each other." The EMT

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<sup>4</sup> Gibbons, 17-18.

workers rushed my mother out of the apartment and to the elevator in order to take her to the ambulance that was parked outside. I stood at the window watching everything, full of tears and unable to grasp what I had been missing because I had been too consumed with the problems I had at middle school. As I did that, I felt a hand touch my right shoulder. I looked over. It was my older brother, who was older than me by a year. We had our own sibling rivalry and problems, but at that moment, his presence was comforting to me.

From my middle school years and on, my mother has been chronically sick for a variety of reasons. She permanently changed her diet to prevent any major flare-ups that she experienced in her body from consuming certain types of foods. Meals that we used to enjoy together as an entire family no longer happened. Her particular diet prevented us from eating out at most restaurants. Our family lived with the consciousness of illness due to my mother's physical condition. We shifted our lifestyle and made it work. Five years ago, my mother also became severely ill due to Lyme Disease and has yet to recover. Her illness brought a complete stop to her involvement in the life of the gathered church. Yet, she has an unwavering spirit in prayer and yearning for the miraculous healing of God upon her body.

In 2008, my father-in-law was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and courageously battled his illness until February 5, 2020, when he passed onto glory. From the time that he was diagnosed with cancer, we were told that the cancer had already metastasized to the bones, so it was a matter of time before it spread. It was a long journey of navigating through many challenges, including chemotherapy. One of the important lessons learned is the resurrection as final healing. When I shared about my father-in-law's passing onto

glory, Leonard Sweet wrote, "So sorry to hear about your father-in-law, but grateful for his final healing. What a witness to the resurrection you will have today."<sup>5</sup> John Wesley called glorification as "final salvation."<sup>6</sup> This is important in the conversation and practice of healing prayer. Understanding final salvation has transformed my understanding of practicing divine healing prayer.

In 2009, when my oldest daughter was less than a year old, she became very sick, and the doctors did not know how to address her constant fevers. I began to pray for healing actively to no avail. I remember shouting out to God, "Please heal my daughter!" The theology of healing I had at that time was that God would heal according to my devotion and faithfulness to God. What I truly believed was exposed when I abruptly cried out, "You have to answer my prayer! I'm a pastor! I'm a church planter! I'm giving my life to you!" This was a pivotal moment in which I came to realize that all along I was praying on the basis of my own righteousness, rather than the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In 2010, my wife was pregnant with our second child. We found out that she had very high numbers for Down Syndrome and that my wife was going to have a high-risk pregnancy. We learned to lay hands on my wife's womb every day and pray God's promises over her. Throughout the pregnancy, we were consistently told by the doctors that we need to be prepared for the possibility of a child with Down Syndrome. We

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet, email to author, February 10, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> John Trinklein, "Holiness Unto Whom? John Wesley's Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in Light of The Two Kinds of Righteousness" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2016), 248, <https://scholar.csl.edu/phd/25>

learned to pray and trust in God. My second child was born in 2011 without Down Syndrome.

In 2015, we discovered that our third child possibly had Autism Spectrum Disorder. She was severely delayed in her speech and communicational development. The doctors did not know what to do, and the therapists could not get her to speak. She qualified for special education through the county. The teachers admitted that they could only reinforce certain tasks, but there was no way to enable my daughter to speak. My congregation, Chesterbrook United Methodist Church and my family began to pray fervently for my daughter. In the summer of 2017, at three and a half years old, my daughter said her first word, "Goodbye." I like to think that she was saying, "Goodbye" to her speechlessness. Today, she has no end to her speech and is growing continually in her cognitive and speech development.

In 2018, my fourth and youngest child had an accident where he slipped in front of a wooden piano bench and hit the side of his cheekbone onto the edge of the piano bench. Immediately the point of impact on his face began to swell up and bruise. I held him in his distress. Our family laid hands on him with anointing oil and prayed healing over him. Within 15 minutes, the swelling and bruising were completely gone. This was an experience of what happens when healing prayers are answered quickly.

In 2019, my mother-in-law was diagnosed with throat cancer and had the cancer surgically removed, and afterward began the process of chemotherapy and radiation treatment to make sure that any remaining traces of cancer could be fully destroyed. Part of my journey with her was to pray with her daily over the phone with her during chemotherapy and radiation treatment. In the midst of praying with my mother-in-law

every day, I learned the discipline of praying with long-term recovery and healing in mind.

In the midst of my mother-in-law's recovery, my father-in-law's passing, and my mother's chronic illness, July 2020 proved to be another traumatic and shocking event for our family. My father, who has always been the healthy one, free of any illness or injury, had a terrible accident at a beach. He slipped and fell while wading in the water and injured his C2-C3 vertebrae. He is on a very long road to recovery. At the time of this writing, we have seen remarkable recovery with his ability to breathe without a ventilator. Furthermore, doctors and therapists have said that he would be a quadriplegic for the rest of his life, but my father has begun regaining movement in both arms, his right hand, and fingers, as well as his toes and calf muscles. This is all due to many people praying healing prayers over him.

One of the things to note in the aftermath of my father's injury is how the trauma of his injury brought my brother and I together, and we have experienced much healing in our relationship with each other. Our sibling rivalry at one point caused our relationship to be almost non-existent beyond official functions for many years. What contributed to our emotional distance was our physical distance. From 2008 and on, we have lived in completely different parts of the country. Shortly before my father's injury, my brother had reached out while I was in New Jersey for an in-person intensive at Drew University. My brother who lives in New Jersey reached out to me to meet up for dinner. That evening, we sat at a diner for five hours catching up. During our conversation, my brother apologized to me for the rift that we have. That was the beginning of healing. When my father was injured, my brother and I began to speak on the phone daily for updates and

prayer. The crisis and trauma of my father's injury brought my brother and I together for a greater purpose: to be healing agents for each other.

Praying for healing is not limited to some kind of spontaneous instantaneous miraculous healing, but even wondrous ways that God allows for the right medical professionals to treat our ailments from a medical standpoint. My wife and I wanted to have children from early on in our marriage. In fact, we wanted to have children right away. Yet, we had trouble conceiving. In 2007, we discovered that my wife had dermoid cysts on her ovaries measuring 8 centimeters and 11 centimeters each, and it was causing infertility. We went the route of getting surgery to remove the dermoid cysts. We began to pray for God to help make everything go well. It turned out my wife's doctor was not the one who would do the surgery, but one of the most renowned OB-GYN surgeons in New York state. The doctor mentioned that we should not expect to get pregnant for at least another year. However, six months later, we found out my wife was pregnant with our oldest. We had changed doctors because we moved from New York to Chicago. Her new doctor was baffled and amazed at how successful the surgery was because, in her 19 years of surgical experience, she had not ever been able to salvage the ovaries when the dermoid cysts were so large. How well did the surgery work? We have four beautiful children to testify!

My family's journey through healing and the difficulties of ailments contributed significantly to my curiosity of how we as Christians pray actively for the healing ministry of Jesus to manifest among us. This is a key part of my identity formation that has contributed to the pursuit of more deeply understanding divine healing prayers. When life circumstances necessitate healing, the spirit searches for such answers.

### *Third Context of Identity Formation: Forming a Pastoral Identity of Healing*

"Don't you dare think about being a pastor! Don't you ever mention that ever again! Do you even know what that means? Only be a pastor if you receive a calling from God!" These were the words of my paternal grandmother when I was five years old. I was in her living room in upper Manhattan, in New York City. She had asked me, "Daniel, what would you like to be when you grow up?" I said, "I want to be just like my dad! I want to be a pastor!" As soon as those words left my lips, my grandmother became very upset and scolded me. She really scared the pastor out of me. I would not think of being a pastor for another twelve years. Why did my grandmother become so upset with the idea of me becoming a pastor? Well, there is a backstory to all this that begins three generations earlier.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Methodist missionary by the name of Kate Cooper arrived in the Korean Peninsula. One of the methods of missionary work during that time was to build schools to increase literacy among Koreans, especially women. It was actually women who were instrumental in the transmission of the Gospel message to the Korean people. This is through the process of training "Bible women." According to Dr. Hyaewol Choi (University of Iowa), "A Bible woman [chondo puin] was defined in various ways. In general, she was a Christian woman employed in the distribution of Christian literature, and in biblical instruction."<sup>7</sup> One of these "Bible women" was my great-grandmother, Lucy Lee. She was one of the early converts and church leaders through the mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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<sup>7</sup> Hyaewol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 65-66.

My great-grandmother's prayer and dream was that her four sons would grow up to be pastors, and they did. They became: Rev. Chai Bong Park, Rev. Chai Geun Park (my paternal grandfather), Rev. Chai Gon Park, and Rev. Chai Hoon Park. Of the four brothers, the ones that are well-known in Korean Methodist history is the oldest son and the youngest son. The oldest was Rev. Chai Bong Park. He was a revivalist most well-known for miraculous healings. I grew up hearing the stories of my oldest great-uncle. People would get healed when he would place a handkerchief over the part of their bodies that were hurting and prayed for them. One story I heard was that he kept a record of how many people he prayed healing for and led to salvation in Christ. That number was over ten thousand people. Through stories of my oldest great-uncle, I learned that God could work in miraculous and marvelous ways. Such stories still influence me today regarding preaching and healing ministry.

The youngest brother is Rev. Chai Hoon Park. He is more well-known as a classical musician and responsible for composing over five hundred hymns, many of which are found in the Korean hymnal. He has spent most of his life laying a foundation for music in Korea. After the Japanese colonial period, Korea was a nation that had been stripped of much literature, culture, and resources. The nation called upon my youngest great-uncle to write over one hundred fifty children's folk songs. Many of them are the famous children's folk songs that are sung in Korea today. Responding to a call to pastoral ministry at the age of sixty, he felt God answering his mother's prayer for all four sons to become pastors. When I was a child and my extended family would gather together, we would always sing one of the hymns he composed. The hymn is entitled: "O,

the Help That God Has Given (지금까지 지내온 것)."<sup>8</sup> It was a part of our life. When my first child was born, unbeknownst to me, I began singing that exact hymn as a lullaby. It is now a hymn that has been transmitted for four generations. I asked myself one time why this hymn was so important to our family. Of all the hymns that my great-uncle composed, why did we sing this particular one? The hymn text embodies a testimony of God's faithful grace throughout someone's life. My family certainly could testify to that hymn. I would imagine that many Christians can as well. According to an interview done with my great-uncle, when he was composing the music for the hymn text, he did not know who had written the words. What mattered was how the words spoke to the Korean people at the time. In the interview, he says:

Writing Korean hymns during the post-Japanese colonial period and post-Korean War era was vital to Korean spirituality because the hymn texts described the hope of Jesus Christ in the midst of such great desolation and the despair of the Koreans.<sup>9</sup>

The hymns would provide hope and healing for broken people. Only many years later, after immigrating to Canada, did he discover only a name, perhaps a pseudonym:

Tetusaburo Sasao.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, hymnals such as *Come Let Us Worship: The Korean-English United Methodist Hymnal, 2001* attribute the text to his name.<sup>11</sup> Unbeknownst to me, the

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<sup>8</sup> United Methodist Church, *Chansong gwa yēbæ = Come, Let Us Worship: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, United Methodist Publishing House, 2001), 89.

<sup>9</sup> C-Channel Broadcast, "Hymns that Have Stories: Episode 9 – Rev. Chai Hoon Park", YouTube video, 26:59, July 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMXo1vL3QFE>, 8:36-9:20.

<sup>10</sup> C-Channel Broadcast, 2012, 5:46-6:55.

<sup>11</sup> United Methodist Church, *Chansong gwa yēbæ = Come, Let Us Worship: Book of United Methodist Worship*, 89.

theology of this hymn shaped my life and continues to do so today. Through my youngest great-uncle, I learned the power of music in worship and faith formation. I learned that people remember songs. Songs heal people. Stories are birthed out of the songs we sing, and songs embody the narrative of our lives.

Songs become the soundtrack of our lives and our faith. This is in line with my denominational tradition of Methodism. Charles Wesley's hymns were his poetry set to music, and they conveyed the teachings and convictions of the Methodist movement. Regarding Charles Wesley's hymns, Adam Hamilton writes, "The hymns were moving expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God. Some of them celebrated and commemorated key moments in a Christian's life."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps that is why the church largely remembers the hymns of Methodism (Charles Wesley) more than the sermons of Methodism (John Wesley). Songs capture the stories of our lives, much like the hymn "Blessed Assurance," where Fanny J. Crosby writes, "This is my story, this is my song."<sup>13</sup> Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:18-20). Story and song go together. Life stories and songs go together. Songs of healing bring healing to the story of our lives.

My own father, Bishop Hyo Sung Park, came to the United States in 1978 after becoming ordained in the Korean Methodist Church. I was born in 1980 in Long Branch,

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<sup>12</sup> Adam Hamilton, "Charles Wesley and the Music of the Wesleyan Revival," Date Accessed: November 29, 2020, <https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/charles-wesley-and-the-music-of-the-wesleyan-revival/#.X8RyjC2z2CM>

<sup>13</sup> The United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 369.

New Jersey, while my father served in the U.S. Army. In 1983, he planted the church he pastored for 36 years and is now the pastor emeritus. From a young age, I observed first-hand the challenges of pastoral ministry. He modeled for me the often-needed steadiness of a pastor through the conflicts and challenges that take place during the growth of a church, raising leadership, running a capital campaign, purchasing and expanding church property, while preaching faithfully, leading worship, and diligently visiting congregation members. He also modeled for me the adapting ability that must be exercised as culture shifts through the passage of time. In the early years, during the height of immigration of Koreans to the United States, my father, and lay leaders would often be in ministry with Korean families by finding places for them to live, assisting with setting up various social services, finding jobs, and even picking up unwanted, used furniture that was put out on the curbside in front of homes and apartment buildings so that a family who had just moved to the United States could have a dining table, a chair, or even a bed. As Koreans became more established, the felt needs of people changed, and therefore the method of ministry changed. My father would visit their businesses, pray for them, counsel parents on how to raise second-generation Korean American children, minister to them through the death and dying of parents and children. My father believed that pastoral ministry was about bringing hope and healing to the brokenness of immigrant life in the Korean American community. Sunday Worship, especially preaching, should be a time to offer healing grace to people weary from the immigrant life. As I look at his life in ministry for forty-four years, I have seen his continual commitment to realize this idea as a pastor, district superintendent, and even bishop in the Korean Methodist Church. Through my

father, I learned the need to be consistent with the Gospel yet fluid and adaptive to the changing culture.

When I was seventeen years old, I attended a retreat at which I felt the Lord speak to me for the very first time. I felt him call me to ministry. At that time, it was about music ministry. A year later, it became about preaching the Gospel. During my college years, it became about pastoral ministry. Around eight years ago, as I had been leading various ministries, I discovered that the human condition of sin, immorality, and brokenness must be understood through the lens of health.

I discovered through the years in myself and in others that the backstory behind every sin and immorality is a story of an individual, community, or generation becoming hurt. There is a sickness in the soul that must be healed. Jesus came to heal us. The salvation that we preach is, first and foremost, a matter of healing. Therefore, when I read John Wesley's sermon, *Original Sin*, I was compelled by his conclusion:

Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin; therefore "you must be born from above"—that is, "born of God," By nature, you are completely corrupted; by grace, you will be wholly renewed: "As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." You "who were dead through your trespasses, Christ has made alive." God has already given you a prescription for life: "We live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us"! Therefore, let us go on "through faith for faith," until your whole sickness be healed, and "the same mind is in you that was in Christ Jesus."<sup>14</sup>

I have become convinced about my pastoral identity as a healer. There in the ministry of healing is the purpose of preaching, worship, and doing church. People need healing and to be made whole in Jesus Christ. I am convinced in my spirit that healing is where we can see a glimpse of what heaven will be like, where God is "making all things new!"<sup>7</sup> I

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Practice: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Volume III, 34-53* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 221.

see in my pastoral identity a convergence of my family's legacy. My hope is that as I reach far back into the backstory of my calling, I can swing forward in full force for healthier and more effective pastoral ministry. Leonard Sweet explains this in the following way:

The best analogy of the demand for double vision is the new theory among physicists about how the swing works. Previous theories revolved around the principle of "parametric instability," which pivoted the action of swinging at the middle of the arc, and the rocking forward into a higher center of gravity. Grinnell College physicist William Case, while watching how children actually swing, has now posited a new principle which physicists call "driven harmonic oscillator" or what I call "parabolic harmonious oscillation." The key to the swing is not in the middle of the arc, but at each end of the arc, where and when the swingers at the same time lean back and throw their feet forward.<sup>15</sup>

The key to pushing forward into effective ministry is to not only consider where I am in my present context, but to reach back to all that has formed me in my identity and push forth with the force that comes forth from that into a more powerful future. My father considered preaching to be a healing ministry. My youngest great uncle considered music to be a healing ministry. My oldest great-uncle prayed for miraculous healing. John Wesley viewed salvation as healing. Through the cross, Jesus made healing possible to all who believe. As I reach back to my father, my grandfathers, even the historical Methodist movement that compelled people such as Kate Cooper to go to the Korean peninsula, the things of John Wesley's teaching that shaped such passion and power of the Gospel movement and most of all the lifting up of what Jesus Christ has done, I am convinced that a pastoral identity of healing is critical to a world that is much in need of healing today.

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<sup>15</sup> Leonard Sweet, email to author, November 13, 2018.

#### *Fourth Context of Identity Formation: My Pastoral Context*

"Daniel, what kind of a ministry context would you like to be appointed to next?" my district superintendent asked. The year was 2015, and I had spent seven years planting and growing a church plant for de-churched Korean Americans in the Chicago area. I had been working with second-generation Korean American congregations for thirteen years. My entire life had been in the Korean American immigrant church context. As a second-generation Korean American, married to another second-generation Korean American, and raising third-generation Korean Americans, I still felt called to serve in that particular context. I told my district superintendent, "While I am open to serving wherever the bishop sends me, I would prefer to continue serving in a Korean American church context." Unfortunately, there were no such open appointments available for me in the Chicago area. I asked permission to seek other appointment opportunities outside of the Northern Illinois Conference. Permission was granted.

In May 2015, I arrived in Northern Virginia to my present context. Chesterbrook United Methodist Church (CUMC) is located in McLean, Virginia. The congregation is predominantly second-generation Korean Americans, with a significant group of people who are non-Korean descent. Today, the congregation is approximately 80% Korean descent, 5% other Asian descent, and 15% White.

One could say that moralism is a key factor in understanding how Asian Americans understand and embrace Christianity. This stems from Asian American culture being rooted in the form of "toxic shame."<sup>16</sup> This idea of shame is very different

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Cha, "Introduction," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights From Groundbreaking Congregations*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 15.

from a Western understanding of shame. In "Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling," Dr. Young Gweon You explains the difference:

In Western understanding, internal shame arises when one feels he or she has not lived up to his or her own expectation of the self. However, internal shame in Korea comes when a person has not lived up to the community's rules and expectations. This internal shame is very prevalent among Asians and Koreans. It functions to build group harmony and unity.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding Asian American shame culture is very important to understand how Asian Americans at CUMC receive the Gospel, how we do church business, and how we do church life. This is important to positioning a predominantly Asian American church to become agents of healing in this world today.

Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong write in regards to the trouble that Asian Americans have with the story of the "outrageously generous father of Luke 15 who runs out to meet a wasteful, shame-filled child and throws a party in celebration of his love for that child."<sup>18</sup> Already in that description is a loaded phrase that which Asian Americans socialized by shame culture. They further write, "Not only do we have difficulty identifying with the father's compulsion to celebrate, but we also have difficulty identifying with the younger son."<sup>19</sup> The idea of a celebrating father is quite alien to most Asian Americans. Much like how the people who were listening to Jesus' parable would have been surprised at the thought of a rich man running and embracing his wayward son, Asian Americans also have a very difficult time with such imagery. In fact, many second-

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<sup>17</sup> Young Gweon You, "Shame and Guilt Mechanisms in East Asian Culture," in *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 51, no. 1 (1997): 62.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong, "Grace-Filled Households," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights From Groundbreaking Congregations*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Sugikawa and Wong, 22.

generation Korean American fathers lack role models for fatherhood that is characterized by celebration as well as being vulnerable before their children. "Distant fathers and a heritage of emotional restraint have often robbed Asian families of ways to express familial affection as well as personal hurt or fear."<sup>20</sup>

Shame culture also affects how we develop leaders at CUMC. Prevalent in the leadership profile of the congregation, moralism tends to be a strong indicator of whether one is well-suited to be in leadership. It is not an explicit requirement. However, the conversations that take place at the Nominations Committee (lay leadership identifying and development committee in a United Methodist local church) level often evaluate potential leaders on the basis of their moral performance or appearance of "having their life together." Sugikawa and Wong write: If we are church leaders, we probably rose to leadership by being like the older son: responsible and careful, keeping the family honor, not wasting the family resources. Honor and righteousness, living according to standards and expectations, are all high values in Eastern cultures.<sup>21</sup> Such is the case for the lay leadership at CUMC. Such is also the expectation that the congregation has of pastoral leaders at CUMC. Moralism is a strong indicator of avoiding shame. Moralism is regarded as a measure of one's spiritual maturity. In the midst of many conversations, I seldom hear people state that someone's effective ability to navigate spiritual terrain and depth of gracious spirit is the qualifier for someone to be in leadership. While moralism is important to the outward lived out faith of a Christian, it should not replace the measure of one's faith in Jesus Christ as the primary qualifier for leadership in the church. That is

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<sup>20</sup> Sugikawa and Wong, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

certainly a point of challenge in my context. CUMC's predominantly Asian American demographic is largely influenced by a moralism produced by shame rather than virtues and values lived out as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

### **The need for a healing culture**

"Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live."<sup>22</sup> Thomas A. Tarrants writes this in "True Conversion and Wholehearted Commitment: Foundations of Discipleship." It is a well-known quote used by many people. Perhaps this can be another way to sum up the ministry of Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul declares to the Ephesian church, "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."<sup>23</sup> He also says to the Colossian church, "And when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses."<sup>24</sup> So, if it is not about being "good," but being alive, it goes against the traditional culture that shapes and forms Korean and Asian Americans. Although second-generation Korean and Asian Americans have become socialized in the United States, they still have been raised up in households that have traditional Korean or Asian cultural values.

In "Grace-Filled Households," Sukigawa and Wong write about how the church can bring healing to Korean and Asian American shame culture, "In the church, our

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas A. Tarrants, "True Conversion and Wholehearted Commitment: Foundations of Discipleship," C.S. Lewis Institute, *Knowing and Doing*, Summer (2011): 2, accessed on March 5, 2021, [https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm\\_send/251](https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/251).

<sup>23</sup> Eph. 2:5.

<sup>24</sup> Col. 2:13.

relationships with each other are based on our standing in Christ, not our previous merits or demerits. In other words, everything is now based on God's love for us. Love doesn't ignore our previous failings but has a vision of something greater for us."<sup>25</sup> The toxic shame mentioned previously produces a collective mindset and a sense of upholding community values and standards. On the one hand, one can view this reality as a setback or preventing individuals from growing strong in faith and shining in ways they need to individually. On the other hand, there is a redemptive element to the collective mindset that is much needed in the current Christian culture found in the United States. Much influenced by Western values of individualism, it is often the case that churches in Western cultures emphasize a personal experience and personal growth in Jesus Christ. S. Steve Kang writes about this cultural reality in "Truth-Embodying Households." Kang writes:

The present-day Western Protestant church has largely individualized and privatized the depth of God's election of his people in Jesus Christ. The modern church has tended to construe the individual elected by God as the basic unit that makes up the church. As a corollary, Christians are taught to find their self-identity and God's will for their personal lives as individuals.<sup>26</sup>

There is a much-needed movement of the Gospel as a collective force rather than an individualistic force in our culture today. Korean and Asian American churches have the potential to offer the collective mindset to a strong Gospel movement. However, there is a hurdle that must be overcome.

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<sup>25</sup> Sugikawa and Wong, 26

<sup>26</sup> S. Steve Kang, "Truth-Filled Households," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights From Groundbreaking Congregations*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 44.

The challenge of leveraging the collective mindset of Korean or Asian American churches to become a multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial movement of the Gospel is the reality that many Korean or Asian American Christians grew up in churches that spoke a language other than English and had implemented Asian cultural elements into the church experience. These elements stand in stark contrast to the Westernized culture in the United States. As a result, while Korean and Asian American churches have a strong collective mindset to offer for a mass movement of the Gospel in the United States, there is a social damper of some kind that prevents such a collective mindset from being unleashed into a movement. Perhaps it can be said that due to practicing Christian faith in a homogenous and exclusive community with a different language and different culture, that Korean and Asian American churches do not have the training or exposure to engaging people beyond their own racially or ethnically homogenous communities.

Why is it important for Korean and Asian American churches to consider how to engage the "other" and how to contribute to the movement of the Gospel beyond their own homogenous contexts? It is because the world outside the church does not exist in homogenous contexts anymore. Nor does it function primarily from a Western/European frame of reference. Globalization is not only happening globally, but it is happening locally. Korean and Asian American churches are largely located in cities or suburbs that are adjacent to large cities. There is great diversity in such areas. The surrounding world is getting smaller and more diverse. Churches need to catch on to the direction that culture is shaping and moving. In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas L. Friedman writes:

Globalization 3.0 differs from previous eras not only in how it is shrinking and flattening the world and how it is empowering individuals. It also is different in that Globalization 1.0 and 2.0 were driven primarily by European and American individuals and businesses...Because it is flattening and shrinking the world,

Globalization 3.0 is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse—non-Western, non-white—group of individuals.<sup>27</sup>

This globalization is happening locally. It is happening to the individuals in churches as well, but for some reason, not collectively in the churches. At Chesterbrook United Methodist Church, there is diversity to some degree. Even among married couples, there are interracial and interethnic marriages. There are non-Koreans who have adopted children from Korea. There are young people and old people. Diversity is happening in the very lives of people in this congregation. Much like this, as people's lives become more diverse, the church must engage such a change in culture.

Through the phenomenon of Globalization 3.0, diversity increases, and differences abound. Friedman mentions that individuals are being empowered. If the culture remains individualistic, the differences can cause an even greater increase of self-oriented, self-interested, and self-promoting mindsets. As mentioned earlier in Kang's article, the individualistic mindset is detrimental to the movement of the Gospel. If the Gospel is to counter the individualistic mindset, then it is important for the Korean and Asian American church to discover a way to redeem the collective mindset and offer it to churches in the United States.

Jesus came to make dead people alive. What is it that must die in the Korean and Asian American culture in order for the movement of the Gospel to live? The self must die. Christ must live through us. Apostle Paul says, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 11.

the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>28</sup> The collective mindset is good if Korean and Asian American Christians understand that the church is the body of Christ! If it is understood strictly from the standpoint of a Korean and/or Asian cultural value, it has the potential to continue restricting Korean and Asian American Christians from engaging the surrounding culture with the Gospel. It can continue to keep Korean and Asian American Christians insular. Yet, if the collective mindset is healed and redeemed as a Gospel mindset, Korean and Asian American Christians can utilize the collective mindset as a powerful tool to foster a Gospel movement in the increasingly individualistic culture today.

A very important way to effectively communicate this redemption of the collective mindset is the use of signs in Korean or Asian American churches. Crystal Downing introduces "(re)signing" in her book, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*. She writes:

The parenthetical (re) is essential, expressing two necessary components of our "signing"—resigning and re-signing. 1. As Christians, we are resigned to essential truths revealed by God. 2. As communicators, we recognize the need to re-sign those truths, generating fresh signs that make ancient truths meaningful to contemporary audiences.<sup>29</sup>

There are two ancient signs that can be (re)signed. They are the sacraments of the church: baptism and the Eucharist.

In regards to baptism, many Korean and Asian American Christians were baptized as infants or children and were done so by the process of sprinkling. Confirmation

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<sup>28</sup> Gal. 2:19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), Kindle Edition, Location 144-145.

ceremonies were conducted in a way that did not immerse individuals into an experience that embodied the idea of joining Christ in his death and rising in his resurrection. At Chesterbrook United Methodist Church, baptism and confirmation is a full-immersion experience. This is to offer believers the experience of truly going under and coming out alive in Christ! Downing mentions that Tertullian explained baptism as: "we are born in water and only by remaining in water can we live."<sup>30</sup> Dying to the individual self and becoming alive in Christ means to be part of the Gospel community of Jesus Christ. We are to remain in such a community to continue alive in Christ. No longer is the collective mindset of an individual's cultural background, but it is Scriptural. It is about belonging to the body of Christ. In doing so, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and inviting people to a community of faith is no longer a cultural, ethnic, or racial value.

In regards to the Eucharist, the practice of open table proves to be very important. Many Korean and Asian American Christians experience the invitation to the Lord's Table as exclusive to only those who have been baptized and to those who have their life straightened out before God. This practice goes in sync with Korean and Asian shame culture. Yet, when a church practices an open table, and the pastor proclaims that all are forgiven in Christ, and all are welcome to receive from the Lord's table, it begins to heal and redeem shame culture. In addition, instead of inviting people to come forward with a clean slate of their own making, when people are invited to come forward just as they are, shame culture becomes redeemed as well. Invitations can include leaving all that is wrong or problematic or hurting at the altar and taking from Jesus. Instead of coming to Jesus with one's best foot forward, it is an invitation to come in the fullness of one's lack

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<sup>30</sup> Downing, Location 855.

and troubles. This enables people to abandon the shame culture that produces a performance mindset and embrace a culture of grace instead. In doing so, the cultural baggage of Korean and Asian shame can be shed. The church can begin identifying as a redemptive and healing community, not a moral or socially performing community. What is the result? The church community can become open to people who are different. The church community can become a Gospel movement that engages the increasingly diverse world around. With this, the Eucharist becomes a collective experience because during the Eucharist, the bread and cup can be used as a sign for how many grains come together for one loaf and many grapes are squeezed for the one cup. There are many people, but the people are one. Downing says that the Eucharist "signals a miraculous gift: the union of God and human—both in Christ and through Christ with us."<sup>31</sup> The collective mindset as a social burden can then be shed away and be seen as truly a Gospel mindset.

In order to unleash second-generation Korean and Asian American churches to its full potential, it is important to address the cultural values that have shaped the second generation. Only by revealing how the Gospel redeems cultural values can those values be seen in light of the Gospel instead of traditional culture. The culture of shame must be redeemed by the grace of Jesus Christ. If the collective mindset is rooted in a shame culture, then the only way for Korean and Asian American churches to utilize the collective mindset as a strength and tool for Gospel advancement is to redeem the shame culture. In doing so, Korean and Asian American churches can become third culture. Gibbons writes, "Third culture actually enhances a culture's uniqueness while at the same

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<sup>31</sup> Downing, Location 2155.

time celebrating the synergy of its fusion with other cultures."<sup>32</sup> Only by healing and redeeming shame culture through the Gospel can the unique strength of Korean and Asian American churches, such as a collective mindset, be utilized for the advancement of the gospel in our diversifying world today.

### **Connecting Identity to Context**

Eugene Peterson writes about the identity and role of the pastor in his work, *The Pastor: A Memoir*:

"the pervasive element in our two-thousand-year pastoral tradition is not someone who 'gets things done' but rather the person placed in the community to pay attention and call attention to 'what is going on right now' between men and women, with one another and with God"<sup>33</sup>

The call of the pastor and congregation to discover the unique way that Jesus Christ redeems their particular identity and context, as a way to reveal Jesus Christ to the surrounding culture with boldness, confidence, and relevancy.

Perhaps Korean and Asian American churches have been much like the monkey in the Eastern Parable<sup>34</sup> introduced earlier. With a mission to declare salvation to the surrounding and greater American cultures, there has been a disconnect in relevancy or a reluctance to shine the unique gift and strength that Korean and Asian American churches can offer. Whatever the Korean and Asian American churches have been doing has been largely ineffective when it comes to reaching beyond their homogenous contexts, much

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<sup>32</sup> Gibbons, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 5.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 4.

like the monkey's attempt to save the fish. The collective mindset is one of the many unique aspects of Korean and Asian American church culture. However, without the Gospel, it can be viewed as antithetical and crippling to the idea of success in American individualistic culture. With the Gospel, Korean and Asian American churches can view collective mindset as Scriptural and vital to a stronger Gospel movement in the United States today.

Considering my own particular identity and context, I believe there is a great need among Korean and Asian American churches to emphasize and experience healing from the toxic shame that undergirds the collective mindset. When there is healing to the soul, there can be healing to ideas and cultures. When there is healing to the soul, there can also be healing to the body. The Scripture says, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul" (3 John 2). When the collective mindset can be seen, not as a way to avoid shame, but rather to elevate the honor of Christ, the Korean and Asian American church can be healed and emboldened to more effectively offer its uniqueness of collective mindset to the world today.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT

### **The Role Of Context**

Context is key to understanding where and how healing ministry takes place. It is the key to understanding how knowledge and practice of ministry can interface with the real world and materialize effectively and appropriately. For a pastor, understanding the context means to know the particular details of a ministry. Only then can the skills of a pastor connect with the people and make a difference because it is not enough to only have the right ideas and be equipped well with skills. The capacity to understand the specific context of a ministry setting and apply knowledge and practice effectively into that context is called “contextual intelligence.” Leonard Sweet writes in *So Beautiful*, “There must be high ‘contextual intelligence’ of the locality of ministry and God’s thumbprint in that particular context. ‘Contextual intelligence’ means you have the ability to see from another’s eyes, to hear the unfamiliar, to learn the strange, to understand in a different way.”<sup>35</sup> A well-educated pastor and well-equipped pastor can fail miserably in ministry if the pastor is not able to accurately understand the context of the church. To understand and know the context of the church is to know the people and their stories in the particular rhythms of life and culture of the particular setting. If a pastor is able to understand the context of ministry and apply knowledge and practice according to the said context, there can be a high level of ministry effectiveness.

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<sup>35</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 201.

## **Context of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the specific context of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church (CUMC), located in McLean, Virginia. The chapter is organized in the following way:

- What is the story of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church?
- What is the demographic context of the congregation?
- What is the general demographic context of McLean, Virginia?
- What is the specific context of ministry with Korean-Americans?
- What are the ministries at Chesterbrook United Methodist Church?

These questions help weave together the details of context and how CUMC can effectively be in ministry.

### *What is the story of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church?*

Chesterbrook United Methodist Church began in the fall of 1906 at a small schoolhouse. The congregation met regularly and in soon time felt the need for a house of worship. They secured the current property (1711 Kirby Rd, McLean, Virginia 22101), and began the work of a building committee. In 1920, the cornerstone was laid. In 1921, the building was completed. In 1922, the congregation officially became chartered as the Chesterbrook-Langley Charge. The physical church building and property is still in that location today. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregation is meeting on various online platforms, and all in-person gatherings have been suspended.

Throughout its history, the CUMC congregation was vibrant and became an effective ministry to the surrounding neighborhood of McLean, VA. Margaret Hollar is a

lifelong member of the church. She was interviewed by the church for a presentation on the history of CUMC. She shares how her grandparents helped start the church.<sup>36</sup>

According to Hollar, the congregation at its peak was about 500 people in worship, with three different choirs.<sup>37</sup> Although CUMC was vibrant and relevant through much of its time, the church began to decline slowly through the years and faced a major decline around 2011. By 2015, the congregation had dwindled down to an average of 6 people in worship. The congregation felt that they no longer had a vital witness of the gospel to the community. Therefore, the congregation reached out to the Arlington District of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church and requested help.

Through a process of discernment and prayer, CUMC entered into a new chapter of significant and vital ministry with the Vision of Peace (VOPC) congregation of Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington (KUMCGW). VOPC began in 1986 (then Koinonia Chapel) as the English Ministry Congregation of KUMCGW. Over the years, God placed a desire in the hearts of the VOPC congregation to dream of a greater impact for Christ. In the fall of 2015, CUMC initiated a search through the Arlington District of the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to find ways to do ministry differently for the sake of the gospel. Through a process of prayer and discernment, CUMC and VOPC decided to become partners for the gospel and become one church. Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington was instrumental in blessing the sending of VOPC to CUMC.

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<sup>36</sup> “CUMC History Interview,” YouTube Video, 0:12, posted by “Chesterbrook United Methodist Church,” March 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHU4DFtrD8k>.

<sup>37</sup> “CUMC History Interview,” YouTube Video, 5:05.

On June 5, 2016, under the leadership of Rev. Cathy Abbott (District Superintendent of Arlington District), the Vision of Peace Church congregation transferred their membership of 54 adults and 43 children from Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington to Chesterbrook United Methodist Church. Rev. Gene Larkin (then pastor of CUMC), Rev. Daniel Park (then lead pastor of VOPC), and Rev. Young Bong Kim (then senior pastor of KUMCGW) also participated in the membership transfer service. This resulted in a total of 103 members in the church. It was the mark of a new beginning for two congregations. On July 1, 2016, I was appointed by Bishop Young Jin Cho (then bishop of the Virginia Conference) to be the new pastor of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church as Rev. Gene Larkin retired after over 50 years of service to the United Methodist Church. Today, the congregation is steadily growing in attendance as well as a greater witness of Jesus Christ.

*What is the demographic context of the congregation?*

The congregation has grown to the size of about 175 people, with an average weekly worship attendance of 123 people, which includes children under 18 years of age. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started and the church became an online worshipping community, the average weekly worship attendance has increased to 133 people. The approximate racial breakdown of the congregation is 80% Korean descent, 5% other Asian descent, and 15% white. Previously, CUMC would have been able to say, “We are a white church,” and the Vision of Peace congregation would have been able to say, “We are a Korean church,” but now the congregation cannot say either and must simply say, “We are a church that has Koreans, other Asians, and whites.” Ultimately, the

congregation must say, “We are a church.” CUMC is an intergenerational church with participants who range in age from newborn to 82 years. Most of the congregation is comprised of families. The congregation has approximately 80 children and youth registered in the roster, and the adults make up about 95 people. Of these adults, the predominant age bracket would be those in their mid-30s to early 50s. Seniors above the age of 65 are five people.

The average level of education among the adults in the congregation is postgraduate. Most working people are highly educated, professional white-collar folks, many of whom are of high-profile jobs in upper-level positions within their respective organizations and companies. Most of the church members are homeowners, living in areas of Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, and Loudoun Counties. The greatest concentration of the congregation resides in McLean, Arlington, and Vienna, within a 15-minute driving distance to the church. These are wealthy neighborhoods, known to be some of the most expensive areas to live in the Northern Virginia region. Most families are dual-income families. Most children are in the top school districts and are involved in many extra-curricular activities. Most families have overscheduled, busy lives. When the congregation was gathering in-person, the congregational life largely took place on the weekends. Due to COVID-19, the congregation is largely homebound and have become more flexible with their schedules. As a result, there are more gatherings and meetings taking place during the week. Furthermore, due to the convenience of interfacing through Zoom or Google Meet, gatherings and meetings are more accessible.

The pastoral staff team is currently comprised of three people. I am the Senior Pastor, and my wife is the Education Ministry and Youth Pastor. The Associate Pastor

leads in the areas of college ministry and children's ministry. The pastoral staff team is 100% Korean descent.

The real property of the Chesterbrook United Methodist Church is located at 1711 Kirby Rd, McLean, Virginia 22101 in Fairfax County. The location of this property is key, as it is very close to the border of Arlington County and near downtown McLean. The church is also less than 10 miles from the center of Washington, D.C. On the property of 3.5 acres is the church building and an education building. The education building houses the church offices and two schools. The first school is the Chesterbrook United Methodist Church Preschool and After Care program (CPAC). The second school is the Montessori School of McLean (MSM). Both schools are operating successfully with a waitlist every year. Income through the MSM pays 105% of the mortgage of the construction loan on the Education Building. The church, therefore, has no need to factor funds from tithes and offerings to be allocated towards paying any debt service. The school building has many classrooms, a multipurpose room (gymnasium), and a large backyard with playgrounds, basketball courts, and a soccer field. The facilities at the property provide many opportunities for fellowship and have the potential for community outreach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CPAC is temporarily closed. However, MSM is continuing to operate successfully.

As three entities share the property of CUMC, the relationship between CUMC, CPAC, and MSM is an important part of the demographic study of the church. This is because while the church has a racial breakdown of 80% Korean descent, 5% other Asian descent, and 15% white, the racial breakdown of CPAC and MSM is different. Both schools are predominantly white, with people of color being of a smaller percentage.

Furthermore, both school communities are not limited to the Christian faith and have a diverse religious and non-religious community. This provides the church opportunities to become more engaged with racially and religiously diverse communities as the potential for evangelism and outreach exists in the church's relationship with the two schools.

The pastoral staff has spent the last four years building very strong relationships with the school administrators and their staff teams. There continues to be a strong sense of collegiality and support. As it is a shared space, all three entities are open and willing to cooperate and work with each other for the common good. This is vital because even five years ago, it was a very different reality. The church had virtually no relationship with CPAC, even though it bore the church's name. The church had a negative relationship with MSM due to previous years of conflict and control between a former pastor and the business head of the school. The merger brought forth an opportunity for something new. With the new pastoral team and congregation, bridges were built between the church and both schools. The legal relationship between the church and the two schools have obligatory commitments. CPAC depends on CUMC for its religious exempt status and therefore comes under the authority of the church. MSM is in a binding lease agreement that makes clear the landlord and tenant responsibilities. However, the relationships between the church and the schools have a spirit of trust and mutual respect.

*What is the general demographic context of McLean, Virginia?*

The surrounding 3-mile radius of the church is contained within the boundaries of McLean, Virginia. The town of McLean is located in Fairfax County and is very close to Washington, D.C., and Bethesda, Maryland. Its proximity to those areas, as well as the

Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, makes it ideal for commuting. The cost of real estate is known to be high. Bestplaces.net provides the data for explaining how McLean stands among the state of Virginia and the rest of the U.S.<sup>38</sup> For example, the cost of living indices is based on a U.S. average of 100. An amount below 100 would mean that McLean is cheaper than the U.S. average. An amount above 100 would mean that McLean is more expensive than the U.S. average. The overall cost of living in Virginia is 113.8 to the U.S. average of 100. And the overall cost of living in McLean is 238.6. Along that same comparison, the cost of housing in Virginia is 135.1 to the U.S. average of 100, and the cost of housing in McLean is 514.9. The median home cost in the U.S. is \$219,700. The median home cost in Virginia is \$251,500. The median home cost in McLean is \$919,300.

Other demographic data include racial breakdown, population trend, income trends, and details on schools. ExecutiveInsight Report provides data for racial breakdown, population trend income trend, marital status, educational achievement, and employment details.<sup>39</sup> 2017 data shows that the racial breakdown of the community is as follows: 72% White, 12% Asian, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Black/African American, and 3% Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other. There is a steady increase in the number of households in McLean. The most significant areas of projected population growth (2018-2028) are with singles and young families. A study of educational attainment reveals that 46% of the population have a Graduate or Professional degree, and 21.2% of the

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<sup>38</sup> “McLean, Virginia Cost of Living,” Date Accessed: May 2, 2019, [https://www.bestplaces.net/cost\\_of\\_living/city/virginia/mclean](https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/virginia/mclean).

<sup>39</sup> “The ExecutiveInsight Report,” 2/1/2019, sourced from The Episcopal Church for St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church.

population have a Bachelor's degree, with 86.2% of people working white-collar jobs. From 2018 to 2023, there is an expected increase of children ages 10-14, pointing to the value of the elementary and middle school rankings in McLean. According to [greatschools.org](https://www.greatschools.org), the public schools available for residents in McLean are some of the highest rankings in the United States.<sup>40</sup>

What does all of this information reveal to CUMC? The average adult living in McLean is a highly educated, white-collar professional who is either single, married, or divorced. If married or divorced with children, the children are likely to be in elementary school or middle school. The person is most likely to be White and perhaps of Asian descent. Education is of extremely high priority. In regards to interfacing with the surrounding neighborhood, CUMC must take into consideration these factors and determine how ministry time, energy, and funding will be shaped accordingly. This means that the education ministry in the church is of high priority. It also means that family ministry is also important. The worldview of white-collar employed and highly educated individuals must be taken into consideration as the church discerns the subject matter of discipleship, worship, and potential social spheres in which evangelism can take place. With the average resident in McLean being of above-average financial capacity, there also lies the opportunity to leverage financial generosity. Yet, one must also consider the amount of education debt due to the high level of graduate and professional degrees among the residents in McLean.

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<sup>40</sup> "Best McLean Schools, McLean, VA School Ratings," Date Accessed: May 2, 2019. <https://www.greatschools.org/virginia/mclean/>.

One of the challenges of reaching a neighborhood that has a different racial/ethnic breakdown than the church is figuring out ways to interface with the community. This has been a concerning point for many of the CUMC members who perceive themselves as an ethnic/racial minority. There have been some instances where a new individual or family joins for the Sunday worship experiences and realizes that their ethnic or racial identity is not the same as the majority of the current congregation, and therefore does not return or even leaves during the middle of the worship service. The name of the church, “Chesterbrook United Methodist Church,” does not indicate any kind of ethnic or racial specificity.

*What is the specific context of ministry with Korean Americans?*

While the congregation of CUMC is not limited to being a Korean descent congregation, approximately 80% of the congregation is of that demographic. It is important then to understand any particularities of Korean American contexts in order to do more effective ministry. W.E.B. Dubois writes in *The Souls of Black Folks* regarding the double-consciousness of black folks. He writes, “One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from behind torn asunder.”<sup>41</sup> The reality of Korean Americans living in the United States, as successful as they might be, is that they still face the realities of racism that exist in the workplace and in the communities where they reside. As much as they might have climbed the social

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<sup>41</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: Lushena Books, 2000), 3.

ladder, they still feel the limitations of social advancement and acceptance. This is the reality of ethnic and racial dual identity in the United States of America.

The discussion and understanding of ethnicity are ever-changing through time, surrounding environments, people, and generations. Korean Americans constantly face this process through what W.E.B. Dubois names as double-consciousness. The notion of double-consciousness is defined as the sensation of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. There is a marked difference between the way first, and second-generation Korean Americans experience this double-consciousness. The uniqueness of the second-generation experience is that while they are able to assimilate to the culture and language, they are still perceived to be "foreign" or "exotic." Asian stereotypes in pop culture are attributed where even third and fourth generation Korean Americans growing up in the United States still feel the sense of being an "outsider." This social context calls for the need for a new consciousness and a new paradigm of belonging that can help overcome this double-consciousness. This specific challenge is dealt with in a church that is predominantly a Korean American demographic.<sup>42</sup>

People who experience double-consciousness struggle with the desire to hold onto the dual identities and yet not experience the phenomenon of double-consciousness. In addressing the daily lived out experience of many members of the CUMC, it is important to take into consideration how the gospel of Jesus Christ, or better yet, an identity in Jesus Christ, can help folks navigate through the challenge of double-consciousness. The goal for a church then would not be to build an ethnically or racially homogenous demographic

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<sup>42</sup> Karen J. Chai, "Competing for the Second Generation: English-language Ministry in a Korean Protestant Church," In *Gathers in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, ed. R.S. Warner and J.G. Witter (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 311.

but pursue an ethnic and racially diverse congregation while addressing the specific experiences of the said double-consciousness. The particular challenge before CUMC can be more clearly understood through Cornel West's expansion of DuBois' double-consciousness. In *Prophesy Deliverance!* West writes:

“In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois eloquently described a double consciousness in black Americans, a dual lens through which they saw themselves. For Du Bois, the dialectic of black self recognition oscillated between being *in* America but not *of* it, from being black natives to black aliens. Yet Du Bois overlooked the broader dialectic of being American yet feeling European, of being provincial but yearning for British cosmopolitanism, of being at once incompletely civilized and materially prosperous, a genteel Brahmin amid uncouth conditions. Black Americans labored rather under the burden of a triple crisis of self-recognition.<sup>43</sup>

West accurately captures the idea that in the phenomenon of double-consciousness, there is actually a third consciousness that emerges. In regards to Korean Americans, it is the idea of not being fully Korean, not being fully American, but a new kind of identity that enables Korean Americans to find a unique place in the diversity of the racial landscape in the United States through their devotion to Christian faith. Christian identity is a form of third consciousness that enables a sort of hybridity for Korean Americans. This is because in both Korean and American experiences, the Christian identity and formation is a connecting point.

Taking from Paul's letter to the Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>44</sup> This could be accomplished by keeping the focus of Christ-identity and Christ-consciousness as the point of connection as the congregation

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<sup>43</sup> Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 30-31.

<sup>44</sup> Gal. 3:28.

interfaces with a different demographic in the surrounding neighborhood. It is not to say that the specifics of ethnic and racial groups should be ignored, but as such specifics and differences are wholly embraced, the differences can come together in a new identity and consciousness found in Jesus Christ.

*What are the ministries at Chesterbrook United Methodist Church?*

There are many reasons why someone should consider Chesterbrook United Methodist Church. In the greater McLean area, there are not many congregations that have a vibrant education ministry program at the caliber and quality of CUMC. Most congregations in the area have a basic children's sermon on Sundays followed by some activities. CUMC has a holistic education ministry for all ages. For the parent who wants to provide a spiritually enriching ministry for not only their children but the entire family, CUMC should be one of the top choices for people to consider. For example, pre-pandemic, the education ministry used a curriculum called "Faith Weaver" from Group Publishing, that provides Bible study resources and activities that are custom-tailored for different life stages.<sup>45</sup> They range from Pre-K/Tots, Elementary School (broken down by grade), Middle School, High School, and Adult curriculums. CUMC decided to use this particular curriculum because there are not many curriculums that provide specific resources for an entire range of life stages as such. This is important because the curriculum uses the same Bible passages for every life stage each week. The pastoral team meets weekly to go over the Scripture text that is assigned for the upcoming Sunday

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<sup>45</sup> "FaithWeaver NOW – Children & Family Ministry," group.com, Date Accessed: May 02, 2019, <https://www.group.com/category/ministry-resources/childrens-ministry/sunday-school/faithweaver-now.do>.

and makes sure that all the sermons that are preached in the upcoming Sunday will embody the same message. This allows for the families in the church to be on a similar journey with discipleship. Furthermore, parents who may not be familiar with the Scriptures can have a baseline idea of how to converse about the Bible because the parents, youth, and children hear sermons from the same Scripture text. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the education ministry of the church has shifted to a more virtual-friendlier curriculum called “Dig In,” and is providing to be a more effective way of engaging Pre-K/Toddlers and elementary school-age children than “Faith Weaver.”<sup>46</sup> The youth ministry has gone the way of no curriculum and instead adopted an in-depth discussion-based Bible study of Paul’s letter to the Romans. This format has allowed for teenagers and the Bible study teachers to enter into highly engaging conversations allowing for the virtual engagement to hold the attention of the teens in our congregation.

In regards to the experience of the weekly sermon or teaching, CUMC does not focus on “making a point.” In the pastoral meetings, there is an emphasis on the discovery of the story that reveals Jesus Christ in some manner, whether it is an Old Testament or New Testament text. The sermons and teachings are geared towards stories and narratives that people can remember and encounter Jesus Christ. The purpose is not to drive a point or remember a doctrinal idea. The purpose is to convey Jesus Christ and his healing and liberating gospel to the church in some fashion by revealing the story of Jesus Christ and how each of our stories can join his story.

CUMC also has intergenerational worship. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the first Sunday of every month, the whole church (ages 2 through 82) gathered in

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<sup>46</sup> “DIG IN,” group.com, Date Accessed: March 15, 2021, <https://www.group.com/digin>.

the sanctuary to worship together as an entire body of Christ-followers. From the beginning to the end of the worship service, all the generations of the church were gathered. This is especially important to first-generation Korean Americans. Many first-generation Korean Americans dreamt of worshipping in the same sanctuary with their children and grandchildren. This dream has been very difficult to fulfill within the Korean immigrant church context largely due to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Korean Americans' lack of ability to understand the Korean language and culture. However, 1<sup>st</sup> generation Korean Americans have a greater desire and a better understanding of the English language than the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation's understanding of the Korean language. CUMC had first-generation Korean Americans attending on the first Sunday of every month because they are the parents of the adults and grandparents of the youth and children at CUMC. If a Korean American family has desires for intergenerational worship, Chesterbrook had a trend of such participation for in-person worship service. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, the church has become a 100% online worship service. CUMC has only one virtual worship service, and it is an intergenerational worship service every Sunday involving aspects of the worship service that are connective with children through adults. Therefore, all the more, anyone looking for intergenerational worship services can experience this on a weekly basis. Worshipping together intergenerationally poses the possibility for intergenerational healing as families continue to worship together.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the individual who wants to experience a form of traditional worship but also be engaged in singing newer songs, CUMC created a hybrid worship order that involves a traditional format while including a praise set of

three contemporary worship songs in the middle of the service. This drew the attention of worshipers from both camps of traditional and contemporary styles of worship. Much thought was put into this process due to a desire to retain the legacy members of CUMC while building up the younger demographic of the former VOPC members. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, the virtual online worship service has taken on a change in format to adjust to a worship service that must be experienced through a screen. The church finds ways to engage and interact through the chat feature on Zoom, and we have much more visibility of lay involvement in worship services to allow for the church to “see” more people every week. The messages are shorter. The focus of the story is even more heightened to hold the attention of the congregation and thereby effectively communicate the message of the gospel.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, CUMC always served lunch on Sundays after worship service, no matter what. The congregation believes in the importance of table fellowship. Regular menu items include pizza, sandwiches, Peruvian chicken, chili, Korean food, Japanese food, Mexican food, and more. At CUMC, the hospitality ministry is of utmost importance along with the Sunday worship and education ministry experience. The church has retained a steady amount of growth throughout the last five years, and the continual feedback we receive from new people and families that stay is: the pastors and lay leadership, the sermons, the education ministry, and the Sunday lunches are the main reasons that contributed for people to stay. Providing lunch on Sundays also appeals to parents who can take a break from preparing meals for their children. Furthermore, the church has a gym and large playground facilities that have been instrumental for children and youth to play every Sunday. Since the onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to pivot on how the post-worship fellowship takes place. To hold an open conversation on Zoom has proven to be ineffective. We have tried many different ways to hold the involvement and interest of the people. We have found that there must be a purposeful discussion taking place, and the discussions that engage missional living and giving seem to attract and engage the highest participation.

CUMC is also a place for the person who is looking for a prayer experience of spiritual breakthrough, miraculous healing, and the receiving of prophetic words. This is also practiced in a way that is not intrusive to the public worship experience. It is important that Sunday worship services do not advocate for these activities because of the spiritually diverse spectrum of the congregation. There are people new or young in the faith. There are people who are unsure about the mystery of things such as signs and wonders and mysticism-type of expressions of faith. Especially in the Korean American church communities, there are two other options available. The first option is theologically conservative churches that either does not believe in signs and wonders or discourage advocating for them today. The second option is the other end of the spectrum: churches much like the tradition of Pentecostalism that actively promote signs and wonders, openly pray in tongues aloud, advocate for experiences such as getting “slain in the Spirit.” Yet, there are those who feel uncomfortable with Pentecostal worship culture but want to actively experience the miraculous hand of God in their life. CUMC provides the middle of the way experience. Much of our prayers are quiet and contemplative, and even when the prayer team and pastoral team lay hands on people to pray, prayer is not done in loud decibels. A gentle approach and simply praying for healing and breakthrough often brings forth the miracles of God in people’s lives.

## **Weaving the Context Together**

The vision statement of CUMC is “A community of people transformed by God’s grace in order to transform the world with his grace.” It has been a few years of building a foundation of grace in the church. The legacy Chesterbrook congregation spoke much of God’s love and grace but lacked an explicit message regarding Jesus Christ. The VOPC congregation, as far as any of the longstanding members could remember, had no experience of learning what it means to be Methodist and hold to a Wesleyan theology and tradition, and to believe in the gospel of grace. In the beginning, as grace was being preached every single Sunday, people would say, “Ok. We get it. What’s next?” Of course, that is a sign that people do not understand grace. There is the story of C.S. Lewis, who wandered into a room where an intense debate about the uniqueness of Christianity was taking place. People could not conclude, whether it was about the incarnation, resurrection, or other themes. Lewis proceeded to ask what the commotion was about and heard about the debate, and Lewis simply stated, “Oh that’s easy. It’s grace.”<sup>47</sup>

It took about three years for the congregation as a whole to start understanding that grace is the entire framework and substance of the gospel. It is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion in the world. This is especially challenging for a demographic of people who are high achievers. There is great value and worth derived from high achievement. Grace tells people that high achievement is not enough, just like Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18. When people boast in their

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<sup>47</sup> “What’s So Amazing About Grace? Part 1.” ChristianityToday.com. Date Published: June 28, 2017. Date Accessed: May 02, 2019. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1997/october6/7tb52a.html>.

high achievement, Jesus will always say, “You still lack one thing.”<sup>48</sup> Grace drives people away from self-achievement and moves people on to trusting in Christ’s achievement. This idea was hammered away week after week for the first three years in the pulpit, discussed deeply in small groups, prayed through, and implemented into the discipleship culture of the church from pastoral team, lay leadership team to how people are brought into the ministry of the church.

The question that the pastors and lay leadership of the church have been asking is, “Now what?” The answer to such a question can be addressed by creating new programs or projects that implement some idea of the culture of grace, as well as exploring how a culture of grace can infiltrate into the very rhythms of the church life and the very structure of the church. Both are necessary for developing a church community truly embodied by grace. Much like a physical body, the bones, muscles, organs, and systems need to be in harmony with each other to be healthy and effective. In the same way, the programs and projects need to be undergirded by rhythms and systems that are saturated by grace. The first rhythm and system of grace would be to remember and reintroduce a culture of Sabbath.

In *Subversive Sabbath* by A.J. Swoboda, the importance of sabbath is discussed, and it is particularly important to the life of the congregation at CUMC and the pace of life in the surrounding community. Swoboda writes:

“When all is said and done, the worst thing that has happened to the Sabbath is religion. Religion is hostile to gifts. Religion hates free stuff. Religion squanders

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<sup>48</sup> Luke 18:22.

the good gifts of God by trying to earn them, which is why we will never really enjoy a sacred day of rest as long as we think our religion is all about earning.”<sup>49</sup>

Religion is anti-grace. It is a pro-earning culture. Sabbath culture is pro-grace culture. It is an anti-earning culture. Religion and Sabbath cultures cannot coexist. In order for God’s grace and healing to flow in the life of an individual or a church, it is imperative to first understand and experience Sabbath. Resting demands people to trust that forces beyond themselves will continue to work without their active involvement. Resting takes the mantle of trusting oneself and places it on God to orchestrate and work in bigger and better ways than the individual. Resting also causes the individual to be placed into the community and be cared for. Rest is healing.

It is common for the people in the Northern Virginia area to live overscheduled, fast-paced lives that do not even get a break on weekends. There is a common trend to get on vacation in every possible opportunity and looking for every opportunity to “get away” from life only to come back more stressed from the vacation and having to readjust back into the fast-paced, overscheduled life again. What effect does this have on the rhythm of life at CUMC? The church ministry is largely a weekend or even Sunday-only type of church. The weekdays are almost impossible to schedule something regular. People can make time once in a while (i.e., once a month or every other month). Those who can make the weekday small group or discipleship class are either retired or single professionals or students who do not have any regular family commitments. As a result, it is common for many folks in the congregation to try and fit in the practice of Christian disciplines on a Sunday with Sunday worship service, fellowship over lunch, followed by

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<sup>49</sup> A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), Kindle Edition, Location 136.

Bible study or small group, and sometimes even an evening gathering at someone's home. This would be in line with the idea of bingeing. According to the Google dictionary, "binge" means "a short period devoted to indulging in an activity to excess, especially drinking alcohol or eating."<sup>50</sup> We can appropriate this definition to this intense practice of Christianity on Sundays and call it "binging on Christianity" or "binge Christianity." Even Sabbath becomes work, and the idea of rest is lost. All this Christian activity becomes a restless culture. Sabbath is forgotten. Swoboda writes, "Sabbath forgetfulness is driven, so often, in the name of doing stuff *for* God rather than *being with* God."<sup>51</sup> It is easy to mistake "doing things" for God as a Sabbath. Even Sabbath has become work. We have what Swoboda calls "Sabbath amnesia," to which he writes, "The result of our Sabbath amnesia is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history."<sup>52</sup> What must be done in CUMC? What message, practice and culture must be implemented in the life of the congregation? How will that affect the surrounding communities? Sabbath must be reintroduced. It is very countercultural, but it must be reintroduced and practiced. This begins with pastoral leadership.

The pastoral staff also reside and function according to the Northern Virginia culture and life. In the fast-paced culture, it is easy to be constantly on the go and expect others to do the same. Swoboda calls out pastoral leaders on the lack of rest in the rhythm of life lived out by the church community. Swoboda writes, "Because we pastors rarely

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<sup>50</sup> "Definition of Binge." Google Search. Date Accessed: May 2, 2019. <https://www.google.com/search?q=define+binge>.

<sup>51</sup> Swoboda, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Swoboda, 5.

practice Sabbath, we rarely preach the Sabbath. And because we do not preach the Sabbath, our congregations are not challenged to take it seriously themselves.”<sup>53</sup> Starting with the pastors of CUMC, the practice of Sabbath must be done well and taught. Creating a culture of grace begins with a culture of rest. A culture of healing is built on a culture of rest. A culture of rest is a culture of faith. It is the idea of surrender. It is much like the parable of the growing seed found in the Gospel of Mark chapter 4, which says, “And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.’”<sup>54</sup> This is faith. There is an acceptance that the farmer cannot do anything to actually make the seed sprout and grow into a harvest bearing crop. Therefore, the farmer must surrender to all the forces outside of himself. For the church to become like the seed that germinates, grows, and bears a great harvest, it is important to practice rest. It is important to practice trust in God and will make the plant grow. God will make our lives grow and bear fruit.

One of the hindrances to the ways in which people can continually trust in God and practice Sabbath is the trend and direction of the world around. In *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Yuval Noah Harari writes about the trend the world is facing. The first trend that is a hindrance to Sabbath is regarding the extinction of human usefulness. Harari does this first by explaining how there have been three main narratives or stories that have governed people’s lives throughout human history. Somehow, each person or society could fit their story into those principal narratives. However, Harari believes that

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<sup>53</sup> Swoboda, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Mark 4:26-27.

those three narratives (fascist, communist, and liberal) have become obsolete through major events in human history. He writes, “In 1938 humans were offered three global stories to choose from, in 1968 just two, and in 1998 a single story seemed to prevail. In 2018 we are down to zero.”<sup>55</sup> The loss of story has left people aimless and terrified in making sense of where people are headed in the course of human history. This produces a frantic and anxiety-ridden culture with people desperately trying to find “meaning” in life. In doing so, many different avenues are pursued. Perhaps one is to simply keep busy, become significant in some measure, and leave a lasting testament of one’s life as having accomplished as much as they could.

The second trend that hinders the Sabbath is connected to the loss of story. It is the idea that the work that human beings do is becoming more obsolete as society continues to progress. Through the advent of machines and artificial intelligence (AI), the work that was once meaningful and required of human beings is not only shifting but becoming lost. What happens when people perceive themselves to become useless?

Harari writes:

Humans have two types of abilities—physical and cognitive. In the past, machines competed with humans mainly in raw physical abilities, while humans retained an immense edge over machines in cognition. Therefore, as manual jobs in agriculture and industry were automated, new service jobs emerged that required the kind of cognitive skills only humans possessed: learning, analyzing, communicating, and above all understanding human emotions. However, AI is now beginning to outperform humans in more and more of these skills, including in the understanding of human emotions. We don’t know of any third field of activity—beyond the physical and the cognitive—where humans will always retain a secure edge.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2018), Kindle Edition, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Harari, 19.

Given the opportunities for top-level education in the Northern Virginia area, families more want to make sure that children are given the most amount of experiences possible to help prepare children for a future that is yet unpredictable. Nearly all those in CUMC who are employed are high-level specialists in their individual fields of their careers. There is a lack of general practitioners in any of the careers represented in the congregation. If there is an engineer, it is an engineer who designs rockets. If there is a physician, it is a cardiologist who also teaches in medical school or a cardiologist who is trained in business management of hospitals and medical groups. These are but a few examples. There are also lawyers and other medical professionals who are in highly specialized areas of their careers. Understanding the high level of specialty that parents have in the congregation, one can imagine what will be the case for their children. They are keenly aware of the trends in their own respective fields. The days of the general practitioner are diminishing, and the days of the highly-trained specialists are here. As Harari mentions that there is no “third field of activity,” it is easy to think that in order to secure oneself in the future, one must become as specialized as possible in a field that will not be replaced by machines or artificial intelligence.

Perhaps it is here that the people of CUMC can come to recognize that the realm of the spirit, the faith life is an arena that technological advances or any kind of material advances of the world can never replace. Areas of spirituality, ethics, and religion will become vital to the felt needs of entire generations that will experience the ripple effect of manual and cognitive means of putting bread on the table becoming obsolete. There lies the great potential for a faith community that is keenly aware of the trends of the secular working world to commit all the more to life in Christ so that they can navigate

the uncertainties of such a world with success. If the concerns laid out by Harari can be addressed by the church, it opens up an entire mission field of Northern Virginia culture that might not be a recognized mission field today. If story has been lost, it is the most opportune time to connect people to God's story. If usefulness is lost, it is the most opportune time to connect people to God's purpose. This can only be discovered through the practice of Sabbath. In essence, the culture of Sabbath, an ancient tradition, must be reintroduced, reoriented, and reinstated so that a future culture of loss can be redeemed and the ministry of the church can become vital again.

In *So Beautiful*, Leonard Sweet provides a vital framework to help churches become more vital in their witness, and it certainly works for developing a culture of Sabbath, or a culture of grace. Sweet first introduces the idea of APC churches (likened after the APC pill in World War II). APC churches are those churches that emphasize “‘A’ for Attractional, ‘P’ for Propositional, and ‘C’ for Colonial.” Sweet writes, “Some things can be good for you for a short time but bad for you over the long haul. In fact, some things can make your church grow fast and big in months and years, and yet over decades can have debilitating effects on the body of Christ, and even kill you if not kill your spirit.”<sup>57</sup> While in the short term, APC churches might have hype and high energy, it can become toxic, having more debilitating effects. This is because the idea of “attractional” is to put on a show that entices and entertains, but does not guarantee the substance that will carry out the longevity of the organization. An attractional church is likely to put on a great show on Sundays but runs the risk of not creating the relationships necessary to guarantee the long-term health of the congregation. It is quite a passive

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<sup>57</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 18.

approach that waits for people to come to the church community. There is no active seeking and engagement of people. As a result, relationships are not formed as they ought to. Practically speaking, if a church goes out and brings people into the community of Christ, there is an engaging relational investment of the church. However, if an individual enters the church without a personal invitation, there is no “glue” that holds the church together. The practice of actively inviting people to the church creates relational investments that go much farther than a passive waiting for people to come.

Five years earlier, the goal of Chesterbrook was to make sure there is a strong worship service for people to attend and a system of small groups for people to participate in. The faultiness of this idea was that there was no system put in place for the people to actively participate in being missional to their respective communities. These communities can be defined as people geographically close to the church building or the different spheres of influence they have in their lives. One of the temptations to counter the APC way of doing Christian life and church is to think of doing better or more. Sweet’s book states otherwise.

Sweet introduces the counter paradigm to the APC model by explaining what he calls the MRI way of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. He writes that while the first “threeness” that is important to Christian life is the Holy Trinity, the second most important would be MRI, which stands for missional, relational, and incarnational.<sup>58</sup> To sum up his explanation of these three words, the focus is not on doing more or doing better. Rather, it a matter of living that stems from a sense of being. Sweet writes, “Missional is not a program arm of the church or a line item in the budget. It is living a

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<sup>58</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 26.

life born in the very being of God... Relationships are not something the church does. Relationships are what faith is. Incarnation is not something the church does. It is how the church lives.”<sup>59</sup> The trouble that CUMC can easily run into is the idea that the church needs to do more to become relevant or to be more effective as a church. The same goes for individuals. The temptation is to be more relevant or effective as a Christian. Suppose the people of CUMC can be deeply transfigured into the life of Jesus Christ, the missional, relational, and incarnational flows out of that new identity in Jesus Christ. This idea begs the church to stop trying to add more or innovate. It begs the church to know who they are and live accordingly.

CUMC is then brought back to the idea of Sabbath rest, a mindset of surrender, a way of life that demands faith in the amazing grace of God. It is precisely this encounter with God’s grace that can produce a change in identity that in turn, produces the effectiveness of church and life. Sweet writes, “The church can never be ‘on a mission’ because that presupposes an ‘off’ switch, and you can’t be ‘off mission’ and still be a church. The church is mission.”<sup>60</sup> In the same vein, we can say that the church is mission, the church is relational, and the church is incarnational. CUMC needs to be redefined in its identity, not in its doing, for in its identity, the congregation will organically flow in the function of the church to be missional, relational, and incarnational. To do so requires people to rest themselves in Christ. Resting or basking in Christ and his love will cause people to know who they are and live accordingly. This will cause the gospel experience to be authentic and natural to everyone.

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<sup>59</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 64.

What is the practical step for CUMC to implement these ideas? The role of the pastor is key because pastors can shepherd a congregation through the shifts and changes necessary to be a people of Sabbath as Swoboda describes or an MRI people as Sweet explains, and effectively interface the world that Harari imagines will be in the future. The idea is that CUMC can go beyond “keeping up with the times” and prophetically prepare the congregation to live the life of Christ and engage a world that is to come. This happens through rest. By resting, people become open to a new MRI identity and way of living. A new MRI identity and way of living yields the power of the gospel. Should the world be as Harari imagines, there will always be a spiritual void to fill. This is the mighty calling of the Church! The key is to be disciples who live in the rhythms of grace as embodied in Swoboda’s book and Sweet’s book.

In the COVID-19 pandemic world we live in, CUMC has discovered a “need” that the congregation has. It is the need to be missional. It is the need to serve others. It is the need to see the world around and be able to offer the world something. Perhaps it is the “rest” that the congregation has been experiencing during the pandemic where everyone is forced to stay home, and other obligations have been canceled that there is “room” for people to do something about the grace-starved world we live in. As unemployment is on the rise, the fear of pandemic related deaths, problems of elder care with death and dying, and the uncertainties of the economy and education, the CUMC congregation who find themselves in places of privilege, have become awakened to the positioning they have to serve. The most impactful moment during the pandemic took place in the wake of the death of George Floyd. This caused the CUMC congregation to move into action regarding racial justice. The congregation formed an ad hoc committee

on racial justice and has begun the process of education, awareness building, and participating in the different action steps towards a more just and equitable world. This phenomenon has revealed what rest, even if it is a “forced” rest, can do to the bandwidth, awareness, and level of engagement of missional living. There is an urgent hunger to be healers to one another and healers to the greater community beyond the local church. The beauty of this is that this “hunger” for living missionally has risen up from the congregation instead of being prescribed from the clergy or lay leadership. Yet, there is a role of leadership in living missionally.

What can pastors do? *We Have This Ministry*, authored by Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor, provides insights into the role of the pastor in this process. First, the teaching role of the pastor is very important. In the context of CUMC’s ministry, it is imperative that pastors draw people to God, not to the self or anyone else. Proctor writes:

Pastors can teach about the central place God is to occupy in our lives by how the worship services direct our attention toward God. This splendid teaching opportunity should not be wasted in pulpit trivia and in endless small talk about persons’ dress, hobbies, cooking, vacations, new cars, and social life. There is always room for a little spice and humor, but too much focus on such trivia teaches the people that are focusing on God is an afterthought, to be pursued if any time is left.<sup>61</sup>

When God is an afterthought, it only reinforces the anti-Sabbath culture that which the people of CUMC and Northern Virginia live in. Instead of drawing people to the amazing life in Christ, it gives permission for the people of God to avoid rest. By avoiding rest, the richness of identity in Christ is left undiscovered. Pastors of CUMC must take seriously the opportunity of teaching given to them at the pulpit on every occasion. The COVID-19

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<sup>61</sup> Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor, *We Have This Ministry: The Heart of the Pastor’s Vocation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996), 26-27.

pandemic has given rise to the context of the congregation to make use of their restfulness and be missional in their living. The pastoral team has found this as an opportune time to teach the congregation to be more God-focused.

Another part of the life of CUMC is the meetings that take place. Whether leadership meetings, board meetings, or planning meetings. Very often, the culture of the meetings is more secular than spiritual. Taylor writes:

Some Christian people who have gotten into the corporate structure want the church to take on the standards of these perishing orders in conducting the life of the church of Jesus Christ. . . . Many contemporary churches have also embrace the idea of testing the waters before trying anything new. They conduct feasibility studies before undertaking new projects instead of working under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. People who are going to lead do not call people to a vision. They hold up the mirror of a poll and see what is there, taking their cue and planning direction from the poll.<sup>62</sup>

When the administrative culture of the church is not conducted in a manner that is dependent on the wisdom and know-how of human beings, it teaches the church that faith in Jesus Christ is something that is only done in worship or prayer meetings, but not in the day-to-day functions of life. Administration or organization is something done by everyone from the corporate organizational level to the personal choices made each day. It is perhaps of great importance that especially in the area of church administration that there is a strong sense of being led by the Holy Spirit. The pastor has a key role in establishing such a culture.

The current lay leadership team has met weekly with me this calendar year. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, these weekly meetings have been very crucial to navigating the difficult and complicated decisions that have been made throughout the year. There have

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<sup>62</sup> Proctor and Taylor, 52.

been many moments of the spirit of the conversation to become more secular, and it has proven to be vital to bring the conversation into the focus of the gospel and through the lens of faith. By doing this, the administrative leadership of the church has been growing in the area of seeing administration as discipleship and as a form of spiritual leadership.

### **Connecting the Context to Healing**

The question before the COVID-19 pandemic was: What would happen in the life of CUMC if the themes discussed in this chapter were put into practice? The thought was that there is a clear potential for great ministry of the gospel through CUMC. However, a clear understanding of cultural context must be taken into consideration so that ministry is not just a collection of “great ideas.” There must be an intersection of theory, praxis, and context. The context of CUMC and McLean speaks of people who need rest. It speaks of people who live in an anti-grace culture. Rest and grace go together. Rest and healing go together. Starting with the pastoral team, there can be a strong concerted effort towards raising up a Sabbath people so that an MRI way of being and living can take place. This can position the church to be most effectively ready to interface a world that Harari declares is soon coming and already here. If CUMC remembers Sabbath as resting in God and discovers their identity as an MRI people, the effect would be significant for the gospel in this world today. The people of CUMC can make significant strides towards fulfilling their vision statement, which is to be a community of people transformed by God’s grace in order to transform the world with His grace.

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, there are clear examples of what would indeed happen if the people of CUMC does in fact, rest. Rest has brought about sharper

focus to the people and causing them to realize what is truly a priority in life. It has awakened a strong desire to be missional with their lives. People have become more aware of the ways that others are hurting and how they can be part of bringing Christ's healing presence and power into their lives. This could be in regards to providing 150 bags of essential items to a missional partner that serves the poorest communities in Washington, D.C., sending relief aid to a small village that we have adopted as our mission field in Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, taking care of grocery shopping for the elderly who are vulnerable to COVID-19, providing grief counseling/small group communities to those who are struggling with elder care or seeing their elders pass onto glory, or praying for miraculous physical healing upon those who are physically hurting. The CUMC community has become more missional than it has ever been in the last five years due to being a restful people. In the effort to be missional in the 2020 Thanksgiving season during the COVID-19 pandemic, CUMC had a goal to prepare 150 Thanksgiving meals for the poorest communities in Southwest Washington, D.C. However, the congregation decided to be evangelistic with this missional goal and began to invite people to the cause and was able to provide Thanksgiving meals to 230 families. Such a missional mindset and longing is the right context to be in so that a community of people who pray for healing can be raised up.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEOLOGY

### **Defining “Divine Healing Prayer”**

“Divine Healing Prayer” is defined by separating the phrase into three parts. This section more clearly defines this phrase. The idea of divine healing prayer is the spiritual practice of prayer that looks to God for healing.

“Divine” refers to the Triune God. One of the practices that I teach in my ministry settings is to pray to our Heavenly Father to bring forth miraculous healing through the Holy Spirit's power, and we ask for this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son. This is because Jesus taught us to ask of the Father in his name.<sup>63</sup> It is important to emphasize “divine” in this practice of healing prayer. John Wimber writes:

When describing Christian healing, I find it most helpful to use the term ‘divine healing.’ What I mean by divine healing should not be confused with Mary Baker Eddy’s teaching on healing. Christian Science rejects the idea of a *personal* God, whereas Christianity teaches that Christ is God, the Second Person of the Trinity—fully God and fully man. Jesus is neither like the impersonal “It” of Eastern religions nor the vague Moral Principal of many modern theologians.<sup>64</sup>

It is important to note that terms such as “miracle healing, faith healing, supernatural healing, or psychic healing” are not adequate enough to use because it takes away from the specificity of divine healing as referring to the Triune God. In the process of training Christians on how to pray for healing, it is important that the focus and attention are put upon God to manifest God’s divine presence and power.

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<sup>63</sup> John 16:23.

<sup>64</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco:Harper & Row, 1987), 6.

The divine work of healing that is being asked for in prayer is often understood as limited to only God doing some kind of miraculous or supernatural work of healing.<sup>65</sup> While this is certainly a part of divine healing, it is important to also allow for the divine ways that God uses medical science to provide for healing. For example, sometimes, God's divine healing can be through a "divine appointment" of a specific surgeon in a specific hospital center that works to bring healing to an individual. Francis MacNutt writes in *Healing*, "Medicine and prayer are not opposed, but the doctor, the nurse, the pharmacist, and the person with the gift of healing all together form God's healing team."<sup>66</sup>

"Healing" is the specific manifestation or activity that is being asked for in the practice of divine healing prayer. This practice is not about asking God for a breakthrough, provision, or any other kind of matter. It is specifically in regards to healing. Healing is equivalent to salvation. In the New Testament, the word "save" is *sózó*, which means to heal. A theology of salvation must include a theology of healing. Healing can be in the forms of physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, relational, etc. The point is to pray for a healing of some form. In fact, healing is about wholeness, and there is an interconnection between all the aspects of the self. The purpose of healing is for the wholeness of the person. Francis MacNutt writes:

"Every time a sick person came to him in faith, Jesus healed that person. He did not divide human beings, as we so often do, into a soul to be saved and healed and a body that is to suffer and remain unhealed until the next life and resurrection. We are the ones who talk about "saving souls," but nowhere in the New

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<sup>65</sup> Wimber and Springer, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1999), 206.

Testament does it say that Christ came to save souls; he came to save human beings—body and soul.”<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, when Christians practice divine healing prayer, the purpose is to request healing in some form because every healing is part of the wholeness of the person.

“Prayer” is the activity that the Christian is practicing in the context of divine healing prayer. While this practice is to look to God in faith for the specific request of healing, the action point that people exercise is prayer. Prayer is being defined here according to the New Testament Greek word for “to pray,” “*proseuchomai*,” which means to exchange wishes.<sup>68</sup> In the practice of divine healing prayer, to pray is to lift up the concerns and wishes for healing and to receive God’s answer, a healing. Prayer is being exercised as an act of faith to the Triune God (going back to the “divine” part of this practice) and asking for healing to manifest or be made possible.

In addition, as this is an act of prayer, it is also important to emphasize that the act of prayer takes the burden of action away from the person and places it upon God. Often there is a fear that praying for healing might not produce answers that are sought after, and thus making the prayer person embarrassed or even disillusioned in faith. Yet, that is antithetical to the act of prayer in and of itself. Prayer is about looking to God. It is, as defined earlier, the act of exchanges our wishes with God’s wishes. The practice of divine healing prayer stands on the act of God, not on the act of the human being. Jack Deere writes in *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, “If we will be careful to give the Lord glory for every healing, every miracle, and every answer to prayer, then he is willing to

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<sup>67</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Bible Hub, “*proseuchomai*,” Date Accessed: November 2, 2020, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4336.htm>

take all the blame for those who don't get healed.”<sup>69</sup> The act of praying necessitates for the practice of divine healing prayer to be that of exercising faith in God. The focus, the trajectory, the purpose is towards God.

### **Theological Conversations on the Challenges to Healing Miracles**

Going beyond the theological understanding of defining “divine healing prayer,” there are some theological hurdles to overcome in order to actively practice divine healing prayer. These hurdles are a part of the theology and worldview that the people of Chesterbrook United Methodist Church have. They are the following: naturalism, elitism, cessationism, and theological determinism. All of these theologies and worldviews stand in contrast to a Wesleyan theological viewpoint, which I propose that we need in order to most effectively engage in the practice of divine healing prayer.

### **Wesleyan Theology as an Inclusivist Foundation to Divine Healing Prayer**

The project stands on a Wesleyan theological foundation. It is from this theological viewpoint that I posit the idea that all Christians can be actively engaged in the practice of divine healing prayer. It is not reserved for an elite group of Christians. It is not something we should cease practicing. It is not something that we should give up on the basis of determinism. The following is a summation of the Wesleyan theological viewpoint and how Wesleyan theology makes possible the greatest number of people to be included in the practice of divine healing prayer.

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<sup>69</sup> Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: Discovering How God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 124.

*On Wesleyan Tradition and Inclusivism*

Wesleyan theology is built on “the foundational teachings about the universal human need for grace and the universal availability of grace.”<sup>70</sup> In addition, it is important to note that John Wesley commonly experienced supernatural occurrences in his ministry, along with many other Methodists throughout the movement. Wesley wrote about his supernatural experiences in his journals and letters.<sup>71</sup> One letter records John Wesley stating that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are common to those who are justified and sanctified. Wesley writes that after justification, a Christian receives one gift, but a sanctified Christian receives five.<sup>72</sup> Thomas C. Oden writes in *John Wesley’s Teachings, Volume 2: Christ and Salvation*, “Wesley taught that the gift of the Spirit is the common entitlement of all who have faith, all who are adopted into the family of God.”<sup>73</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not extraordinarily available to Christians, but ordinarily available to all Christians. It is on this foundation of universal availability of grace, the ordinarily available work of the Holy Spirit, and the commonness of supernatural occurrences that were part of the historic Methodist movement, that allow for an inclusivist, or an including message. With such a message, Christians can actively engage in the practice of divine healing prayer.

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<sup>70</sup> Ted Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: the Essentials* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 59.

<sup>71</sup> Daniel Jennings, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* (Sean Media, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>72</sup> John Wesley, “Letters to Miss Ritchie, Letter II,” Written on June 3, 1774, from *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (New York: J & J Harper, 1827), 377.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings, Volume 2: Christ and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2012), 119.

This dissertation and project posit the idea that every Christian, on the basis of his or her identity in Christ, is positioned and given authority to pray for divine healing. As a result, the Christian can witness God's divine power at work. The practice of healing prayer is not reserved for an exclusive group of Christians, nor is it a superstitious act. Instead of depending on someone who has a special supernatural gift of healing or viewing healing and wholeness only through the lens of naturalism, this project presupposes that the power of divine healing is available to every Christian through prayer. A key question in training Christians for the practice of divine healing prayer is, "What is the relationship between Christian baptismal identity and the effectiveness of healing prayer?" If one believes that he or she has died and risen with Christ, it grants the believer the spiritual authority and righteous positioning to pray for divine healing.

### **"God As Healer" vs. "God Always Heals"**

It is vital to this work to recognize the difference between the idea of "God as healer" and "God always heals." Theology matters in that if one believes God as healer, then while it asserts that God is able to heal and God does the work of healing as a healer, it does not make the declaration that God always heals. However, if one believes God always heals, then it guides the believer to a deeper and broader understanding of healing. If God always heals, then the believer must come to a new understanding of even death. Death is often viewed as a failure of healing, but a theology that says, "God always heals," causes people to think differently about death. Sweet writes, "Death is the final

healing act.”<sup>74</sup> What is it about the Christian faith and gospel message that will help people to see that death is actually a final act of healing? To begin with, salvation must be understood as healing. Sweet explains that William Tyndale “demonstrated over and over again in his pioneering 1525 translation of the Bible from Greek into English, ‘health’ and ‘salvation’ are synonyms.”<sup>75</sup> Second, if healing is salvation, then healing is always happening. There is always some work of healing taking place to those who are saved.

Sweet writes:

“God always heals. There is no ‘good death’ or ‘beautiful death,’ but there is beauty and goodness in the healing that comes from God when the other divine instruments of healing (medicine, physicians, body as a healing organism, etc.) have played themselves out. In this sense, the Tyndale translation “salvation” (from “salve” a healing lotion or oil) as “health” or “healing” is correct, since that’s what Jesus’ death on the cross gives us: wholeness and healing.”<sup>76</sup>

This is much in line with John Wesley’s understanding of glorifying grace as “final salvation.”<sup>77</sup> The act of God’s grace moving people through the threshold of death from this present material world to the very glory of the presence of Jesus, Wesley described as “glorifying grace.”<sup>78</sup> It is the glorifying grace of God that brings final salvation or fulfillment of salvation in an individual’s life.<sup>79</sup> This dissertation proposes that it is better to say” “final healing,” in light of *sózó* that explains salvation as healing. Sweet writes,

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<sup>74</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Health and Medicine in the Evangelical Tradition: “Not By Might Nor Power”* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 183.

<sup>75</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life* (Nashville, Abingdon, Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>76</sup> Leonard Sweet, Email to author, December 3, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p 340, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.html>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Trinklein, 248.

“John Wesley observed that ‘our people die well.’ By this he meant more than resignation to death: ‘Thus may we all our parting breath into the Saviour’s hands resign: O Jesu, let me die her death, and let her latter end be mine!’”<sup>80</sup> The Wesleyan theological framework and teaching provides for Christians a viewpoint that transforms death from failure of healing to the most ultimate view of healing.

Equipped with such an understanding of the theology of healing enables Christians to pray without fear of prayers unanswered. It actually empowers and emboldens people to pray with greater fervor in regards to healing because such a theology allows for Christians to believe that even in death, there is healing. In fact, in death, there is the greatest healing. It is not a “matter of life and death, but life and life.”<sup>81</sup>

### **The Need for Holistic Spiritual Interfacing**

Gordon T. Smith’s work, *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal*, is very important to this practice of divine healing prayer. The Chesterbrook United Methodist congregation engages spiritual interfacing with Scripture, sacraments, and Spirit-led experiences in a holistic manner. Smith uses the terms: evangelical, sacramental, and pentecostal to describe the above-mentioned interfacing ways.

In regards to evangelical, the congregation holds Scripture in high regard. Therefore, sermons, Bible studies, and daily devotions are very important to the spiritual formation and reasoning needed to enter into the practice of healing prayer. However, there are significant segments of the congregation that are sacramental. They are

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<sup>80</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Health and Medicine in the Evangelical Tradition*, 184-185.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

Christians with a Catholic background or a traditional liturgical background. In addition, sacramental engagement causes spiritual formation to become tangible and experiential. There are also Christians with a charismatic and Pentecostal background. Every Sunday sermon ends with an invitation to prayer, which is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to manifest in a meaningful way. There is also a common practice of altar calls, to which people come up to receive anointing oil and laying on of hands. This is an opportunity for something pentecostal to take place in the life of the church.

Smith writes that it is entirely possible and actually enriching for the Christian to experience God in all three ways.<sup>82</sup> This is especially important because recognizing the reality that Christians interface divine experience in different ways necessitated the project to be holistic in engagement. Therefore, the sermons, Bible study, and daily devotions have content that is holistic in teaching and holistic in practice. The purpose of being holistic is to explore the idea that the practice of divine healing prayer is accessible for every Christian.

### **The Use of Sacraments in Healing**

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, agreed with the Anglican teaching that a sacrament is “an outward sign of an inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.”<sup>83</sup> This idea is actually attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo.<sup>84</sup> The sacraments of

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<sup>82</sup> Gordon T. Smith, *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal: Why The Church Should Be All Three* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2017), 132.

<sup>83</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton, *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997), 13.

<sup>84</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 219.

Baptism and Communion are discussed as means through which divine healing prayer can be practiced.

### *Holy Communion*

One of the “tools” used to practice divine healing prayer is participation in Holy Communion. In the participation of Holy Communion, people become conscious of their forgiveness and God’s pardoning love in Christ’s redeeming work on the cross. Believers are reminded of their righteousness. The theological understanding of Holy Communion affects how people experience Christ through partaking in Holy Communion. For some Christians, the bread and cup remain as just bread and cup, and the act of partaking in Holy Communion is found more in “remembering” what Christ has done. For United Methodists, the bread and cup are not just bread and cup. It is considered a Holy Mystery in that the presence of the Holy Spirit comes upon the bread and cup to make the bread and grape juice to “be for us the body and blood of Christ.”<sup>85</sup> Holy Communion, then has the divine presence and power of the Holy Spirit infused about it in some mysterious and spiritual way. Those who hold to this idea understand that partaking in Holy Communion is a deeply spiritual and powerful experience.

Gayle Carlton Felton explains the United Methodist view on Holy Communion in the following way:

“Through Eucharist, we receive healing and are enabled to aid in the healing of others. *Sozo*, the root word used in the New Testament for ‘healing,’ is also translated as ‘salvation’ and ‘wholeness.’ Much of this healing is spiritual, but it also includes the healing of our thoughts and emotions, of our minds and bodies,

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<sup>85</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), 74.

of our attitudes and relationships. The grace received at the Table of the Lord can make us whole.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to connecting Holy Communion to salvation as wholeness and healing, United Methodists view this healing as pertaining to every kind of situation. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* states:

“Spiritual healing is God’s work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through such healing, God works to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, among individuals and communities, within each person, and between humanity and the rest of creation.”<sup>87</sup>

When Holy Communion is viewed as a means through which healing is conveyed, experienced, and actually materialized, then the use of Holy Communion becomes a way by which participants will look to for experiencing answers to divine healing prayer.

Furthermore, the host and the meal of Holy Communion is Jesus Christ. Christ is the host of the table, and he invites us to partake of his body and blood. Therefore, it is an encounter with Christ himself. If so, then as Christ’s ministry was a ministry of healing, and we encounter him in Holy Communion, then the partaking of Holy Communion must be viewed as an experience of healing.

Is the experience of healing through the participation in Holy Communion limited only to a Wesleyan understanding of Christ’s presence at the Table? Going beyond a Methodist understanding, Francis MacNutt writes:

“Although the different churches hold different understandings of how Christ is present, almost all churches have some way of celebrating the Lord’s Supper (the

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<sup>86</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, 20-21.

<sup>87</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 613.

eucharist). Traditionally, the eucharist (meaning ‘thanksgiving’) has always been seen as a sacrament that brings healing.”<sup>88</sup>

There is perhaps a certain mysterious element to this understanding as theologically speaking, there are viewpoints where Christ is not present in the elements of the Holy Communion, but the experience of Holy Communion is more viewed as a memorial, an act of remembrance. However, the mystery of healing is that it is not limited to human understanding of Holy Communion, but rather God’s enactment of healing to the one who is seeking healing. In other words, perhaps in this theological conversation on the use of Holy Communion in practicing divine healing prayers, the human understanding of what exactly happens to the bread and the grape juice is less of a matter than the activity of the Holy Spirit at work through the partaking of Holy Communion. Therefore, what is most important is viewing Holy Communion itself as a means through which God’s healing power can be received.

### *Our Baptismal Identity*

As baptism is regarded as a sacrament, it is important to recognize that in the act of baptism, there is an inward work that is taking place in the action of entering the waters of baptism. There are two things that happen at baptism. First, the believer joins Christ in death and resurrection. Second, the believer is ordained to the general ministry of the church. Gayle Carlton Felton writes, “Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit... We die to our old nature which

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<sup>88</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 221.

was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, it is important to consider this understanding because it is precisely our baptismal identity that declares that we have joined Christ in his death and risen with him in resurrection. The hope of final salvation or final healing in the Wesleyan tradition matters greatly to provide hope for healing in this world and into eternity. An identity that is rooted in the hope of eternity and final salvation offers Christians a calling that is connected to such a hope.

Baptismal identity provides Christians with a sense of calling. If baptism has a strong element of healing, and salvation is understood as healing, then there is a calling for Christians to be engaged in the ministry of healing. Felton also writes, “Baptism is our ordination into the general ministry of the church.” The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church supports this by stating that the mission of the church is to make disciples by “healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, it is the calling of all baptized Christians to be involved in the work of healing. How often do Christians view themselves as agents of healing in this world? This kind of theological conversation is important to enable Christians to practice divine healing prayer. The idea is that if Christians see themselves as agents of healing, they will engage in the work of healing and pray for divine healing.

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<sup>89</sup> Felton, *By Water and Spirit*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 94.

## The Use of Anointing Oil

Anointing oil is not a sacrament in the United Methodist Church, but it is considered a sacrament in the Roman Catholic tradition. Although Pentecostal churches are non-sacramental, there is a heavy emphasis and high value placed on the use of anointing oil for healing prayer.<sup>91</sup> In fact, if there is any “tool” that is most directly used for divine healing prayer, it is the use of anointing oil. Gayle Carlton Felton writes, “In the Bible, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, anointing was a sign of healing (Mark 6:13 and James 5:14), of hospitality and love (Luke 7:36-50), and of the claiming and equipping by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and 1 John 2:20, 27).<sup>92</sup> There is a belief in the United Methodist Church that consecration by anointing oil and laying on of hands invokes the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sweet writes about how important it is to make use of anointing oil to provide new meaning for the symbol and word, “oil.” He writes:

The symbolism of “oil” –which today sends us to do the battle in the world (plans, tanks, ships) or in the workplace (cars) and is literally *exhausting* our earth to death—will be invested with new meaning through healing and anointing rituals, both the oil of healing and the oil of health (or “gladness”).<sup>93</sup>

Downing’s work on signs can be helpful to further explain the importance of providing a new symbol for oil. In a world where oil symbolizes the source of wars and ecological crises, (re)signing oil as healing is powerful. This new signing of oil must be claimed by the church. Downing writes, “the signs Christians use reflect the influence of both Christ

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<sup>91</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 223.

<sup>92</sup> Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Sweet, *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life*, 184.

and culture.”<sup>94</sup> (Re)signing can powerfully transform the meaning of oil, its symbol, and its effect from destruction to healing.

MacNutt writes in regards to James 5:14, “The intended effect of the anointing is healing of sickness, whether bodily or spiritual, including sins if need be.”<sup>95</sup> The use of anointing oil has been misconstrued for spiritual purposes and not for the healing of sickness (of all kinds). This is largely due to the result of a mistranslation of the word by St. Jerome used in James 5:15 as “save.”<sup>96</sup> While the Greek word “sózó” means heal, the Latin word “salvo,” which means save, was used to translate “sózó.” Therefore, for approximately 1500 years, the translation did not read, “The prayer of faith will heal the sick man,” but rather “the prayer of faith will save the sick man.”<sup>97</sup> To this day, many English translations still read “save” rather than “heal.”<sup>98</sup> There is a rediscovery of the use of anointing oil for the purpose of practicing divine healing prayer.<sup>99</sup> There is a growing ecumenical use of anointing oil for the purpose of praying for the sick. Pentecostals, Protestants, and Roman Catholics use anointing oil in divine healing prayer.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Downing, Location 141.

<sup>95</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 224.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> <https://biblehub.com/james/5-15.htm>

<sup>99</sup> J.P. McClain, “Anointing of the Sick” in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. I (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

<sup>100</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 224.

It is important to note that the use of anointing oil is not to be done independently, but it is much like the experience of Holy Communion, a mystery through which the power of God is at work. Therefore, it is important that along with anointing a sick person with blessed oil, that there is divine healing prayer practiced along with it. The *Rite Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick* states that along with anointing the sick with oil “sanctified by God’s blessing,” there must “the prayer of faith.”<sup>101</sup> Prayer is the act of faith by which anointing oil and the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism can engage divine healing prayer.

God always heals. Ultimately, the theological conversations regarding whether divine healing prayer happens, how it happens, and what can be done to experience it further comes down to the need for Christians to have faith in the God who always heals. God as always healing, can be experienced through Scripture, sacraments, and the experience of God’s Spirit.

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<sup>101</sup> *Study Text II: Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick*, pp 24-25.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROJECT

### **Overview of the Project**

Every year during the Lenten season, I would do a special sermon series at Chesterbrook United Methodist Church (CUMC). However, for this project, I decided to expand beyond a sermon series to designing a more holistic spiritual formation experience. It was designed with three parts: sermon series, 40-day devotional, and small group curriculum. The project was titled, “Sózó: Salvation as Wholeness and Healing.” The entire project is included in the appendix of this dissertation. This was the first time CUMC had a church-wide project that encompassed sermons, a small group curriculum, and a forty-day devotional revolving around one theme. In addition, it was the first time CUMC had a project written by a pastor and laypeople. I wrote the sermons and the small group curriculum. The forty-day devotional was written by myself as well as laypeople who submitted their testimonies for the purpose of this project. This chapter addresses the different parts of the project, the purpose of each part of the project, how it was implemented, and how the COVID-19 pandemic caused both the content and the implementation to pivot. This chapter is organized in the following way:

- What were the different parts of the project and what was the purpose of each part?
  - Sermons
  - Small Group Curriculum
  - Forty-day Lenten Devotional
- How was the project implemented?

- In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic cause the project to pivot?

The main reason for the project involving the three parts is that the CUMC congregation engages with spiritual formation mostly through the Sunday service, small groups, and daily devotions. Therefore, it was fitting to implement the subject of *Sózó* in various different approaches in different settings. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, our church became a 100% online worshipping and gathering congregation. What it did for the engagement of the congregation was to create synchronous and asynchronous ways to engage the materials. This is much like how many students during the pandemic are engaging in education. At CUMC, the sermons were available live during the Sunday morning online worship service but also made available online for later viewing if someone missed it or wanted to hear it again. The daily devotions have always been asynchronous. The small group gatherings were the synchronous engagement of the material.

### **The Different Parts of the Project – *Sózó*: Salvation as Wholeness and Healing**

#### *Sermons – Sózó: How We Hurt, How God Heals*

The sermon series began on Ash Wednesday. It was titled “*Sózó: How We Hurt, How God Heals.*” Beginning with the topic of human frailty, I preached a series on the following six Sundays, going through many aspects of healing that is needed, but also made sure to keep in mind aspects of illness that exist within our congregation and the various contexts that each church member lived in. I addressed physical health, mental illness, emotional wounds, family tensions, church divisions, and spiritual strongholds.

The general format of the sermons begins with a story. The purpose of the opening story was to capture the attention of the congregation to focus on a particular narrative that is important to experiencing God's healing in a particular area of health. Being that the sermon series covered six different types of ailments that God heals, it was important to have six stories that set the stage for the congregation to connect with. The sermon also connects the opening story with the biblical narrative that carries the theme of healing. The purpose of the sermon was not simply to make a point, but to intersect the narratives of our lives that reveal our need for healing with the biblical narrative that introduces the God who heals us through Christ Jesus.

Leonard Sweet has mentioned in a number of lectures regarding preaching that sermons should not have "apps."<sup>102</sup> The temptation for a preacher to provide applications at the end is to prescribe some practical steps for everyone to do as if the sermon is a cookie-cutter mold for everyone to use. I agree with and resonate with Sweet's insistence on allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work of application. Therefore, my sermons did not include any application portion but concluded with an invitation to prayer for people to respond as the Holy Spirit would lead them.

One thing to note is that I preached another sermon series that preceded the *Sózó* series, which was important to an effective launch of the *Sózó* series. I received feedback from my doctoral advisory team from the congregation that it would be helpful if the congregation had more exposure to what it means to pray and how to practice prayer

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<sup>102</sup> Leonard Sweet, Lecture during Doctor of Ministry Program: Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire in a Fluid Culture, Drew University. September 24, 2018.

more effectively. Therefore, the preceding sermon series from January 12, 2020 to February 23, 2020 was on the topic of prayer.

Furthermore, it is important in the practice of preaching and prayer that a definitive answer to prayer is not prescribed because the Scriptures reveal that God does not answer prayer uniformly or the same way for every person. Therefore, I made sure that the sermons were focused on proclaiming that God heals, rather than exactly how God will heal or what “fool-proof” steps need to be taken in order to acquire the desired results in prayer. This would first take away from the idea of the “divine” portion of “divine healing prayer.” There is no manipulation or leveraging done in the practice of divine healing prayer, for it is a surrender and yielding for God to do what God does. God heals. How God heals is God’s power and decision, but the purpose of the sermon would be to inspire the congregation with a proclamation that God heals, so surrender and leave the ailment to God.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to pivot the length, content, and delivery of the sermons. The sermon series began in-person on February 26, 2020, was Ash Wednesday, but by March 15, 2020, on the third Sunday of Lent, CUMC became a 100% online church. This means that three of the seven sermons were preached in-person live worship. The latter five were preached online via Zoom and YouTube platforms. On a typical Sunday, I tend to preach about twenty-five to thirty minutes, but with the move to the online worship service, we made some important pivots in our worship order and length. I had to preach sermons that were approximately ten minutes long. This required me to organize the material and deliver it more concisely as the sermon series continued. Furthermore, in the initial closure of in-person worship services, the CUMC congregation

and I initially thought that we would be back in an in-person worship setting by Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020. Easter 2020 came and went and at the time of writing this dissertation, CUMC is still meeting online for Sunday worship. We have gathered a few times for an outdoor worship service, but due to the rising numbers of the pandemic as the Thanksgiving/Christmas season approaches, CUMC has decided to suspend in-person outdoor worship services until further notice.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the tendencies of the in-person Sunday worship service was that as people departed from the worship service, I would stand outside the sanctuary doors, greeting everyone coming out of the worship service. Through that mode of engagement and the post-worship lunch fellowships, I would be able to easily gauge people's responses and experience of the Sunday sermon/service. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not.

Therefore, another way I had to pivot in response to such a situation was the manner by which I was able to gauge the impact of the sermon. I invited people to make comments in the chat feature of the Zoom worship services. We also conducted post-worship fellowship times to converse at a greater depth of the sermon as well as life in quarantine. We started a lay-shepherding ministry that organized the congregation to be under the care of lay leaders and other spiritually mature Christians in the congregation. These lay-shepherds were to contact their folks on a regular basis. It was an informative and important way to gauge the spiritual well-being of the congregation. I had weekly meetings with the pastoral staff team and lay leadership team for feedback and input as to how the online worship service and sermons were connecting with the congregation.

*Small Group Study – Sózó: Our Salvation That Enables the Practice of Divine Healing Prayer*

I wrote a small group study titled: *Sózó: Our Salvation that Enables the Practice of Divine Healing Prayer*. It is a study that can be stand-alone or a more practical and more in-depth companion to the sermon series. While the sermon series, “Sózó: How We Hurt, How God Heals” focuses on proclaiming that God heals all kinds of ailments and illnesses, the small group study, *Sózó: Our Salvation that Enables the Practice of Divine Healing Prayer*, focuses on the reasons why Christians are able to boldly engage in the practice of divine healing prayer. The study begins with an introduction to the power of truth and how the truth sets people free. It is the idea that the gospel truth enables people to pray. The first two chapters focus on the ancient understanding of healing in the context of the “Balm of Gilead” that addresses salvation as healing and wholeness, and the “Divine Exchange” that addresses how through Christ there has been an exchange of our ailments for Christ’s wholeness. Chapters 3-5 focuses on ancient practices of baptism, Holy Communion, and anointing oil are discussed as a way for Christians to tangibly engage in the act of divine healing prayer. The study concludes with a Bible study on James 5:13-18. The epilogue introduces practical steps to practicing divine healing prayer.

Each session of the small group study also begins with a story because our lives are stories. The use of stories invites participants to connect with a narrative of healing or an experience of God. Our lives are stories, and the stories must be connective. The gospel is the story of God’s redemptive work unfolding in our lives. More importantly, it is to emphasize the very story and life of God intersecting the story and life of humanity.

It has been intertwined since creation. As Sweet often says, “From garden to garden-city,” is the story of creation to the New Jerusalem. Everything begins in a garden (Eden) and ends in another garden (Resurrection).<sup>103</sup>

In the writing of this small group study, the purpose was to invite people to see how their story can intersect the story of each session, but more importantly, the greater narrative of the gospel and God’s healing as presented to us in salvation. Sweet writes, “The church runs on stories. Stories are the bloodstream of the body of Christ.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore in the aim to be the body of Christ, small groups would be the place for storytelling. It would be for telling the story of the gospel, the stories of healing, and finding each person’s story in the greater story.

There were four small groups that utilized this study. The small groups were different from each other, presenting a diverse body of the CUMC congregation. The first small group was a group of empty-nesters and retired folks meeting on Tuesday evenings. The second small group was a women’s group that met on Saturday mornings. The third small group was a group of college students and post-college professionals (22-38 years old). The fourth small group was a group of young families with children ranging from elementary school to high school students.

All of the small groups were led by laypeople. I visited each small group to also participate in the discussion and even answer questions related to the content written in the study. I followed up with small group leaders to see how the study was affecting the

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<sup>103</sup> Leonard Sweet, Lecture during Doctor of Ministry Program: Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire in a Fluid Culture, Drew University. April 25, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Foreword.” *The Story Lectionary*, edited by David McDonald, Portland: Portland Seminary, 2017.

small group discussions and the lives of the people. Three of the small groups finished all of the sessions. One of the small groups pivoted to studying systemic racism in response to the United Methodist Council of Bishops' recognition of a “pandemic of racism” brought to attention through the death of George Floyd.<sup>105</sup>

One of the major results of this small group’s pivot was the sense of urgency to respond to the systemic racism and the creation of an ad hoc racial justice team at CUMC. The church has identified itself as a people who need to be involved in the healing of our nation in regards to race relations and people’s understanding of racial identity and how that affects the world around us. This has led the CUMC congregation to be more cognizant and engaged as Christians standing against systemic racism. Race literacy courses, in-depth conversations, town hall meetings are but a few ways in which CUMC folks are becoming educated. Getting involved in marches, advocacy causes, making bold statements against racism have been some ways the CUMC community has shifted as a result of this one small group’s decision to respond. This small group’s decision made an impact that reverberated throughout the congregation. Addressing racism is a form of healing that is needed in society, as well as the individual. As described in my own stories of experiencing racism, this pivoting calls the church to see racial justice work as a form of social healing, but also healing individuals who have experienced pain regarding racism.

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<sup>105</sup> Council of Bishops, “COB supports Minnesota area bishop in call for Christians to fight pandemic of racism,” Date Accessed: November 29, 2020, <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/pandemic-of-racism-14011039>

*Devotional - Sózó: Inspirational Stories of Healing*

Being that the sermons were focused on proclaiming that God heals, and the small group study was designed to train people to practice divine healing prayer, the purpose of the devotionals was to inspire the congregation with real stories of healing from within the congregation. I reached out to the congregation for people to share their stories of healing. With the doctoral project advisory team's help, I was able to identify people in our congregation to share eighteen different stories of healing they had experienced. The remaining stories were my own testimonies of healing that God had done in my life, as well as stories of healing that God had done through my experiences of praying for people. The stories were not limited to physical healing but also include emotional, psychological, relational, and spiritual healing. All in all, these are stories of holistic healing. Every healing story reveals a mighty salvific work that God has done.

When asked for some guidance on how to write a healing devotional, I provided a template that was consistent with the usual daily devotionals that are sent out to the congregation. There is always a key Scripture passage, a reflection, and a prayer. For the healing devotional, I asked every participant to share the following:

- A Scripture verse or passage that connects with the story that the participant is sharing
- Tell the story:
  - What was the ailment?
  - How was prayer practiced?
  - How did God heal you? In what way?

- There were those who felt comfortable writing a prayer. For those who were not comfortable doing that, I wrote the prayer at the end of the devotional.

There were two stories that maintained anonymity because the writer did not want to disclose their identity, yet felt compelled to share their story. Therefore, the name was not mentioned.

The first week of devotionals (Ash Wednesday to the Saturday before the first Sunday of Lent) was an introduction to the healing devotional. Following that first partial week, each full week of Lent consisted of two to three stories from the congregation and three to four stories from myself. I made sure to alternate the order so that the congregation could get a pattern of clergy – lay stories. It was of great importance that the congregation could receive stories of healing from the laity in order to show the congregation that God’s healing power is not reserved for particular Christians but all those who call upon the name of the Lord.<sup>106</sup>

It was not smooth sailing to get the participation of the laity at first. Shortly before the project began, I only had three stories of healing written by laypeople to share, and I was very concerned because one of the goals of this doctoral project was to train the laity to practice divine healing prayer. Also, I was aware from experience but also through my readings and research that there is a common misconception that even for those among Christians who believe in miracles, mysticism, or supernatural activity of God, they often have the idea that such breakthrough is reserved for a spiritually elite group of people. I also thought that it was important to have stories from within the congregation. Instead of reading or hearing about stories of healing from people that the congregation members do

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<sup>106</sup> Rom. 10:13.

not know, I wanted the congregation to hear stories from those who were in the congregation so that they could have certainty of God's answered prayer for healing. I was desperate to have at least half of the stories to be from within the congregation. I reached out to my doctoral advisory team for additional help and started to get some additional names of people who had a story to tell. I reached out to those individuals personally and asked for their help, and told them how much of a blessing it will be to the congregation to hear a story of God's healing work in their life. There were thirty-six stories of healing in the forty-day Lenten devotional. Of those thirty-six, eighteen of them were stories from the laity. I am thankful that half of the stories were from the laity. It was an answer to prayer and served an important purpose to accomplish the goal of this doctoral project.

Furthermore, while one of the purposes of this project was indeed to fulfill the partial requirements of my Doctor of Ministry degree, I had a greater concern and desire to see the ministry of divine healing prayer take place among the laity at CUMC. I believe that creating such a culture of ministry in the church requires more than teaching and equipping. It requires the stories and testimonies of God's healing power to be shared among the people. Addressing the various theological conversations presented in the previous chapter, the CUMC congregation has a wide range of beliefs on healing. The purpose of the devotionals was not to address whether God heals, but rather that God's healing is not restricted to certain individuals, and God's healing comes in many different forms and mediums. It was important to define this as well for those who were willing to share their testimonies. Leonard Sweet writes that we need to:

“reframe healing away from the popular ‘hocus pocus’ healings that are popular in people’s minds to healing stories that include healings of relationships, healings

of despair and depression, and even death is a healing act... God always heals, the beauty is not in the 'death' but in the healing from pain and disease and agony and the liberation of the spirit for an eternity with God... Remember, 'salvation' is a healing word from 'salve,' so any salvation story is a healing story."<sup>107</sup>

Gary Simpson also echoes this idea that in order to get the participation of people, "You cannot ask them to provide healing stories before you show and frame what definition of healing you are trying to lift before them."<sup>108</sup> By reframing healing as salvation and salvation as healing, and showing this definition to the people, I was able to recruit more participants in sharing their healing stories through the devotional.

### **How the project was implemented**

The implementation of the project required the combination of the doctoral project advisory team, CUMC lay leadership, CUMC pastoral team, and my consistent communication and leadership with the various groups. I convened the doctoral project advisory team four different times, received input and support as needed. The language of the different sessions was shaped by the members of the doctoral project advisory team. Through the different mentioned groups, the doctoral project went beyond a pamphlet, poster, and email. It was key individuals advocating for the implementation of the project to go well that allowed for the measure of participation that we had. When I was having trouble recruiting people to write healing devotionals, these various teams were helpful in recruiting people. When I needed a higher level of engagement with small groups, the

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<sup>107</sup> Email with Leonard Sweet, February 6, 2020

<sup>108</sup> Email with Gary Simpson, February 6, 2020

small group leaders and lay leaders prioritized the implementation of this project and advocated for the study. With these critical pieces in place, the project was launched.

The project began on Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020. On that day launched the first sermon of the sermon series during the Ash Wednesday service and the first devotional of the forty-day devotional. Small groups began that week as well but met at their differently scheduled times as determined by each small group. The project remained on course without disruption (even from the COVID-19 pandemic) from Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020, to the end of the Lenten season, April 11, 2020. However, I had to pivot the implementation method due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In preparation for launching the project, the sermon series, small group study, and devotional series were announced to the church starting the first Sunday of January through the Sunday bulletin, announcements, and emails. As our congregation entered the new year, it was also a good time to recruit people to sign up for small groups. Providing enough time for people to schedule their commitments to a small group is very important to the congregation. As the CUMC congregation and the general rhythm of life of Northern Virginia is very busy and overscheduled, people need plenty of advance notice before they can commit to something. The advance notice helped greatly as the congregation was able to schedule and make time to participate throughout the project. Another important preparation tool, as mentioned earlier, was preaching a sermon series on prayer. One of my doctoral project advisory team members who has extensive experience in the practice of divine healing prayer recommended that the church has a clear understanding and experience of the practice of prayer before introducing healing prayer. Under such recommendation and discussion with the whole team, I decided to set

a vision for “prayer” for CUMC in 2020. A series on prayer would lead to a series on divine healing prayer. The practice of prayer has since become very important to all areas of ministry in CUMC, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and many other crises in 2020.

I thought it important to collect data on the numbers of people being reached through the project. The sermons were based on worship service attendance. The small groups were based on small group leaders' reports on how many people were attending the small groups, which met on a weekly basis. The devotionals were sent out through an email service, “Constant Contacts,” that tracks the data of how many people opened each email.<sup>109</sup>

To measure the number of people who were able to participate in the worship services for the sermon series, I had to look at varying attendance amounts as well as looking at views on the CUMC YouTube and SoundCloud pages. The first sermon in the series took place on Ash Wednesday, which had an attendance turn out in-person and online at 28 people. The first two Sundays of Lent were in-person worship services in the sanctuary, and in that particular setup taking all of the data into consideration, there was an average of 64 listeners to the sermon series. Starting March 15, 2020, when the church became a fully online worshipping church, the youth and children also joined the worship service, and we began to track an average of 76 adults and 24 youth, resulting in 100 people for four weeks, listening to the remaining Lenten series.

An average of 40 people participated each week in small groups. This data was collected through reports and conversations with small group leaders in the congregation.

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<sup>109</sup> Constant Contacts, Date Accessed: November 27, 2020, [www.constantcontacts.com](http://www.constantcontacts.com).

There were four small groups, of which three met weekly, and one met twice a week. I was able to visit each small group and have firsthand interaction with the small group attendees and the small group study. I conducted these visits towards the end of the study. The reason was to allow small group participants enough interaction with the small group study so that interaction with me as the pastor as well as the author of the study could be more fruitful.

The devotional was sent out to the congregation through an email service, “Constant Contacts.”<sup>110</sup> This enabled the daily devotionals to be sent out consistently to a group of 122 contacts every day from February 26, 2020 to April 11, 2020, with the exclusion of Sundays. It was a collection of forty devotions that comprised of a Scripture passage, a story of healing, and a prayer. Being that the emails were tracked, I was able to see how many unique opens there were for each daily devotional. I was also able to compare the number of unique opens during the course of this doctoral project to the unique opens of the daily devotions outside the timeframe of this doctoral project. From January 2, 2020 to February 25, 2020, the average number of unique opens of the daily devotions was 48, with the lowest number of opens being 39 and the maximum number being 58. However, during this doctoral project, the number of daily devotions increased. From February 26, 2020 to April 11, 2020, the average number of unique opens was 61, with the lowest number of opens being 52 and the maximum number being 69. There was clearly a greater level of engagement and interest during the course of the project.

Easter Sunday was a great celebration of the resurrection of Christ, but also the day we marked the completion of the project. I was able to connect with the small group

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<sup>110</sup> Constant Contacts, Date Accessed: November 27, 2020, [www.constantcontacts.com](http://www.constantcontacts.com).

leaders, lay leadership, and the pastoral team to get a clear sense of how the *Sózó* series had affected the congregation. There were emails and conversations that relayed how the sermons, small group sessions, and daily devotions had impacted various groups and individuals in the congregation.

### **How COVID-19 caused the project to pivot**

The COVID-19 pandemic moved CUMC from an in-person worshipping church to an online-only church. This change happened overnight. All worship services, small groups, prayer meetings, business meetings took place on Zoom, Google Meet, and FaceTime. One of the challenges was trying to gauge the level of impact that the three different parts of the project were making in the congregation. It required a heightened sense of observation and more intentional inquiry to be able to measure whether the project was effective.

An interesting change that took place due to the COVID-19 pandemic was the increase of attendance in Sunday worship and small groups. Although the congregation members who work became even busier with their jobs through virtual mediums, their responsibilities to their family, especially in regards to the extracurricular activities of their children, become non-existent overnight. Suddenly, the congregation was available to do a lot of engagement with the church. At the time of this writing, the church has remained largely an online community for the last eight months. I consistently hear about pandemic fatigue, quarantine fatigue, and online fatigue. Yet, attendance, involvement, and even financial giving have remained rather consistent. Perhaps it is due to the deeper

level of engagement with church folks when overnight, all of the extracurricular activities of children and youth disappeared, and all that was left was connecting with the church.

Witnessing this drastic change and abundance of availability of time for church folks, we pivoted and made sure that we could provide consistent spiritual formation for those who suddenly had time to engage. This actually enabled people to participate in Sunday worship services and small groups at a more consistent and higher measure than before.

One of the challenges of pivoting with the pandemic was trying to figure out how to communicate virtually the matters of the Spirit. As convenient and great it is to see people through the virtual medium, the ability to “feel” one another’s spirit becomes dampened by the absence of physical interaction. Having experienced this myself through the Doctor of Ministry program, I felt prepared and equipped to pivot. The Doctor of Ministry cohort met in person at the beginning of the program for a week-long intensive but met the rest of the semester virtually. We repeated these two times more, and one of them was much like a retreat where the cohort spent long hours together. This kind of in-person interaction allowed for the virtual connections to be far more meaningful and effective. With that in mind, it is good that I have been the pastor of CUMC for the last five years, building relationships with congregation members. More importantly, many of the congregation members have known each other for more than ten years. One of the major pivots we did was to invite those in the congregation who had been members for at least ten years and empower them to reach out to the rest of the congregation in hopes to keep the spiritual connections alive throughout the pandemic. So far, it has proven to be

vital to the congregation's ongoing stability. This very stable connection was important to the successful implementation of the project.

In regards to preaching, I suddenly found myself no longer preaching to a live audience, from which a preacher can draw on the vibe or spirit of the people. There is a sense of "aliveness" to the delivery of the sermon. A major pivot was to imagine the faces of my congregation members as I prerecorded the sermons on Saturday afternoons that would be delivered the next day. I felt compelled to pray more. I learned to rely on the Holy Spirit more to take the digital content, the prerecorded content, and deliver the gospel to the people. Though it was performed live in the moment of recording, it would not become live for the people until the next day. My hope was that the Holy Spirit would empower the sermon in such a way that it would connect with the people and inspire the people that indeed God heals.

There was not much pivoting to do with preparing and sending the daily devotions because it was going to be sent out via the same medium that I had been for the previous two years. However, I made an intent to engage further with people who were participating in reading the devotions. The daily devotions were accessed asynchronously. People who wanted to reply to the emails did or had discussions about the inspirational effect these stories were having in some other virtual gathering spaces, such as the "small talk" that takes place before the start of a standing committee meeting.

One of the adjustments that needed to be made was the idea that preaching was no longer going to be a synchronous, in-person experience. Even though the prerecorded sermon was going to be delivered online in the presence of a live digital audience, the true synchronous engagement would only take place through small group ministry. This

made it necessary to put greater “weight” on the small group study as a way to gauge how the people were experiencing the study of Sózó in real-time. The sermons were discussed and addressed in the aftermath of the worship services.

There were originally conversations about gathering people together in-person to learn how to practice divine healing prayer. I had thought of preparing a training session that would be “hands-on.” There was interest in this idea as well in the small group sessions. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to pursue such an idea. This was a major pivot for me because my experience of praying and training others to practice divine healing prayer is in the physical gathering space of people who are praying and people who have certain ailments or conditions come up to receive prayer. A major theological pivot comes to mind. If the Holy Spirit that manifests in the in-person gathering of the saints for divine healing prayer is truly omnipresent, then would we be able to pivot in a way that practices and trains people to practice divine healing prayer through a virtual setting? This alludes to the conflict of how certain groups of people do not believe Holy Communion should be served virtually and only served in-person. During the project implementation, I did not pursue a training event through a virtual medium. Perhaps one of the future additions to practicing divine healing prayer should take place online. This is a theological shift from how I have practiced divine healing prayer.

In regards to the theological pivoting, I had typically practiced anointing people with oil in-person every Sunday during the season of Lent and once a month on Holy Communion Sunday. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, I only anointed people with oil on Ash Wednesday and the first two Sundays of Lent. I could not anoint people

with oil and pray for healing. In previous times, praying with anointing oil and laying on of hands produced healing stories in the CUMC congregation that served to inspire and help people see that indeed God answers healing prayers. As a result of not regularly practicing anointing oil and laying on of hands, this part of practicing divine healing prayer came to pause. One theological pivot that could be considered in the future is having people prepare their own oil, and I can pray virtually over the oil to consecrate it and introduce the church to praying with anointing oil even through the virtual medium.

Along with being unable to practice anointing oil and laying on of hands, CUMC did not have Holy Communion until September 13, 2020. This means March 1, 2020 was the last Sunday that the CUMC congregation received Holy Communion until September 13, 2020, when the Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church allowed for churches in the Virginia Annual Conference to partake in Holy Communion through online worship. Arriving at this decision for the bishop was not easy because of the theological challenges and disagreements that were very strong on both sides of the argument. Holy Communion was viewed on one side as only observable in the physical in-person gathering of the church. While the other side viewed that the omnipresent Holy Spirit who manifests in the midst of the online worshipping community also is able to make the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ for the people. The absence of practicing Holy Communion was another pivot to the project because Holy Communion is viewed as a means of grace and a means to experience God's healing power. The small group study addresses both anointing oil and Holy Communion as a practice for divine healing prayer. Without Holy Communion, another "tool" for practicing divine healing prayer became unavailable. When the bishop

allowed for the Virginia Conference churches to administer Holy Communion online, it was a theological pivot that enabled me and CUMC to start declaring the healing work of Jesus Christ in the midst of partaking Holy Communion.

The project itself was successfully implemented in terms of executing the sermon series, small group study, and daily devotions. However, there were key aspects such as the use of anointing oil and Holy Communion during the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented the “object lesson” or tangible demonstration of such practices involved in divine healing prayer. Nonetheless, the congregation has previously seen their uses, and the good news is that those who participated in the small group study are looking forward to the one day when we return to in-person worship to experience the healing power of God through those two means. In the meantime, I am compelled to explore how the use of anointing oil and Holy Communion can be effectively pivoted for healing ministry in the digital medium.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Learnings**

In every project, there are discoveries not only in the results but in the process as well. During the implementation of the project, there were learnings about the process of training the laity, observations I made with how the laity began to practice divine healing prayer, and things I learned about myself. As a result of these learnings, there are conclusions that can be made about the implications of this work for the Church at large, how this study can intersect Christian identity, context and prophetically speak healing to a broken world. Lastly, based on the learnings, I explore the question of what practical steps a church can do to be mobilized for practicing divine healing prayer. This chapter presents the above-mentioned learnings.

### **What I learned about training laity in divine healing prayer**

In the continual conversations with the congregation on divine healing prayer, I have discovered that laypeople are curious and want to experience more of the mystery, supernatural, and divine aspects of the Christian faith. Most of the congregants at CUMC are well attuned to the mental and intellectual experience of life and thus have a strong awareness and understanding of God in such ways. I notice a hunger among people for something more than an intellectual assent of the mind and rational understanding of Christian doctrine and God.

The COVID-19 pandemic, businesses being shut down, and the stay-at-home orders issued by the governor revealed the yearnings of the congregation. While there

were definitely glimpses of this prior to the pandemic, there was definitely a heightened expression of a hunger for “doing” and a hunger for “experiencing” divine mystery. In the desire for “doing” and “experiencing,” there is also a desire for the answers to such hungers to be practical. The congregation wanted practical means of experiencing God and to “do” something about their faith.

There was a lot of rich discussion around the use of Holy Communion and anointing oil as a way to tangibly engage faith in the practice of divine healing prayer. These “objects” in and of themselves shape and frame the foundation and focus of divine healing prayer. I learned that there is power in using tools to help enhance or materialize the divine experience. Especially for people who might be new to thinking abstractly or spiritually, having anointing oil as a sign for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was a great help to many. As the congregation has become more familiar with the use of anointing oil in the past year, it allowed the experience of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power to be more accessible. It is not that the physical oil contains some kind of mystical property, but that by consecration and its use, there is a focus to boldly praying for the Holy Spirit’s power to work in the area of healing. It also helped that the use of anointing oil finds its roots, not in a charismatic or Pentecostal movement, but in Scripture itself, for the congregation has high regard for Scripture while unsure of the charismatic and Pentecostal movement.

Laities are also willing to be stretched in thinking, belief, and doing. The teaching on Holy Communion shows as such. United Methodists believe in “This Holy Mystery” as to what happens to the bread and grape juice during the administration of Holy Communion. How does the partaking of Holy Communion cause healing to take place in

someone's life? If one believes that the Holy Spirit causes the bread and grape juice to be for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ, then one must also believe that there is divine power and presence at work when one partakes of the Holy Communion. If partaking in Holy Communion means to encounter Jesus Christ, then all that is true about Jesus Christ must be interacting with people as they take from the Lord's table. There is a divine exchange that takes place during Holy Communion. Christ offers his very life and self to us, and we in turn give him our sickness. The act of faith of receiving the body and blood of Christ is participating in this exchange. The idea of a divine exchange and the practice of Holy Communion as addressed in the small group study were spiritual challenges that the laity were willing to reflect on and think differently about. I learned that in the arena of spirituality and experiencing God, laypeople are open to learning and yearning for deeper experiences.

In this regard, while the laypeople at CUMC are aware that God heals, I learned that it made a difference to the laity to know and understand that God wants to heal and that God always heals. It is like the story of Jesus when he was asked by a leper if he is willing to heal him. To which, Jesus says, "I am willing."<sup>111</sup> When we have a view that Jesus desires to heal and he always heals, it begins to normalize the practice of asking God for healing with a hopeful expectation for God's divine power to manifest in God's mysterious but certainly loving ways.

I also learned that even in spite of misconceptions or preconceived understandings of prayer and healing, when there is a desperate situation that requires divine intervention, people will seek out prayer, and those who love the person asking for

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<sup>111</sup> Matthew 8:2-3.

prayer, if they believe that Jesus still heals people as he did during his earthly ministry, they will confidently “launch out” into learning and practicing divine healing prayer.<sup>112</sup> What helps greatly is when people have a reframing of salvation and the language of salvation as healing.

### **What results I observed with laity practicing divine healing prayer**

In addition to the lessons I learned, I noticed many changes in how the congregation began practicing divine healing prayer in different settings after the project implementation came to an end. I see these as strong indicators that the doctoral project has made an impact on the culture of the congregation in regards to addressing the hurts and ailments people have. In this section, I highlight some main observations that are related to the practice of divine healing prayer.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we had two church members experience the grief of a loved one passing onto glory. Immediately there was a handful of folks who took the responsibility of coordinating ways to provide care for those who were grieving and praying together with them. Both individuals who were grieving the loss of their loved one were already contacted by laypeople who prayed for healing and peace over the one who is grieving.

We had various lay-led prayer meetings that took place without any direction of the clergy and were in the context of divine healing prayer.

- The women’s small group that used the small group study for the doctoral project included regular times of prayer for healing and wholeness. After the small group

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<sup>112</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 155

study ended, they continued on with another study but included prayer times for wholeness and healing.

- We had someone who was experiencing emotional and mental distress, taking a leave of absence from a certain professional setting, and the lay people who were aware of this coordinated a prayer meeting to pray for wholeness and healing.
- When my father experienced his tragic accident and the injury of his C2-C3 vertebrae, the lay leadership of the church coordinated a prayer meeting that was entirely lay-led. During the prayer service, the people who were praying for healing were practicing divine healing prayer as explained in the small group study, and the general practices they have witnessed during the altar calls in the in-person Sunday worship services.
- When one of the missionaries that CUMC members know became diagnosed with COVID-19, a layperson rallied people together to actively pray for the missionary and the missionary's family. This was a very dangerous experience of COVID-19 for the missionary and the missionary's family, but the boldness and faith of the people at CUMC were demonstrated and clear. Today, the missionary and the family are healed and whole.

In addition to lay-led prayer meetings and movements at CUMC, there were other ways the congregation started to practice divine healing prayer.

- During the online worship service time, we have a "passing of the peace" time when the people put into the Zoom chat some phrase to pass the peace of Christ with each other. We expanded that engagement by inviting people to type in their joys and concerns into the chat. The CUMC congregation has been very active on

the chat to freely share their joys and concerns. In particular, the concerns shared have included requesting prayers for healing and wellness.

- The lay leadership team and I have been meeting weekly on Thursdays since the beginning of the year, and since the Fall, we have started a spiritual discipline of not having only one person to open up the meeting in prayer but to select a prayer point and have everyone go around and lift up a prayer. It has been a regular and normal situation to hear those in leadership lift up divine healing prayers.
- Our youth gatherings have addressed at length the issues of anxiety and stress that youth are experiencing due to the pandemic and related life changes. The youth ministry meetings, as led by the youth pastor and teachers, have fostered an environment where the youth not only are told that it is normal to pray divine healing prayers over anxiety and stress, but they actively practice this with one another. This developed into a weekly youth prayer meeting that takes place at the end of the weekly Sunday youth ministry time over Zoom.
- The Education Ministry Team is a team of clergy and laypeople who partner together for the development and success of CUMC's children and youth ministries. They have met regularly before to pray and plan together, but ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Education Ministry made a commitment to pray every Tuesday for many prayer topics and always include divine healing prayers for the church families and loved ones.
- The topic of mental health has become more normal with the youth as well as adults. Much of the mental health challenges that the adults at CUMC face currently are related to the high-stress experiences of their professional lives that

have become completely different due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A second set of challenges for adults is related to parenting. As schools have suspended in-person learning and are mostly running the schools on virtual platforms, parents have had to juggle their professional work life (from home) as well as making sure that their children are actively participating in school (from home). As the topic of mental health has become normal, it comes out regularly in “How are you doing? How can I pray for you?” conversations. Throughout the pandemic, the youth ministry has held a number of workshops on “self-awareness” to promote emotional and mental health for the youth of our congregation.

- The Nominations Committee decided to use *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Peter Scazzero as a “textbook” to promote emotional health and well-being for everyone serving in church leadership (clergy and laity).<sup>113</sup> As it was recommended by the laity, it shows forth a strong indicator that the topic of salvation as health and wholeness is resonating with the congregation. All of the church lay leadership has been asked to read the book. Every church council meeting blocks out time for the leadership to hear an overview of a chapter and then enter breakout groups to discuss at greater length a chapter and questions, as well as to pray together for health and wholeness in the congregation.

### **What did I learn about myself?**

Throughout the implementation of the project, and in the aftermath, I learned many things about myself. Most of all, I have experienced the joy of witnessing people

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

practicing divine healing prayer. From even before the implementation phase, I found joy in the conversations I had with my doctoral project advisory team. There was a sense of interest and curiosity among the people on the team that would give me the assurance that there would also be a good sense of interest in the greater congregation.

I learned that I also rejoice when, as a pastor, I witness the people in the congregation I serve are equipped in spiritual practices, and they actually practice it. Furthermore, there is even greater joy when Christ is elevated in the midst of such equipping and enabling, and Christ's work of salvation is highlighted in the midst. While I enjoy partaking in the practice of divine healing prayer myself, there is an indescribable joy when laypeople are so moved to participate in this practice.

During the planning and implementation phase, I learned that I need to push myself to become more organized and collecting information in order to better study and implement programs and ministries in the church. In my own professional development as a pastor, I had not implemented collecting data to help gauge the effectiveness of the pastoral or congregational ministry. In collecting the data for how much the congregation is participating in the three different parts of the project, I came to realize the importance of having accurate data. Having accurate data gives as clear of a picture as possible to assess the congregation's spiritual health and development.

I learned much more about making sure that divine healing prayer is not confined to a particular method or expectation. Francis MacNutt writes that praying for divine healing should not be focused on only one method or experience. He writes, "There is something in us that makes us want to find the right technique for every task, the right formula of prayer for every need... But God teaches us over and over again that he is

beyond our limitations and will not be boxed into our neat compartments.”<sup>114</sup> I realized that I, too, have put the practice of divine healing prayer into a system of my own understanding. Receiving the different daily devotions (testimonies of healing) reminded me that every healing was experienced differently, and every prayer had been prayed differently. It required conscious effort to stop myself from resorting to that natural tendency to create formulas and templates of prayer and to becoming more open to the dynamic guidance of the Holy Spirit, as well as the uniqueness of each ailment requiring prayer. In doing so, I have become more in tune with myself, the context of ministry, and how to prophetically speak healing into the situations of sickness. The reminder that God answers prayers very differently at times also helped me celebrate answers to prayer more and see differently about healing than in the past.

I also learned that no matter how much God has answered divine healing prayers in my life and in the ministry of others that I know, I never stop being amazed and even “shocked” that God answered the healing prayer. How surprised I become whenever God answers prayer, especially healing prayer! I am still left in wonder and awe that God would so marvelously and graciously answer prayers for healing. Answers to divine healing prayers are wonderful and beautiful. Yes, they are “wonder-filled” and “beauty-filled.”

Expanding the understanding of salvation as healing through the implementation of the project was not only a learning experience for the laity at CUMC. As the pastor, the writer, the editor, and the one directing the implementation of this project, I learned a great deal, especially in the arena of my understanding of healing. Especially, when I

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<sup>114</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 109.

spent time reflecting deeply on death as final healing, I discovered healing in my own experience of my father-in-law's passing, and when I was ministering to the laity who were grieving the loss of their loved ones, I was able to pray with them and talk with them about death as final healing. I learned that framing death as final healing is a liberating and healing experience for those who grieve their loss. Furthermore, the understanding of death as final healing is important when God does not answer divine healing prayers in the way that we imagine. When we have death as final healing, we still hold onto the hope of true restoration, redemption, and healing that the one who is sick will experience in the day of glory. This final healing we experience in the eternity of heaven is beyond the boundaries of the greatest healings we can experience in the limitations of this finite world.

Frankly, death as final healing is also instrumental to my ability to continually explore the topic and practice of divine healing prayer even in spite of my father's injury. His accident is very close to my heart and initially caused me to think about putting to rest this ministry of healing. However, it is death as final healing that continues to give me hope. It is the hope of eternity that gives me hope for this earth. Should he walk again on earth, it will be because of the hope of final healing in heaven. Should he never walk again on earth, it will not be in vain, for his final healing will be an eternity of walking and running.

Lastly, the power of lay ministry in the practice of divine healing prayer has awakened me to be ever more convinced that in my own pastoral ministry, wherever I go, it is not enough for me to sense God's calling to practice divine healing prayers and impart some measure of healing to people, but to equip people to participate in this

practice. I learned that as Christ did his ministry of healing, he did not keep that ministry to himself but released it to his disciples (not just the twelve) but the seventy-two!<sup>115</sup> I will not only teach and practice divine healing prayer but also equip people to practice divine healing prayer so that salvation as healing can be made known to greater reaches of the Church.

### **What implications does this study have for the Church at large?**

Francis MacNutt writes about the distinction between those who have a gift of faith and those who have the virtue of faith.<sup>116</sup> Everyone has faith, but some people have a particular gift in which they can receive direction from God and pronounce healing over the sick person. The latter person is the one who exercises the faith they simply have in God and pray on behalf of the person who is sick. There are those with the particular gift, but those who do not have this particular gift still have faith. As this study is to explore the way the common layperson in a Christian church can engage in divine healing prayer, MacNutt's work is helpful in articulating the findings I have from this project.

The purpose of the doctoral project was to equip Christians to boldly and courageously engage in the practice of divine healing prayer. Not on the basis of a gift of faith, but the basis of the virtue of faith, baptismal identity, the practice of Holy Communion, the use of anointing oil, and some practical teachings found in James 5:13-18. In doing so, praying for healing becomes a norm and not a special or unique practice. If the people of God are to pray and make normal the practice of praying for healing, how

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<sup>115</sup> Luke 10:1-17.

<sup>116</sup> MacNutt, *Healing*, 98.

much a difference would this make in the life of the church? How much of a difference would it make in cultivating a spirit of faith and hope in the church? As mentioned earlier, there were marked changes that took place in the life of the congregation as people decided to be bolder in their exercise of faith and turn to God in prayer for healing.

For those who are eagerly seeking to cultivate a congregation that seeks God in prayer for healing as the “norm” or “standard,” I discovered through this study that the congregation members needed to be able to see how praying for divine healing is intrinsic to who they are as baptized Christians. The more churches are able to dispel the idea that divine healing prayer is for a certain spiritually elite group of Christians, or for certain ordained folks, or some ancient superstitious practice of the past, the more the congregation as a whole is able to embrace the “norm” of practicing divine healing prayer.

It seems to be of great importance that a congregation must experience a demonstration of divine healing prayer in order to become open to a congregation-wide practice of such prayers. In the context of CUMC, divine healing prayer was introduced as a clergy-led practice first. This took place in the Spring of 2019. The timing of this was important because a year prior, during the summer, I led a team of pastors and students to a national conference where I was the main preacher, and they witnessed divine healing prayer in which physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healings took place. These reports came back to CUMC. This prepped the “soil” of the congregation for Spring 2019 when I introduced divine healing prayer as an altar call ministry on Sundays after worship during the season of Lent.

When a congregation can hear first, experience next, it helps cause the congregation to have a desire to participate in the practice of divine healing prayer. I especially emphasize that divine healing prayer is something anyone who believes in Jesus Christ can participate in. As I conversed with small groups and other individuals about what drew interest in the practice of divine healing prayer, the sequence mentioned above was a conclusion I was able to land on. It is much like the experience the disciples had with Jesus. John the Baptist tells his disciples about Jesus. Andrew experiences Jesus, and then he participates in reaching out to others about Jesus, especially Simon Peter.<sup>117</sup>

Hear first, experience next, then practice. Perhaps this is a model that would work in equipping congregations to engage in the practice of divine healing prayer. Yet, what shall they hear? A systematic theological approach to explaining healing? I discovered that there is great power and quickness to people simply hearing stories of healing and answer to divine healing prayers. A system of explaining how divine healing prayer works can be explained at a later time. What is more important is hearing the stories of healing. This is what the forty-day healing devotions were helpful for. As people read the stories of healing, the congregation became more inspired and excited for what God can and will do in the midst of people's lives today. In the life of every congregation is a treasure trove of stories of God's faithfulness and grace at work. What matters is that these stories are not all stories that have instantaneous or "hocus pocus" type of experience, but that there is a diversity to the stories. Some healing experiences are about getting connected to the right physician at the right time. Other healing experiences are about getting out of harmful relationships and getting into whole relationships. Still, other

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<sup>117</sup> John 1:29-42.

experiences take place through a long stretch of time and through many different stages of recovery and healing. Lastly, healing is perhaps most glorious in death. Methodist tradition teaches about glorifying grace as the grace that takes us to the very presence of Jesus in the glory of heaven: final salvation.<sup>118</sup> Taking the definition of salvation as healing, then the final healing of all is when we pass on from this life into the glory of eternity with Christ.

When stories from within a congregation can declare that God always heals, then it inspires people to reflect on the ways God has also brought healing into their own lives and start telling their stories. The brave ones who go first to tell the stories will inspire the rest of the congregation to share their own stories. As people are able to see that any kind of saving work of God is a healing work of God, a congregation can develop a culture of sharing healing stories because there has been a radical shift in understanding salvation as healing. These storytelling times can be done in a larger setting or in a smaller setting where many stories can be shared together. At CUMC, the small groups were the perfect setting for such an experience. More important than even the small group study itself were the small group times in which people shared their own stories of healing and answers to divine healing prayer.

Perhaps the combination of small groups and daily devotions in which many stories of healing were shared enabled the congregation to hear the sermons with greater interest and enthusiasm. It also seems that the power of the sermon was not found solely in the declaration that “God always heals,” but more so in the time of prayer following

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<sup>118</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p 340, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.html>

the sermons when the people in the congregation could reflect on what they heard, and the Holy Spirit manifested in various ways to reveal the truth of divine healing for people today. It is also very important to make sure that the sermons or messages on healing are not confined to a particular topic alone. In doing so, it greatly limits the vision people can have for healing. If the topic is solely on physical healing, then it excludes the ways in which God brings healing to those who suffer from mental, emotional, relational, church, and spiritual pains. The sermons I preached covered all of those topics. Furthermore, I learned that it is important to “give permission” to the congregation to see that it is a common human experience to have ailments of many different kinds. To this, the truly Human One (Jesus Christ) came to offer us not only a different way of understanding healing and wholeness but truly healing us and making us whole in every single way. That is why the sermon series did not begin with the different forms of sickness but a simple invitation to see the common experience of human frailty. The sermon series ended with an invitation to Jesus Christ the truly Human One, in whom all of our frailty rests, and we find our healing and wholeness through his passion, death, and resurrection.

### **Christian identity, context, and prophetic utterances of healing to a broken world**

The study of healing and equipping laity for divine healing prayer is more than just learning a Christian practice. It is important for the baptismal calling of the Christian to be lived out, and such a calling is desperately needed now more than ever. In the wake of the 2020 General Election in the United States, and in the midst of a global pandemic that has crippled the United States, people are more divided, hurt, and confused than ever. There were many assumptions of a “blue wave” in which the Democrats would have a

sweeping victory over the presidency, the Senate, and maintain a strong majority in the House of Representatives. However, election night revealed that the American people are more divided down the middle than projected. Approaching Election Day, the legitimacy of information and dissemination of scientific data proved to be increasingly at risk and the post-election season continued to display such factors. Moral leadership in the political spheres of American life have become questionable or even irrelevant. As there is so much distrust in the political and social landscape of our nation, the gospel of Jesus Christ must take on the form of healing rather than forgiveness and pardoning of sin as immoral acts.

One can say that the greater spiritual soil of the United States that we are living in is very conscious of health and morality. This is perhaps because of the pandemic, but also noticing the sickness of the political system, the social systems that shape race, gender, and sexuality. This is the context of our whole nation. In particular, the Northern Virginia area where CUMC is located in an ever-increasingly diverse area of our nation, and the need for healing is even more evident. Our Christian identity matters more in the message and demonstration of healing rather than raising the question of morals. The former addresses a nationwide felt need, while the latter causes people to draw lines of “right” and “wrong,” which further the polarization culture even further.

In the midst of such context, if the church can be regularly practicing divine healing prayer, it not only addresses the equipping of religious practice but such a practice shapes one’s thinking to see salvation as healing, which means to see the world in need of healing through Jesus Christ. If a Christian’s understanding of salvation is that the Christian has been healed of the sickness of sin, then how much more will that

Christian be an agent of healing to the world of sickness he or she once lived in? This identity springs forth a crucial understanding of how the Christian will understand the context in which gospel ministry is taking place. Such a Christian will raise up Jesus Christ as healer to a broken world. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”<sup>119</sup> What kind of Jesus can the Church and Christians offer to the world? A healing savior!

When Christians lift up a forgiving Savior, then it is easy to point fingers at all the people who are doing “wrong” and preach a message that condemns the “wrongs” such people are doing. However, when Christians lift up a healing Savior, then in the common human experience of illness and sickness, the finger-pointing ceases, “swords are beaten into plowshares.”<sup>120</sup> In our given context of pain and brokenness throughout our nation, the message of a healing Savior is far more appealing and effective.

### **What can a church do to be mobilized for practicing divine healing prayer?**

Through this dissertation and project implementation, I conclude that divine healing prayer is essential and much needed as a wide-spread practice today. In order to make this a wide-spread practice, there are different stages of implementation that must be done in order to mobilize churches and Christians to the practice of divine healing prayer. First, churches need to tell stories of healing. Second, churches and Christians need to witness present answers to divine healing prayer. Third, churches and Christians need to be equipped to practice divine healing prayer.

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<sup>119</sup> John 12:32.

<sup>120</sup> Isa. 2:4.

First, churches need to tell stories of healing. Christians need to tell stories of healing. First and foremost, the stories must be the stories of healing found in the Bible. Jesus' healing ministry must be highlighted and shared. Connected to the stories of Jesus' healing ministry are further stories of the apostles' healing ministry. Lastly, churches and Christians need to tell stories of their own experiences of divine healing. These stories of healing must be a wide-expansive breadth of all kinds of healings that Christians have experienced. The point is that healing must become the norm of spiritual engagement in the Church today. The stories we tell become the very heartbeat of the culture and life of a congregation, our families, and our own lives. When churches and Christians can live in this manner, even communities can have stories of divine healing.

Second, churches and Christians need to witness answers to divine healing prayers in the present. Churches and Christians should not depend on "good old days" and only look at the "glory days" of the past when they experienced God's hand of healing. The ever-present experiences of God's healing testify to God's healing ministry today. The present-experience of divine healing is crucial for the ongoing practice of the church and Christians in divine healing prayer. When churches and Christians can be inspired by the stories of what God has done in the past, as well as what God is doing in the present, it will inspire and stir up people to want to actively engage in the practice of divine healing prayer themselves.

Third and last is the equipping of people to practice divine healing prayer. Much like the sermons, small group study, and devotionals launched in the doctoral project, churches need to utilize a comprehensive and holistic resource that allows for people to learn, share, and experience God's healing ministry. There also must be a practicum on

how to practice divine healing prayer. As Christ showed his disciples how to pray for healing, he was able to send out the seventy-two disciples. They knew how to pray for the sick because they had observed Christ do it. Therefore, it is important not just to read about it, hear about it, and be inspired to do it. It is vital to have training and hands-on equipping.

At CUMC, I have involved laypeople who are ready to accompany me in the practice of divine healing prayer and experience firsthand how to pray for healing and how to exercise faith in the midst of praying for healing. I myself experienced firsthand not in theory but with people who had prayed for healing and demonstrated results. Sometimes the results were immediate. Other times, it took time, and still, other healings came in final salvation. More interestingly, there were times when healing took place in stages, so requiring a number of multiple “attempts” at divine healing prayer or multiple sessions. Most importantly, I have learned that God does not answer the same way all the time, so it is important to be mindful and in tune with the context of the people, as well as the lead of the Holy Spirit. This is an equipping that is vital as it is easy to become discouraged in the practice of divine healing prayers. Even after training and equipping, it is important to be connected to people who are active practitioners of divine healing prayer, who are continually learning the practice, theology, and growing in the experience of praying for healing.

### **Jesus As Healer, the Church as Healing**

There is a lost calling and lost art to the mission of the Church. The misconception of evangelism that is discovered in conversation with the CUMC

congregation is the idea that one needs to effectively articulate the doctrines of the church and refute the arguments that people have. Furthermore, there is reluctance to evangelize because of the burden of having to convince people through their doubts. We must shift from thinking of evangelism as making failproof arguments for the gospel to simply introducing Jesus as healer, the God who always heals. In doing so, we can easily interface a world where sickness is a common experience. Proclaiming the gospel of salvation is proclaiming the gospel of healing.

This reality was most pronounced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which clergy were not considered in the category of “essential” workers to participate in addressing the health crisis. The church was not considered to be a vital operation for healing and wholeness. It was troubling to experience how clergy and churches were considered non-vital, and non-essential by the society at large. However, perhaps more critical to this reality is the question of whether clergy and churches saw themselves as essential and vital in a pandemic health crisis. Did clergy see themselves as healers or did they simply resign themselves to be like other professionals categorized into a “non-essential” category? In retrospect, a question I raise is, “What if we all saw ourselves in Christ as healers of the soul?” Were we too busy pivoting our worship services and ministry gatherings to a virtual format that we lost sight of our vital role to be a people who are mobilized to bring a presence of healing, grace, and wholeness to the world around us?

In the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Commonwealth of Virginia has clergy and faith leaders placed in the category of “Frontline Essential Workers.” This gives me hope. Perhaps one of the realizations of people during the pandemic is the loss

of community, leadership, and relationships. Over 500,000 deaths have occurred through COVID-19, and many crises surrounding physical, emotional, psychological, and social health have emerged. As I see clergy and faith leaders in the category of “Frontline Essential Workers,” I hope that clergy and faith leaders can use this opportunity to reengage with the re-opening world as healers and to steer their congregations and organizations in the direction of bringing healing.

The Church is called to invite people to salvation in Christ Jesus. If salvation is healing, then the Church is to be the agent through which healing is brought to the world. It is to our responsibility and calling to become healing agents. Michael Beck writes, “Jesus’ plan to heal the world is the church...a community of people who embody his risenness. Every believer cultivating new Christian communities in every nook and cranny of life could fill the world with healing.”<sup>121</sup> Christians and churches must begin to self-identify as agents of healing.

Inviting people to salvation is inviting people to healing. Jesus gave the gospel mandate to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>122</sup> What should the Church teach? What shall Christians obey? It is the gospel of healing. In the end, the book of Revelation reveals that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations.<sup>123</sup> Salvation is healing. If we are preaching the gospel, we must preach healing. We must practice healing through divine healing

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Beck’s Facebook page, accessed March 11, 2021.  
<https://www.facebook.com/michael.beck.1044/posts/3953115021419210>

<sup>122</sup> Matt. 28:18-20

<sup>123</sup> Revelation 22:2

prayers. We must train and equip the church to point the world to Jesus as healer, and the Church must be healing to the world.

## EPILOGUE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

### **Sailing the Spirit**

In the first chapter, I addressed how Dave Gibbons writes about “third culture people” and uses the phrase “culture-nauts” to describe people who are able to navigate multiple cultural contexts with ease.<sup>124</sup> There are master practitioners in this world with backgrounds in sociology and multidisciplinary education, and practical experience to help us navigate differences in culture. Indeed, that is what it means to be a “culture-naut.” The word is derived from the word “astronaut,” which is a sailor of the stars. We can understand culture-nauts who “sail through culture,” and they can surely serve as guides to help us “sail through culture” as well. However, the Church is called to more than navigating culture.

Leonard Sweet says that there is truly a third wave taking place in the Church today. The first wave was God the Father, the second wave was Christ the Son, and the third wave is the Holy Spirit. While an astronaut is a sailor of the stars, a cosmonaut is a sailor of the cosmos, and a “pneuma-naut” is a sailor of the Spirit.<sup>125</sup> Is the Church sailing the Spirit? Along those lines, while “the priesthood of all believers” was important in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the “prophethood of believers” is important today.<sup>126</sup>

To this end, the ministry of divine healing prayer is an aspect of the Church’s calling to sail the Spirit. It is a call for Christians to be pneuma-nauts and master the

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<sup>124</sup> Gibbons, 20-21.

<sup>125</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Lecture during Doctor of Ministry Program: Pastoral Identity and Prophetic Fire in a Fluid Culture, Drew University,” October 28, 2019.

<sup>126</sup> Sweet, “Lecture for Doctor of Ministry,” October 28, 2019.

navigation of how to pray for healing. More importantly, it is not simply to engage in spiritual practice but to encounter the living God who always heals. It is time for the Church to rise up and sail the Spirit and be a guide to the world so that people can connect their life stories with the story of our God, who always heals in Christ Jesus.

APPENDIX A: SÓZÓ SERMONS

*Sermons for the Lenten Season*

# SÓZÓ

THE WAYS WE HURT  
THE WAYS GOD HEALS

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WRITTEN BY DANIEL D. PARK



Matthew 8:14-17

<sup>14</sup> And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. <sup>15</sup> He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. <sup>16</sup> That evening they brought him to many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healing all who were sick. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Mark 6:13

<sup>13</sup> And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

**Story:**

"He really heals!" "He still heals today..." Growing up, I had only heard stories of God healing people and read about them in the Bible. I hadn't experienced it first hand. But something in me couldn't shake it off. My God must be able to heal, then he wouldn't be God. Doesn't He still heal? Doesn't He still do miracles?

Around 2011, I began a journey of simply praying for healing for people. And God would show up here and there in different ways. But I wanted more. For the reason of wanting to see God move the way He did in Jesus' ministry and the Acts of Apostles. I wanted church to be like that. In 2012, I was changed forever. God sent me to a conference where in a gathering of 250 students and volunteers, I would estimate that about fifty people were healed of various different sicknesses and illnesses in one worship service. It was that moment, I was so filled with excitement and so humbled at the same time.

But from that moment I began to pray. I want to see this in the local church. What would it be if a local church could experience and grow in the healing grace of our Jesus?

I've been incubating this movement in my heart and sharing glimpses of it with you all over the last few years. But I want to elevate what the Lord has been putting on my heart. His salvation is that of healing. His ministry is that of healing. He wants our church to be a healing church.

Because our God is not some theological argument. God is not some philosophical, theoretical idea. God also not some being that intervenes once in a while. I believe that God is God. God is powerful. God is wonderful. God is good. God is able. God still works miracles today. Our salvation is entirely about healing. Even *death* is a healing. It's the ultimate healing.

We enter a series today during Lent about Salvation as wholeness and healing. Our devotionals will be about healing. Our sermons will be about healing. Please join a Bible study, a small group. If you don't know which one, just ask me, or Andy Choi who is leading us in spiritual formation this year. I wrote a Bible study curriculum entirely on how every Christian on the basis of baptism, the Lord's Supper and anointing oil can practice divine healing prayer. It is built on the idea that salvation is not an eternal destination. Salvation is wholeness and healing. And it is most biblical.

### **William Tyndale**

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to early 16<sup>th</sup> century lived a man named William Tyndale. He was a very gifted scholar in England. He was a very leading figure in the Protestant Reformation. He was a gifted linguist, fluent in English, French, Greek, Hebrew, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. He is credited to be the first person to translate the Bible into English directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts.

It is William Tyndale who translated a word you most commonly see in the New Testament in English as "save." But in the Greek it is a word "sózó, which actually means "heal" or "make whole."

## Salvation is Healing

The salvation we have in Jesus Christ is not just about having a guaranteed place to go to after we pass on from this world. Salvation is wholeness and health. It is about the wholeness of our being. It affects our bodies, our minds, our souls, our hearts, our relationships, our outlook on life.

Jesus came to heal. If there is a word that came sum up Jesus' entire ministry it is "HEAL." Jesus says in Luke 19:10 – *For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.* In other words, Jesus came to seek and heal the lost.

Heal = *Gk. Sózó* = heal and make whole

Lost = *Gk. apollumi* = to be lost, to perish, to be brought to ruin.

It's such a forcefulness to this word. It's like the word anxiety in the Greek, which means to be pulled apart.

In what ways are you lost today? The story we have before us today is from Matthew 8. Jesus goes to Peter's house and there, Peter's mother-in-law was lost in a fever. Afterwards, crowds began to gather at Peter's house.

There are people who are lost spiritually, with all kinds of oppressions, spiritual attacks, and evil powers at work. There are people who are lost physically in sickness and disease. In what ways are you lost today?

I want to encourage you and I want to press on you. Jesus is seeking you out. The word "seek" means "to seek in order to find." Jesus is intent on going to you. Finding you. Seeking you, searching for you. Calling you. Inviting you. Calling you by name. He is saying, "My daughter. My son." I'm here for you. What does He want to say to you? He wants to say, "I'm here to heal you." I'm here to heal you from the place where you are lost. In what way are you lost? What is your ailment? What is your sickness today? What is your point of weakness?

The beautiful part of the story in Matthew 8 is that Jesus healed everyone who was sick. And that word “sick” is not just physical, but to be in misery, which includes physical sickness, or to be in a wrong state of being. Jesus is looking for you. Intently. Can we all just close our eyes for a moment? Can you just intensely focus on quieting our thoughts and listen? Jesus is saying, “I’m here to heal you.”

How is this possible? It is possible through salvation. Because salvation and healing are one in the same. It happens because of Jesus. That is why we take communion. That is why we use anointing oil when we pray for healing.

When Jesus sent out his disciples to pray for healing, they used anointing oil. Why? Because in order to make olive oil, you need to press and crush the olives.



That is the only way to make olive oil. There is no way to keep the olive intact and preserve its structural integrity. And still get the olive oil. In the same way, in order to get the Holy Spirit, Jesus needs to be pressed, crushed, broken for us.

So when we take Holy Communion, I often say,



“This is the body of Christ broken for you.”

Broken for your wholeness! This is the blood of Christ, poured out for your healing! The prophet Isaiah says that by the wounds of Jesus, we are healed. Yes. The Holy Spirit comes ONLY after Jesus is crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected. There is no way to have the Holy Spirit come to us apart from the suffering and death of Christ. This is the only sequence, the only way it can happen. So the more we want to experience the flow of the Holy Spirit, we really gotta get this, “I believe in Jesus Christ and what he did for me” RIGHT. We have to get it down. We live in a world today that is full of great fear

when it comes to sickness and disease. Especially right now the world is frightened with the corona virus. As the corona virus is spreading throughout the world, and has also entered our country. We have friends and family throughout the world in places that are plagued not only by the disease itself, but the fear of it is crippling and paralyzing people.

What do we do as believers in Jesus Christ? Do we have some wishful thinking? Some magic incantation? Some formula? Forget all that. We have Jesus Christ. Won't you put your trust in Jesus Christ, the one who can heal you? Won't you put your trust in Jesus Christ, the one who can protect you and guard your health? This is the time to truly live by faith.

Isaiah 54:17 says:

“No weapon formed against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me.” Declares the Lord.

Notice, it doesn't say that no weapons will be formed against you. It says that they will *not prevail*. And you and I with the authority of Jesus Christ be bold and claim protection and victory. Every word that is speaking against you. The news reports that are scaring you and speaking fear to you. The medical reports that are shaking you up. No. No. How about, we as a church, stand up and refute it! The Word of God says that this is a heritage that we have as God's people. That this is how we will be able to live demonstrating that we have His salvation.

As believers of Jesus Christ. Because of what he did through the cross, the Holy Spirit has been given to us and we have been given the spiritual authority to say, “NO!” And we have been given the spiritual authority to speak wholeness, and wellness, and healing.



It's like Captain America's shield, used for both defense and offense.

It is not we. But it is Jesus Christ. Just as he healed everyone, and just as he sent out the disciples to anoint and heal many people. That same reality is for us. We have the same Jesus.



Today, I want to invite you to come up and take communion.

And afterwards, if you want to be prayed for and be anointed with the Holy Spirit,



I will pray a prayer of protection and wellness over you.

After service, if you have a specific prayer request, please remain so that I can anoint you and pray God's healing over you.

Other sermons in the “Sózó: The Way We Hurt, the Way God Heals” included the following titles:

February 26, 2020 – Ash Wednesday  
“The Reality of Human Frailty and Brokenness”

March 1, 2020 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Physical Health, Loss, and Healing”

March 8, 2020 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Mental Illness, Isolation, and Healing”

March 15, 2020 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Emotional Wounds and Healing”

March 22, 2020 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Family Tensions, Strife, and Healing”

March 29, 2020 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Church Divisions, Polarization, and Healing”

April 5, 2020 – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“Spiritual Strongholds and Healing”

APPENDIX B: SÓZÓ SMALL GROUP STUDY

*Bible Study for the Lenten Season*

# SÓZÓ

OUR SALVATION THAT ENABLES US  
TO PRACTICE DIVINE HEALING PRAYER

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WRITTEN BY DANIEL PARK



*Week One: Ancient Understanding Part One*

## THE BALM OF GILEAD

Jeremiah 8:22

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?*



By Deror\_avi - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36512852>

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I grew up in an evangelical Christian tradition that defined sin along the spectrum of morality. The first sin recorded in the Bible was discussed only along the lines of disobedience. Adam and Eve's problem was that they simply disobeyed God, and that disobedience

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resulted in a morally corrupt human race. Restricting the definition of sin to the spectrum of morality results in a salvation that is focused on making morally upright people. However, a closer reading of the Bible expands our understanding of sin, and therefore expands our understanding of salvation.

*Salvation as health, sin as disease*

"In 1997, the World Health Organization proposed that health should be defined not as an absence of disease but as 'a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well being.' This definition of health returns us to the original definition of salvation in William Tyndale's first English translation of the New Testament (1524). The NT Greek words of healing, health, wholeness, and salvation are the same words, and in Tyndale's translation of the Bible they were interchangeable. The good news is all about 'health' and 'healing' and 'wholeness'... The restoration healing of Christ is not back to where our health started to deteriorate, or even to a point just before we screwed up. It is restoration to a state we have never experienced before."<sup>1</sup>

The problem of sin is not a simple matter of our insistence or stubbornness to continue acting on our sinful thoughts or impulses. The reality of sin is that it stems from a sickness within the soul that is trying to find meaning and purpose within ourselves. Every sin can find its root in something good that is being pursued by our own means rather than fulfilling through God. For example, we were made for significance, but instead of finding significance in God, we look to manufacture it for ourselves. We turn to success, titles, achievements, and accumulation of possessions to say, "I am significant." Meanwhile, God is saying, "You are significant because you were made in my image. You are significant because I am significant!"

When Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the serpent told them that they would become like God. The truth is that they were already like

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet, Leonard. *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (p. 196). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

God. When God made them, He had already said that He would make them in His image and likeness. People have always been in the likeness of God, but we chose to look elsewhere to be like God. Our divineness was not to be found anywhere else but in our created identity.

The real problem of sin is the pursuit of finding identity, meaning, and purpose outside of God and through our own means. It is this spiritual condition that we need to label as sin. Sin is a spiritual illness. That is why William Tyndale translated "salvation" as "health," and "wholeness." John Wesley referred to the corruption of our nature as disease, and that Jesus Christ was the remedy for us.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Forensic view vs. therapeutic view of salvation*

James Pedlar is the chair of Wesley Studies and Associate Professor of Theology at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. He writes, "John Wesley's theology of salvation is sometimes said to combine the best of both the Western and Eastern traditions, meaning he combines a *forensic* understanding of salvation with a *therapeutic* understanding of salvation. Western Christianity has tended to focus on sin as a *guilt* problem, and therefore preached salvation primarily in terms of *forgiveness* (forensic/legal language). The Eastern tradition has tended to focus on sin as a *sickness* problem, and therefore preached salvation primarily in terms of *healing* (therapeutic language)."<sup>3</sup>

To what degree has our understanding of salvation been a forensic understanding as opposed to a therapeutic one? With forensic understanding being the primary message of salvation in the United States, it can explain why even in spite of the presence of Christians and churches in our society that there is a continual rise of mental and spiritual illness. Christians in our culture today grapple most profoundly with stress and anxiety! This leads me to believe that it is important for us to consider the therapeutic understanding of salvation today!

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<sup>2</sup> Wesley, John. "On the Fall of Man"

<sup>3</sup> <https://jamespedlar.wordpress.com/2011/08/11/john-wesley-and-the-mission-of-god-part-3-a-therapeutic-understanding-of-salvation/>

*The balm of Gilead and Jesus*

The balm of Gilead is a legendary medicine that is thought to be lost forever. Gilead was a region east of the Jordan River. Gilead was known for its ointments. The balm of Gilead was a sought-ought ointment with healing properties. The term "balm of Gilead" is used metaphorically and poetically to address the sickness of sin.

In the prophetic work of Jeremiah, God reveals that Babylon will bring destruction upon Judah. In response, Jeremiah laments and says, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (Jeremiah 8:22). In the same vein, he says, "Is there no physician there?" The reason for Judah's destruction is sin and disobedience. Yet, Jeremiah's understanding of this sinful disobedience and turning to idols, is rooted in spiritual disease. His lament reveals that although Judah's destruction is a result of idolatry and sinful disobedience to God, the root of such sinful living is an issue of disease. Therefore, he laments further, "Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not restored?"

Jeremiah is saying, "If we could be a healed people, then we would not commit idolatry and live in sinful disobedience to God." The solution then lies in a salvation that is not only forensic, but most certainly therapeutic. We need to view salvation as healing first and foremost if we are to truly address the forensic understanding of sin and salvation.

There is a well-known African-American spiritual, "There Is A Balm in Gilead." This spiritual compares the balm of Gilead to the healing and saving power of Jesus.

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole*

*There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.*

Jesus is the legendary balm in Gilead that can heal us of our sin-sick soul. He is the one who can make us whole from within so that the way we live outwardly will be done out of wholeness of being.

*Forensic view inevitably leads to therapeutic view*

One last thing to consider about salvation as healing and wholeness is that if we take the forensic understanding of sin and salvation to the fullest measure, we need to understand the power of

condemnation, guilt, and shame. Psychological sciences explain how condemnation leads to guilt, and ultimately shame, when dealing with the character of the person. Shame is a terrible injury to the person.<sup>4</sup> The forensic understanding of salvation pardons the guilty sinner, and removes condemnation. In doing so, the forgiven person can be healed of shame. When someone is healed of shame, they can live with wholeness in spirit, emotions, and thought. We must understand that even the predominantly Western view of salvation is ultimately a matter of healing and wholeness.

Instead of viewing sin and salvation primarily through a forensic understanding, we need to view sin and salvation with a therapeutic understanding. In doing so, we will address the root or foundation of the person, not just the external actions. Therefore, let us see Jesus as the Balm of Gilead who heals the sin-sick soul. Let that shape the way you understand sin and salvation in your life.

### ***Group Discussion Questions***

1. What understanding of sin and salvation did you have previously? Was it forensic? therapeutic? Both? Explain.
2. Jeremiah's response to God's judgment was a lament about the lack of spiritual healing. In what ways is this a new or different understanding of God's judgment against sin?
3. Why is it important to have a therapeutic understanding of sin and salvation?
4. How does a forensic or therapeutic understanding of sin and salvation enable the Christians to engage our present culture?
5. In what ways does this Bible study session encourage or challenge you in your life?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-pathways-experience/201709/embarrassment-guilt-and-shame>

Other chapters in *Sózó: Our Salvation The Enables Us To Practice Divine Healing Prayer* included the following titles:

Introduction

“The Power of Truth”

Week Two

The Divine Exchange

Week Three

Our Baptismal identity

Week Four

The Eucharist

Week Five

Anointing Oil

Week Six

A Study of James 5:13-18

Epilogue

Some Practical Things

APPENDIX C: SÓZÓ DEVOTIONAL

*Daily Devotional for the Lenten Season*

# SÓZÓ

40 INSPIRATIONAL STORIES OF HEALING  
FROM CHESTERBROOK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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COMPILED BY DANIEL D. PARK



**Day 20 - March 19, 2020**

*"Back Pain" by Daniel Park*

Scripture: John 5:6

*"Do you want to be healed?"*

Reflection

At a retreat one time, I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to do an altar call for physical healing. There was a group of woman who brought their friend up to the front of the room we were worshipping in. They said, "This woman needs healing for her back." I could tell that this woman was reluctant to be prayed for. I asked her what the situation was. She proceeded to tell the story. She cooked all summer every day at a church for 300 children. In serving as a volunteer, she strained her back and was in chronic severe pain. Already five months had passed since her injury first took place. Because this took place while serving the Lord, she concluded that this pain would be a cross for her to bear. She said that it must be a thorn in the flesh. I asked her where she got that understanding from. She said that she had learned that way of thinking all of her life in the church. So I asked her how she would like me to pray for her. She said, "I would you like you to pray for me to have the strength to endure the times when it hurts beyond what I can handle on my own." Along that line of reasoning she continued to talk and explain away why that was her prayer request. As I listened to her, I felt the Holy Spirit put it on my heart to ask her the question, "Do you want to be healed?" So I did. I actually interrupted her mid-sentence and asked, "Do you want to be healed?" Without a moment of hesitation, she nodded her head, exclaiming, "Yes!" and immediately became an emotional flood of tears. All of that theology of "thorn in the flesh" and "the cross I must bear" that she was talking about went out the door. She said, "Yes. I want to be healed. It hurts too much. I don't want to be in pain anymore." So I said, "Ok. Let's pray." I asked her to lay hands on her lower back, and for her friends to also lay hands on her. I anointed her with olive oil. We prayed together a few times. Each time we prayed, she became better and better. After the fourth time praying, she was fully healed and free of pain. She was healed in the name of Jesus. Do you want to be healed? Jesus asked that same question during his ministry. Let that question reverberate in your thoughts and spirit today. Do you want to be healed. Hear the voice of our Healer God, Jesus Christ speaking to you. Be healed in the name of Jesus.

Prayer (by Daniel Park)

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus Christ to be my healer. Let me hear loud and clear in the deepest caverns of my soul. Let me hear the voice of Your Spirit, "Do you want to be healed." Let my response be a resounding, "YES." Let Your healing grace wash all over me and heal me in the name of Jesus Christ. Let me be a living testimony of Your healing power. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Other devotions in *Sózó: 40 Inspirational Stories of Healing From Chesterbrook United Methodist Church* included the following titles:

**List of Devotions**

Day 1	2/26/20	Human Frailty (Isaiah 61:1-14)
Day 2	2/27/20	Trusting God (Proverbs 3:5-8)
Day 3	2/28/20	Balm of Gilead (Jeremiah 8:22)
Day 4	2/29/20	The Son of Man (Luke 19:9)
Day 5	3/2/20	Gluten Allergy (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)
Day 6	3/3/20	Fever (James 5:16)
Day 7	3/4/20	Headache (Acts 4:30)
Day 8	3/5/20	Joints (Hebrews 12:13)
Day 9	3/6/20	Fever (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)
Day 10	3/7/20	Brain Tumor (Philippians 4:19)
Day 11	3/9/20	Depression (James 5:13-14)
Day 12	3/10/20	Racial Fear (Galatians 3:28)
Day 13	3/11/20	Depression/Loneliness (2 Corinthians 3:18)
Day 14	3/12/20	Fear of Praying for Healing (1 John 4:18)
Day 15	3/13/20	Reconciling with Step Mother (1 John 4:7-8)
Day 16	3/14/20	Fear of Dogs (Psalm 116:1)
Day 17	3/16/20	Pregnancy and Giving Birth (Deuteronomy 10:21)
Day 18	3/17/20	Autism and Wholeness (Isaiah 43:19)
Day 19	3/18/20	Reconciling with Father (Psalm 33:11)
Day 20	3/19/20	Back Pain (John 5:6)
Day 21	3/20/20	Mental Exhaustion and Trauma (Romans 12:2)
Day 22	3/21/20	Self-Worth (2 Corinthians 5:21)
Day 23	3/23/20	Risking Life for COVID-19 (Hebrews 10:23-25)
Day 24	3/24/20	Painful Hands (Matthew 12:13)
Day 25	3/25/20	Pride (John 8:31)
Day 26	3/26/20	Multiple Illnesses Part 1 (Psalm 30:2-3)
Day 27	3/27/20	Multiple Illnesses Part 2 (Psalm 30:2-3)
Day 28	3/28/20	Hurting Feet (Matthew 11:4)
Day 29	3/30/20	Medical Condition of Urinating (Hebrews 11:1)
Day 30	3/31/20	Chronic Anxiety (1 Peter 5:7)
Day 31	4/1/20	Reconciling with Father (Psalm 61:1-2)
Day 32	4/2/20	Insomnia (Matthew 11:28-30)
Day 33	4/3/20	Car Accident Part 1 (Psalm 34:7)
Day 34	4/4/20	Car Accident Part 2 (Psalm 34:7)
Day 35	4/6/20	Chronic Leg Cramps (Ephesians 5:25-26)
Day 36	4/7/20	Inner Healing (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)
Day 37	4/8/20	Severed ACL (Hebrews 13:8)
Day 38	4/9/20	Laryngitis (John 4:24)
Day 39	4/10/20	Healing Prayer (Isaiah 53:5)
Day 40	4/11/20	When God is Silent (Hebrews 9:28)

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