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## Abstract

There are no spectators in the Kingdom of God. The call to follow Christ is one of belief, repentance, and service. Even though the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is widely accepted among Christians, the fact remains that many believers do not actively participate in serving Christ through a faith community. *Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* imagines practical applications of the priesthood of all believers within the context of the local church. It explores questions concerning a congregation's purpose, leadership development, community formation, and the mobilization of its members. Even though this work relies to some extent on lessons learned from the church in Central Africa, it is the goal of this project to speak to the church in general and has made an effort to be applicable to any particular context.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Mind the Gap

*Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* is, at the same time, a reactionary and a proactive project. It is reactionary because it has partly come out of the state in which many churches find themselves where they feel lost about who they are meant to be and what they are meant to do in the world. It can be said that this endeavor is also proactive because it reaches further than answering these two questions and attempts to think about where the church is going to be in the coming years. Some may look at these current times and declare them to be dark and devoid of hope. This work has attempted to restore hope by discerning where God is moving and endeavoring to nudge the church in that direction. In short, *Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* is an attempt at a more robust and practical application of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers for any congregation.

A fitting place to begin this journey would be to discuss the significant gap that sometimes separates the clergy and laity in varying Christian traditions. However, before treating this significant problem, it will be beneficial to discuss the title by breaking it down word for word. Those who study cultures and languages know that it is easy for ten people to read the same short phrase and walk away with ten different understandings of what it means. Therefore, this short exercise will attempt to start this work out on the right track and clarify its overall direction as an elaboration of the doctrine of the

priesthood of all believers.

*Building* may seem an altogether strange choice of a word when speaking about people. It could also be said that using such a verb would draw one's mind toward its usage as a noun, further reinforcing the idea that the church is a building and not a people. Applying this word here is done in the same spirit as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaching from Matthew 7:24 – 27. In these brief verses, Jesus declares, "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Conversely, those who do not are "like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand." This parable alludes to the importance of starting with the right theoretical foundation, and it is this meaning that is being invoked by the title of this work.

The selection of the word *congregation* was also made with care. Even if it is known that the church is a people and not a place or building, so much casual religious language affirms the notion of the church as the building where the people gather. Choosing *congregations* instead of "churches" represents what has been an intentional effort to refer to people and not the places where believers gather. This point will be discussed extensively at other places within this project.

Speaking of *calling*, from the very title of this work, is an effort to dispel the notion that only some Christians are called into service of the kingdom. Scot McKnight, in *Kingdom Conspiracy*, introduces the notion of vocation as opposed to jobs. Without going too deeply into the subject at this point, McKnight argues that "when our job is swallowed up by the kingdom/church mission, it becomes vocation instead of 'just a job.'" Realizing that all believers are called to serve in God's kingdom mission for the

world is the first step toward transforming our work into God's vocational purpose for our lives.

*Belonging* is perhaps the most dangerous word of this short title. Feelings of belonging can easily be transferred to feelings of possessiveness and exclusion. Instead of creating a place where all are welcome, some congregations more closely resemble a club with exclusive membership requirements, which are unattainable for many of those who need the church the most. In an essay simply entitled "Membership," C. S. Lewis asserts that the people of the church, "are members of one another." Noting that someone is a member of a church should be synonymous with saying that they belong to a group of people and that group belongs to them. If people belong to one another, it is natural that they would all be working toward the same common good of this one body. The word "belonging" should never be used to exclude, but always to include. Its presence in the title of this project denotes careful attention to the fact that Christians are called together for a common purpose.

### *The Clergy/Lay Divide*

With an understanding of the meaning of the title and the direction of this study underway, it would now be helpful to mention the significant challenges of the endeavor to build congregations of calling and belonging. The root of these various problems resides with the deep gulf that separates the clergy and laity in many church traditions. One of the goals of this project will be to examine the need for clergy within the modern church and to outline efforts at bridging this divide for the good of the body of believers. One of John Wesley's most significant challenges surfaced with the broad

implementation of the laity in leadership positions within the Methodist movement. In responding by letter to a complaint that a fellow colleague had over this very issue,

Wesley said this:

Our preachers, many of them, are fallen. They are not spiritual. They are not alive to God. They are soft, enervated, fearful of shame, toil, hardship. They have not the spirit which God gave to Thomas Lee at Pateley Bridge or to you at Boston. Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

The vast divide that separates the clergy from the rest of the people of God is not a new problem for congregations. In chapter 3, this work will show the roots of this great debate back to the first century. At this point, it shall suffice to say that the debate is real and prominent and significantly impacts the faithfulness of every congregation as it strives to be faithful to its calling.

In order to have a fuller idea of the challenges for local congregations resulting from a deep separation between the clergy and laity, three narratives will be shared and examined. These are all true stories, told with some anonymity as to the exact details that highlight problems with the clergy/lay distinction. As they are meant to highlight challenges and difficulties, these will be stories of “getting it wrong” that will eventually be contrasted with hopeful stories of “getting it right.”

### *Stories Of Getting It Wrong*

Church A was once a thriving church of more than 300 people in a decent-sized military town. After a series of families being deployed to other assignments and twenty years of questionable leadership, the church was now reduced to about eighty people.

Perhaps another reason for the dwindling congregation was due to the fact that the neighborhood around the church had dramatically changed during the same time. Instead of being located in the primarily white upper-middle-class neighborhood of years gone by, the community had changed to one of a more lower-class and ethnically diverse population. In an attempt to help and encourage the new pastor of fewer than two years, one member of the church worked with him to discuss ministry opportunities based on needs and assets. They drew up a plan together for ministry, and both seemed to be quite excited. The congregant had one final meeting with the pastor just before the strategic plan was supposed to be unveiled to the church board. During this time, upon going over all the ways that they wanted to be involved in the community through various ministry opportunities, the pastor threw his hands into the air and exclaimed, “But who is going to do it all!” Unfortunately, the plan for new ministry and a sustained presence in the community was abandoned at that time and was never presented to the board or congregation.

As strange as this may sound, the sentiment of Church A’s pastor is echoed in congregations all around the world. Pastors often think that they are the only ones qualified, available, and willing to be involved in ministry. In this case, in particular, things had gotten quite arduous for the congregation. It could be said that those who remained during this trying time were the most dedicated and most likely of people to join in and partner with their pastor for ministry. Unfortunately, this pastor could not get past the fact that there was no professional staff to carry out the new plan. This outlook is understandable to some extent considering the amount of time and energy that pastors put into their education and ministry preparation. They have likely experienced people

turning them down on multiple occasions when asking for help, and they have probably also experienced reduced levels of commitment and quality from members of their congregation. In light of these experiences and Church A's current struggles with the bills and filling basic Sunday School classes with teachers, the pastor seems justified in doubting that their congregation would have been able to pull off a new comprehensive ministry plan.

Although Pastor A's sentiments are understandable, they represent a significant lack of faith in the people of congregation A. Do they not also care for the well-being of their church? Do they not also feel the weight of God's call upon them to join in with the work of the kingdom? The truth is that there are congregations that are interested in being implemented into the ministry of the church, and there are those who are not. At the same time, some pastors truly desire to involve their people in ministry and those who believe that it is too high of a calling for the ordinary layperson to undertake. Whatever the reasons may be for a church body's lack of involvement in ministry, this endeavor will argue that its participation in ministry is essential to their well-being as faithful followers of Christ.

Church B is located on the other side of the world, in a vastly different culture, but also has experienced challenges with the clergy/lay divide. Pastor B had planted a church that met in the family's home, as is the custom for new churches in the area. The pastor worked hard to prepare for ministry and to reach the surrounding neighborhood. Before long, the church had outgrown its modest accommodation and was meeting in a shack of sorts, constructed from bamboo and plastic tarps. Things were going well, and the church had a vibrant ministry in their small community. Several years later, the pastor

inexplicably died, leaving Church B without a leader. After the appropriate mourning period was over and life seemed to return to normal for the congregation, they began making pleas to the hierarchy of the denomination. “Send us a shepherd,” they implored on multiple occasions, “there is no one to take care of our flock.”

Church B was made up of more than one hundred people and had a core group of at least sixty at all of their various services and meetings. Could it be that in this body of more than one hundred members, there is no one capable of leading this congregation – even temporarily? The denominational leadership had a difficult time knowing how to respond to their needs. Usually, the death of a pastor equals the death of a congregation. As is the custom, each new pastor, upon receiving a call to ministry, is sent out to start a new church. There simply are not multiple pastors, or even those preparing to be pastors, within a single body of believers. The district structure in this area was made up of more than four thousand people. Surely, there was a leader among them capable of shepherding Church B. Unfortunately, none was found. No one was sent to them, and they currently meet as a family group of about fifteen people.

The problem for Church B is one that is repeated all around the world. So much of the success of a church relies upon leadership, and that is precisely why pastoral transitions are such painful and uncertain times for congregations. The gulf that separates these two classes of Christians (lay and clergy) has made it so that the laity cannot imagine themselves leading their church. That task lies with the clergy. Even though there are various entities meant to share power, such as church boards and the like, the bulk of the leadership is seen to reside with the pastor. When no suitable pastor is found over an extended period of time, there can be painful consequences. One of the goals of this work

is to make the point that the lay members of the congregation should be just as involved in the leadership and ministry of the church as are the clergy members. Instead of seeing pastoral transition as the likely destruction or weakening of a congregation, it should be seen as an opportunity for the growth and renewed sense of calling within its membership.

Church C is located in a similar context to Church B, although the situation is not entirely foreign to the Western world. On a rare occasion, Pastor C stepped away from the ministry in order to pursue other callings in life. This individual remained a part of the local congregation and attended services, meetings, and other gatherings regularly. It may seem strange that a pastor would step down from a position of leadership and yet remain an active part of the church, but it should also be noted that this person has been its first and most prominent member since the church's inception. Church C experienced the same trouble as Church B in finding a replacement for their pastor. Even though the person in question was still an active part of the church, Pastor C was no longer providing leadership, preaching, or participating in administrative responsibilities. When meeting with the church to discuss who could take over as pastor, the church responded with utter confusion, "Who can rise to his level? He is a man of God; we are simply people to be led."

The problem for this congregation is not a lack of access or opportunity to lead, but an understanding that the care of a body of believers is something too holy for ordinary people. Once again, this struggle is understandable. When a pastor has planted a church, that person is naturally more involved than anyone else. The pastor has likely become something of a parental figure in the lives of many within the congregation. They

have been responsible for leading many to salvation and into times of spiritual growth. The pastor has been the authority on scripture and often, the only voice that the congregation has heard in its interpretation. Some understand that the pastor has some sort of secret connection to God that is not for the ordinary believer.

Of course, this is not the case. The call to ministry and to serve the Kingdom of God are indeed extraordinary things, but they are also not exclusive in nature. This project will argue that all people who follow Christ are equally equipped, called, and invited to participate in the ministry and leadership of a congregation. The Holy Spirit is moving within all members of the congregation equally, although the expression of this movement may bring about different functions and roles from different people. More on this subject will follow at the appropriate time. In summary, these three stories have outlined that the consequences of a vast clergy/lay divide are damaging to the health of the congregation. Such a gulf of separation results in producing a majority of Christians that are unequipped, uninvolved, and unempowered to take on the calling of the church in their various contexts.

### *Chiefs, Tribes, and New Community*

The above stories have provided a sort of general context for the various scenarios that arise from within a congregation specifically related to the utilization of its members in the ministry of the church. Additionally, it is imperative to highlight the context from which much of the theoretical framework for responding to these scenarios has arisen. Central Africa is a vast and diverse expanse of the continent, spanning an area roughly the size of half of the United States. Although French is the language that unites the majority

of the countries in this zone, there are hundreds of spoken languages in regular use. Even though most groupings put less than ten countries in the list of those that belong to Central Africa, there are a plethora of tribes, cultures, and leadership structures. This plurality of life comes with its own unique sets of opportunities and challenges related to ministry.

One of the first things that outsiders will note is the vital aspect of tribes compared to the weak connections that one may feel to their country. Tribal distinctions are at the heart of much of the Central African existence. Respect for elders, leaders, and tradition orients and informs most aspects of life – especially within a community of believers. Even the region’s modern cities are not immune to the collective sense from which most of life takes place. The one cardinal sin in this part of the world is selfishness. Most negative interactions between individuals are seen to stem from this root problem. People who fail to meet communal standards for relationship and decision-making are often described as “complicated” or “individualistic.” These are not seen as positive attributes. Respecting community dynamics makes one easy to live with and upholds the *ubuntu* spirit that is so essential to life there (more on *ubuntu* will be discussed in chapter 2).

An example of this spirit of unity comes from the birth of a child. Whether in a village or urban setting, the birth of a child is seen as a reason for everyone to rejoice. While happening upon an acquaintance in the street, they may proclaim with great joy, “We had a child!” After further inquiry, it may be discovered that the child was born to someone seven houses down from theirs who is of no familial relation. The French language is better suited to communal life because of its ability to be spoken in the plural

and ambiguous tenses that do not draw so much attention to the individual doing the speaking. The phrase, “We had a child!” could also be uttered, “They had a child!” but not in the way that would specify “them and not me.” Speaking of others is almost always done in communal tenses with their appropriate conjugations and pronouns and in ways that are appropriate for the speaker to be included as part of the subject.

So many other aspects could be mentioned concerning the rich and diverse culture of Central Africa, but there is no space to mention them all here. One final dynamic that is worth bringing to light is the way in which most churches, outside of the Catholic tradition, are started. Typically, an individual will feel a pastoral call and will begin gathering people together for prayer, Bible study, and worship in their home. If the small group of believers continues to grow and is able, they will move out of the home into some other structure or building according to the means of the congregation. A pastor seldom leaves the church that they planted for another one someplace else. Pastors are bonded together with their congregations in such a way that the death or resignation of a pastor nearly always results in the closure of a church.

Congregations may understand the importance of hospitality and community. However, there is an overall too close of a link to their chief, or pastor, as opposed to one another in the context of the church. Tribes and communal living are always tied to their leaders in some way. In all contexts, this can be healthy or unhealthy. Leaders can be good or bad. They may be weak or strong in applying their giftings. What this project is arguing for is not an individualistic approach to Christianity nor a whole-hearted application of tribal community-living to the Christian faith. Instead, this project is an attempt to develop a new community that is faithful to the vocational call of the church as

the bride of Christ.

*An Insider's Outside View*

This work, although primarily informed by the Central African context, is not entirely estranged from the Western or North American point of view. Having close contact with churches in the USA provides a lens for seeing and understanding the same root issues as churches in Africa, even if they manifest themselves in different ways. The struggle for congregations in this part of the world is often one of involvement. The laity is often not challenged to be actively involved, not well-equipped to actively participate in ministry, or not given the necessary space from which they may serve in and from their congregation.

As in the story of church A above, many pastors in the United States feel that they are alone. Despite the core of people that they have around them (which, admittedly, is often rather small), pastors struggle to find people to fill ministry positions. Others may feel as though, being the professional hired for and charged with the task of leading the church, this responsibility rightly rests with them alone. These are two extremes at opposite ends of the spectrum that explain why individuals fail to be intimately involved with the congregations of which they are apart. *Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* is an effort to speak to any culture and allow believers to apply certain aspects to their own body of believers with the hopes of more fully living out the call to be the church in their contexts.

Those who have traveled on London's underground (subway) will have undoubtedly noticed the signs and automated voice over the loudspeaker, reminding

passengers to “mind the gap.” This simple phrase is meant to help keep passengers, many of whom are visitors, safe as they utilize this efficient resource. The gap to which these warnings are referring is the space between the platform from which one boards and the train itself. This small space may seem insignificant, yet many a traveler have underestimated its danger and have thus fallen prey to the gap. The subway gap seems small and rather unworthy of mentioning until that one misstep is taken - at which point in time the gap becomes quite significant indeed.

The same could be said about the space that exists between the clergy and the laity of the church. Perhaps in some groups or traditions, the gap seems rather small and not worth the effort of warning others to its presence. For them, life moves smoothly, and they have learned to navigate the gap either by avoidance or by paying it careful attention. Ministry takes place, and a sense of Christian community is built. For others, they have taken that fateful misstep and are now out of balance and in danger of succumbing to the gap. In such case, the congregation is ineffective, uninvolved, and its members are strangers to one another.

In summary, the clergy/lay divide is the primary problem that this study is addressing, and the “new tribe” is presented as its solution. In other words, this work aims to help any church effectively mind the gap, not by choosing the way of avoidance, but by bridging its two sides. Closing the space that divides the clergy and lay classes of Christianity is no simple feat. Nevertheless, doing so will undoubtedly empower congregations to participate more fully in the kingdom work to which it has been called. The exploration of this new community, or “new tribe,” is the task to which this endeavor is dedicated.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Stepping Into The Tribe**

#### Introduction: Global Dialogue

This second chapter will, at times, sound somewhat foreign to the Western reader. The title and its various headings evoke the language and imagery of realities from Central Africa. As this study aims to speak to a broad spectrum of believers, particularly those in both developing and developed countries, it may seem a strange choice to use ideas and language that is so heavily wrapped in the context of only one area. However, using symbols and imagery to discuss a highly localized theology has proven helpful in discussing theology as a whole within the global Christian dialogue. Even though the claim is that all believers are one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, theological sharing often flows in only one direction. Most Christians in the United States, for example, could not name one theological theme or author from Africa. Despite this disconnect, most Africans are well versed in theological trends and writers coming from the United States.

In a survey published by Robert Priest and Kirimi Barine consisting of 3,614 respondents from differing countries within the three major language groups of Africa (English, French, and Portuguese), two of the top five authors in each language were Americans. Africans, and people from other developing nations, are well versed in

reading Western theology. These believers do not attempt a wholesale adoption of what they hear and read. Instead, they adapt and apply it in ways that are appropriate to their contexts. There is no doubt that a Congolese person reads North American theology with their own set of lenses – their way of viewing the world and interpreting information. Even if the response is something along the lines of “well, that wouldn’t work here” or “that does not make sense to my context,” the fact remains that many African Christians are well accustomed to adapting and working with foreign ideas. Their faith and practice are likely all the richer for it.

The same study by Priest and Barine noted that 58.2% of what is being read in Africa falls into the category of Christian literature. However, only 9.5% of this amount is from African authors. This statistic furthers the notion that very few Africans are exposed to Christian thought that comes from their cultural realities of language, experience, and expression. Correcting the one-sided nature of Christian dialogue in any significant way is outside of the scope of this work. However, noting these statistics further supports the notion that global Christian dialogue is vital for the health of the church and that current cultural-theological mixing is heavily one-sided at the moment. Sharing thoughts, imagery, and theology from the Central African Christian experience is one attempt at both bringing the two-way conversational aspect back to the global Christian dialogue and giving back to those who have invested so much in the rich and vibrant life of the African Church.

Benjamin Valentin’s work in *Mapping Public Theology* is a similar attempt to bring a developing world’s theology into the global sphere. The author notes that Latino theology has been relegated to some kind of local sphere where it is only discussed and

applied by those who are in that context. Valentin aims to bring theology from the latin context, liberation theology in particular, into what Valentin calls the “public sphere,” where dialogue and application happen more broadly. The essence of Valentin’s argument is that individualized theologies that are highly specific to a particular context are essential for the wider theological dialogue. Valentin argues that particular, or local, theologies such as those of Latin America, or Africa for the purposes of this investigation, can help to reshape the theology of the church so that it is faithful to the biblical witness regardless of cultural context. Valentin proposes that the goal of public theology is to renew “critical reflection upon and, ultimately, transformation of religion.”

The kind of critical reflection and transformation that the author above is talking about rarely comes from within an isolated context. This is why global dialogue is so essential, especially when it is multi-directional, from every corner of the world towards every other corner. Valentin further drives this point home by arguing that to identify and correct social injustices, liberationist theologians must make their theologies public by nature. Furthermore, practitioners of public theologies must make their cases before the general public while not being afraid to distance themselves from other divergent strains of theological ideologies. Doing so provides scrutiny from a broader audience and allows this audience to identify with key themes and concepts being expressed. In this way, local or highly contextualized theological ideas are refined under the scrutiny of the global Christian witness while also broadening and stretching Christians from around the world with new ideas.

Another key concept that Valentin proposes on this subject is that of what has been called “subaltern counterpublics.” These groups or entities create space where

counter ideas can be fostered by “subordinate” cultures to formulate alternative interpretations of their identities, purposes, and needs. This concept aims to correct ideas about what public theology is and serve as a course-correction for liberation theologies that have unintentionally separated themselves from the social realm. An example of one such “subaltern counterpublic” could be an African Theology of Suffering. Many Christians around the world are not accustomed to the notion that the followers of Christ are likely to experience their fair share of suffering despite the numerous biblical examples in support of this idea.

More closely related to the goals of *Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging*, transforming local theologies into public ones can be a step towards bringing the Western Church back to the realities of how and through whom God carries out God’s mission for the world. Many of those in the West need to be reminded of God’s love and inclination towards underdogs as a part of making God known among the many nations of the world. The church needs the “lowly, despised things of the world,” as in 1 Corinthians 1 and Matthew 5, to help shape the church into the image of Christ in the world. Giving more serious thought to a theology of suffering, along with those of liberation, colonization, the land, and others that may arise out of Africa, will bring a renewed sense of partnership to the table of theological dialogue. African theologies often remind the church that holistic approaches are necessary for mission and theological reflection if people are to be faithful to the ways of Jesus as found in the gospels. Steven Rasmussen clarifies issues of Christian suffering, noting that Western institutions have compartmentalized their approach to the world, leading to a fragmented church in the majority world. In place of this approach, Rasmussen argues that Africans can help by

uniting efforts and thinking because, in their worldview, all of the essential realms of life are united.

A united worldview and holistic approach to ministry is just one way that the African church can contribute to the global Christian community. The Western Church must stop looking at their brothers and sisters in Christ from Africa as people who need their help, but as people who can partner with them in the efforts of God's mission of redemption in the world. Another area where Africans can be of particular help to the one holy, catholic, apostolic church is with the application of its village and tribal concepts. Any marriage of the tribal village concepts of Africa and the Christian faith is indeed a precarious endeavor. There is always the risk that notions of families and tribes can be confused with tribalism or xenophobia. To the uninformed observer, tribalism can be viewed in a positive light. What could be wrong with people getting together for fellowship and the preservation of their culture? However, tribalism has tragic consequences when it leads to oppression, war, and genocide as it has plaid out on African soil time and time again. Tribalism in the African experience can be defined as the preference for people of one's own culture to the detriment of all others. Stephanie Lowery notes that Christian missionaries have historically not understood the intricacies of family lines and ethnic bonds that have been built up over time to favor insiders and have perpetuated ethnocentric patterns by preaching on the notion of family.

Some of the most egregious tribalistic practices can make it so that only one tribe of people are welcome in the church, giving the impression that the Christian God is small and petty. Where this has been the case, Christians have unwittingly destroyed their witness in their society. In the secular realm, tribalism impacts everyday life by limiting

access to employment and upward mobility except for those who are already on the inside. Regardless of its positive and negative effects in society, it is beneficial to note that people's identities are wrapped up in their tribal and familial ties. Adherence to one's tribe, or lack thereof, profoundly impacts the African experience. An invitation to "step into the tribe," as the title of this chapter notes, is not an invitation to become tribalistic or to welcome all of the dangers mentioned above. Stepping into the tribe is to be understood here as an effort to enrich the comprehensive community-focused task of building congregations of calling and belonging.

Additionally, as it shall soon be made clear, the ensuing invitation to join the tribe is made with the same spirit as the "Christian colony" mentioned in Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens*. They make the case "that the church, as those called out by God, embodies a social alternative." The church is not a club or even some geographical location where people get together to worship the Lord. The church is the called-out people of God who embody an "other-worldliness." The foundational argument of Hauerwas and Willimon's work is that "Christianity is an invitation to be a part of an alien people who make a difference because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ." The tribal language of Central Africa, as utilized in this study, will help with the exploration of the church as a body of resident aliens embodying a foreign socio-political presence in the world.

### The Sound of the Drum: Calling

Drums have been exercised in the African context for a vast array of uses throughout history. These instruments go by many different names and take a variety of

distinctive shapes and forms. Drum making is as much of a learned skill as drum playing, and these unique styles are learned from a young age. In modern times, drums are almost exclusively used for calling people to church. They function similarly to church bells of days gone by where people came to church whenever the bells rang. Today, throughout rural places in Africa, the principle is much the same. Whether people are working the fields, hunting, or raising animals off in the distance, the sound of the drum carries out to where they are and calls them to church.

The beating drum still calls people to church in a literal way, but for the new tribe formed around its new chief, Jesus Christ, the sound of the drum can also be discussed in a figurative sense. The drum represents the call to all people into right relationship with God and community with those around them. Modern new tribe Christians are meant to hear and heed this call. Their faithful responses can be equated to coming to church, but more closely resemble participation in the community of God's new people. However, the drum does not beckon the believer simply to hear; it beckons them to learn the discipline themselves and to take up the task of beating the drum. In this way, the new tribe learns the art of the drum not merely for reminding their members to come to church but also to be heard and have a voice among those who do not yet count themselves among their numbers.

There are two essential components to be taken from the imagery of the sound of the drum. The first signifies the call of all humankind to join the new kingdom-people established by Christ Jesus. The second refers to the call of that people to be a voice for the gospel in the world, that is, to effectively beat the drum for all to hear. In order to fully understand the application of these ideas, the doctrine of election should be

discussed in an effort to dispel any notion that the call is only meant for a few. Everett Ferguson wishes to discuss the doctrine of election within the context of the formation of God's people. This discussion is fitting here because the new tribe to which this chapter is referring is none other than the people that God has called together, sustained, and given a new purpose for the world. Ferguson sets up the thought process in this way:

The accent falls on God's creative activity, his choosing, his saving work, his possession (1 Pet. 2:9). He is the one who made it a people (1 Pet. 2:10) and not just a collection of individuals or a group organized around a false or lesser principle. There is much concern today about what gives a person identity. For the church, identity comes from belonging to God.

For Ferguson, an understanding of "peoplehood" is essential to an understanding of the doctrine of election and the calling of individuals within the body of believers. Ferguson adds that "to obtain mercy is to be made a people. Only by God's calling and grace can individuals form a true community." Central to the entire argument, Ferguson makes the sharp distinction that election is for service and not for salvation. Therefore, God calls people into community as a part of God's restorative and creative nature (the beating drum that calls people in from the fields). This community is the means by which the world will be saved, and as such, God's people have been predestined and elected to participate in God's saving grace (the continued beating of the drum for all the world to hear). To be elected (*eklektós*) is not to be chosen for salvation in the place of others, but to be chosen for service for the sake of those who have not yet found their salvation in Christ. For this reason, the doctrine of election should never be used to exclude people from the church – the called-out ones (*ekklesia*). On the contrary, this doctrine should help the church be faithful to the calling of bringing people into the new community that is

found in Christ Jesus.

Another vital point to make within this train of thought is that if election does not exclude individuals from the church, it should also not be an idea that excludes people within the church. The call of the drum is heard by all people, no matter the geographic location or current spiritual inclination. Within the body of believers, this beating drum calls everyone to participation through witnessing and partnership with God through the creating and sustaining of this new tribe. In doing so, the gospel is proclaimed publicly for the world to hear. Lesslie Newbigin, the late missiologist and theologian, has largely pioneered the understanding of the gospel as public truth. Newbigin clarifies that this undertaking “is to affirm the gospel not only as an invitation to a private and personal decision but as public truth which ought to be acknowledged as true for the whole of the life of society.” The gospel is weakened when believers see it as something meant for individuals alone or for only those who already call themselves believers. The church is called to continue beating the drum so that those around us may be informed by the good news and believe that it is true because they can see it being lived out in the new tribe.

Throughout the book, *Truth to Tell*, the author continuously argues for the importance of speaking the truth to Cesar – or to the secular world. Newbigin outlines the duties of the church in society as the following: affirmation of the truth of the gospel, active participation in the public life of society, and to faithfully exist as the new social order. Newbigin is essentially arguing that the church is responsible for the re-creation of society into the new kingdom that Jesus established and will complete upon Christ’s return. The new tribe repeatedly tell the story in their places of worship and in their homes. The gospel is good news whenever it is spoken, believed, and applied to the lives

of God's people. At the same time, if God's people are called to be holy people and chosen to be a royal priesthood, there is a definite outward nature to their existence.

Whenever local musicians get together in the village to sing, play their instruments, and dance, they are at the same time student and teacher. Those who know more difficult rhythms pass along their skill and knowledge by playing in the presence of others. As they play, there is a collaboration taking place as beats and melodies are combined in new and unique ways. This process is multiplied many times over when multiple villages get together, usually for the sake of a wedding – which is seen as a merging of two families and a blending of two tribes. Newbigin picks up on a similar dynamic in describing the “two-way encounter” of the mission of God's people in the world. In participating in the mission of the gospel (by continuing to beat the drum), Christians do not merely affirm what they already believe, but they are informed by new cultures, contexts, and needs of those around them. Members of the new tribe continually learn as they go.

If the church of Jesus Christ is isolated from the secular realm of life for fear of being corrupted, it will not have a voice to be heard. If the church is uninvolved in the public areas of society, then it cannot take part in its transformation. The two-way encounter of learning from and transforming society is the great missionary task of the church. Not only does the church grow and refine its beliefs, but it remembers to sound the drum of calling the world into its fold and into a relationship with the Father. The beating drum both calls people together and beckons them to take up the task of continuing to play it for all to hear. The sound of the drum unites and brings people together into a community for a common purpose.

## Working the Field: Service

In the African village, there are no idle hands and no idle people. Work is a vital part of life and a precursor to membership. In the Western church, membership typically takes place before opportunities for service are extended to an individual. Newcomers are not invited to participate fully in the life of the church, but merely as recipients or the ones to whom the work of the church is directed. In the African village, all people are made members simply by the fact that they exist. Yet their place and prominence are determined not by their individual merit but by the service that they are capable of rendering to the community. Julius Nyerere speaks about this communal set of values by placing them in the realm of work. In the traditional African society, “it was taken for granted that every member of society – barring only the children and the infirm – contributed his fair share of effort towards the production of its wealth.” Elders receive more respect than young people because they have contributed more to the community’s wellbeing.

Nyerere further relates the availability of work, access to land, and building up of the community with a different set of values than those that they received at the hands of the Western colonizers. In the African mindset that Nyerere outlines, work is not just for a paycheck but for a greater purpose. Work is a natural part of life that has nothing to do with wealth. It contributes to an individual’s well-being, but entirely as a part of its contribution to the well-being of the entire community. People work both because they wish to contribute to society and because they need an outlet in which they can be creative and excel. The new tribe is no different. Work inside the community of faith

should be a natural part of life for all of its members. It should allow individuals and communities to thrive and flourish. For this reason, efforts that benefit only part of the whole or forget even a small percentage of its people would be seen as selfish.

It is imperative that service and labor not only better the lives of those who are already members of the new tribe, but they must also benefit those who have yet to join. The unselfish work required of the new tribe's existence is a vital part of its testimonial invitation for other people to join in and work alongside them. In this way, the work of the new tribe is attractive to others and witnesses to them about the nature of God. In the book, *Every Good Endeavor*, Timothy Keller describes the connection to work and revealing the nature of God. Keller writes:

God is the Creator of the world, and our work mirrors his creative work when we create culture that conforms to his will and vision for human beings – when it matches up with the biblical story line. Yet theologians speak not only of God's creation but also of his providence. God does not simply create; he also loves, cares for, and nurtures his creation. He feeds and protects all he has made.

Christians do not work out of some attempt to avoid boredom. Even the nature of their work as a contribution toward the betterment of society as a whole is only seen in light of the Kingdom that Jesus ushered into this world. Rather, all of God's people are required to work because, in doing so, they serve as an extension of God's loving and creative work in the universe. The new tribe congregation participates in and carries out God's presence and purposes for the world.

Despite these lofty ideals, laypeople are generally only asked to serve the church by being present and active within the walls of the place where the members regularly gather. They are also encouraged to work hard and gain all the money possible so that they can support the ministry of their congregation. One final way that laypeople are

generally encouraged to participate in the work of the Kingdom is by witnessing to their colleagues and perhaps holding times of prayer or Bible study if possible and appropriate. These things are right and good but only represent a small part of the faithful existence of a member of the new tribe. It does not make sense that a believer would be told that what you do during the forty or more hours of the week that you are at work is not as important as the, perhaps at most, four hours a week that you are at church. There is a better way to understand a Christian's existence and their vocational calling to participate in God's loving and creative purposes for the world.

Before dealing further with some solutions and practical applications of the Christian vocation in the daily working lives of its believers, it is important to discuss the dualistic nature of the problem listed above. Keller notes that the Christian understanding of work needs to move from dualism toward integration. This dualism is described as “a separating wall between the sacred and the secular.” Keller continues by noting that within the dualistic approach to life, Christians separate the secular parts of their lives from the spiritual and see no real connection between the two. The church of Jesus Christ today calls for a body of believers who work for a harmonious integration of the majority secular and minority spiritual parts of their lives. This is something that comes naturally to the people of Africa. Whether they live in villages dominated by centuries-old customs or in bustling metropolitan areas, most Africans have not separated the secular and spiritual parts of life.

In missiologist Paul Hiebert's widely acclaimed article, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” Hiebert deals with this notion of separation of the spiritual and secular realms of life. Hiebert identifies the “excluded middle” as that space between the western

understanding of the spiritual and scientific realms of our human existence. Hiebert recounts the missionary experiences and the difficulties that were encountered as a result of the “platonic dualism” that Hiebert inherited from the west. Instead of a wall that separates the holy and worldly, the divine and the mundane, the spiritual and scientific realms, Hiebert identifies this middle space as a place where these dominions can be brought together. Embracing Hiebert’s “excluded middle” finds similarities with Keller’s integrated approach to combining biblical principles with cultural engagement. But how do the gospel and its new community relate to the context of our daily working lives?

Miroslav Volf provides an answer to this question in the book entitled, *Work in the Spirit*. Volf argues that work cannot be limited simply to what people get paid for or what they do to occupy their time. Instead, work is something that is defined by instrumentality. In other words, work should be defined by its usefulness. For one person, taking care of their cherished car may be something that they love and for which they gain no wages or compensation. Yet this is still considered work because there is value, particularly a well running and useful vehicle, in the efforts that they provide. For another person who repairs cars at a mechanic shop, there is no love required. The work that they render there is primarily as a means of employment that provides for their needs regardless of their enjoyment. For this reason, the distinction of work as instrumentality is the most useful in defining what work is. Therefore, in understanding a Christian approach to work, the same measure should be applied. How is the daily work of the people of God instrumental to God’s divine purposes for the world?

Volf offers some guidance at this point as well. Similar to Nyerere’s understanding of the communal importance of work, Volf claims, “The unemployment of

every person denies society the creative contribution that a person can make by employing his gifts and talents.” Not participating in work is equated with ostracization from the community. Those who do not work are deprived of fulfilling the social contract required of all members of society. At the same time, the community misses out on their unique God-given abilities and would be contributions.

Volf goes all the way to the point of saying that “as human beings work, they change themselves as well as their social and natural environment in the course of history.” Therefore, the work of the Christian can be seen as the redemption of the world and the effort to re-conform its purposes to that of God’s initial purposes for creation. The sanctification of the believer must include the sanctification of their work and the sacrifice of their intentions to those of the Spirit. A holistic Christian approach to work, therefore, endeavors to create circumstances similar to those of the Garden of Eden or the Early Church, as outlined in the book of Acts. This is no small feat and is, most assuredly, dependent upon harmonious cultural expressions of these realities. The new tribe, founded on Christ Jesus, is one that surrenders its aspirations for wealth and significance in the spirit-led effort to re-evaluate its work and re-create the world, thereby anointing it for God’s good and perfect plan.

An understanding of work as the noble endeavor to benefit the whole of society by bringing it back into line with God’s original intentions for the world is not a useful definition without practical implications to daily life. What does it mean for the new tribe to live as an extension of God’s creative and loving nature? What are the practical applications of these efforts? Chapter four of this work will undertake the task of imagining what the combined efforts of a congregation may look toward mobilizing its

lay members for service to the Kingdom in a more intensive way. At this moment, it will be helpful to mention three points related to these lofty efforts. First, the new tribe makes use of a vocational understanding of work. Christians may have jobs or careers, but this does not detract from their vocational existence in the new community. Keller notes that the English words “vocation” and “calling” are from one common Latin root.

Unfortunately, most communities of faith rarely speak about calling except for that special call of the clergy to lead them. The faithful application of a Spirit-led integration of the secular and spiritual realms of life is intimately tied to an understanding that all believers are vocationally called.

Second, it is important not to confuse testimony with action. The Apostle Paul reminds the community at Colossae, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Colossians 3:17a, New International Version). Our verbal witness to the gospel message is extremely important but is only one side of the proverbial coin. Christians must not just say that they love others; they must show it in concrete ways. Members of the new tribe cannot be satisfied with merely proclaiming that transformation can be found in Christ Jesus; they must model it before others. While not denying the importance of the oral testimony of God’s new tribe people, the adage that actions speak louder than words applies perfectly here. In their daily working lives, Christians must seriously undertake an effort to create the kind of kingdom that they are testifying to.

The third and final point worth mentioning here is in relation to intentionality. So much time and effort go into the ministries of the congregation. Worship services are meticulously planned. Special events run like well-oiled machines, perfectly executing

many moving parts. Yet, somehow, there is no united plan or effort to utilize the majority of the time of the congregation's majority of people. How can this be? The church of Jesus Christ today must strive to challenge its members to hear the call, empower its people through training, and send them out into the world for service in their everyday lives. The church should be the training ground for what happens the rest of the week, not the sole location where the Christian faith is lived out. Christians of the new tribe must develop strategies and methods to intentionally bring about the kingdom realities outlined in the scriptures.

#### Rites of Passage: Membership

With an understanding of what it means for members of the new tribe to work the fields and serve their respective communities underway, the efforts of this work now turn to membership. Membership in the African tribe is automatic in that all people belong simply by being born into that people group. And yet, paradoxically, it could also be said that membership is conditional. There is a coming of age that must take place where children pass through significant rites of passage and come out as full members of the community. The introductory chapter of this study cited C. S. Lewis's essay entitled, simply, "Membership." Central to Lewis' argument in that essay is the notion that the church has always been an institution from its earliest days, and the members of that institution were members of one another. Lewis continues by clarifying that the very word "membership" is of Christian origin. Paul's use of the word "members" could have easily been translated as "organs" or "things that are essentially different from and complementary to one another."

In comparing membership to the relationships in a family, the idea becomes increasingly significant for the African tribe. The loss of a family member, even as the result of a joyous occasion such as marriage, can be difficult for any family. For this reason, the forgotten practice of paying a dowry in the West still remains an important part of life in many places in Africa. The dowry, or bride price, ensures the commitment of one family to receive, love, and cherish the new member (bride) that they are receiving from another family. Even more so, the practice of giving money and gifts to the bride's family is a way of consoling them in their loss. The young woman who was raised in a particular home and contributed, as a valuable member, toward the wellbeing of the family is now gone. The bride will be missed, and the dowry is meant to soothe the pain of the girl's family. It is a rite of passage in which a member is transferred from one community to another. To conceive that one family was purchasing a bride for their son would be a scandalous notion, indeed. Outsiders who have viewed the bride price in this way have failed to comprehend the deep loss and need for assurance that a family feels in sending one of their daughters (members) away to join another family.

Another important aspect of Lewis' argument in this essay is that membership should exist as a healthy middle ground between the rampant collectivism and run-away individualism that characterizes different aspects of the Western world. To one side of the extreme, society makes people afraid to be alone. They must be together in mass, where no real conversation or community can be built. At the other extreme, people make decisions alone and do not consider the repercussions that their actions can have on those around them. Lewis is adamant that "crowd" should not be confused for "community" and that spirituality should not be reserved for times of solitude. Belonging to a

community is earned. It does not come haphazardly or by some kind of happy accident. In many parts of Central Africa today, young men and women who have come of age and have met the criteria to be considered as adults are often marked by scarring on their faces. While looked down on by some who are outside of this context, facial scarring signifies the full acceptance of an individual. An individual's scarred face tells others not only who they belong to but that they are full members worthy of dignity and respect.

Similarly to the African tribe, admittance to the new tribe of Jesus Christ is both earned and freely given. It can be said to be earned in that a prospective member must express their faith in Christ and their desire to follow the new way of the community in order to have fully joined them. Admittance is freely given in that it is available to all who would accept it through Christ's sacrifice and inclusive ministry upon the earth. The paradoxical nature of the rite of passage concept within the Christian context is seen in the sacrament of baptism – which serves as a reminder of a member's death to the world and rebirth in Christ. There are two dominating ideas related to the understanding of joining the Christian Community and an individual's relationship to that community until the moment when they are received as full members. First, there are some traditions that affirm the notion that before one can have full access and privileges within a community, they must first be taken into membership. Regardless of their faith in Christ and their history as faithful members of another community, they must first prove their willingness to join the new community through a series of initiation rites – usually in the form of membership classes.

This is a sort of futile, albeit necessary, process. As this study has already pointed out with the help of C.S. Lewis, to be a member is to belong somewhere. People cannot

learn to be members in a classroom setting. Prospective members can only fully learn what it means to belong to a people by being in their midst and joining in with them in the living out of their foundational beliefs expressed through their core values. Rick Warren's widely popular book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, outlines Warren's experiences of organizing the ministry of Saddleback Community around bringing people into a deeper and deeper commitment to the local church. Warren notes, "Our sanity and survival depended upon developing a workable process to turn seekers into saints, turn consumers into contributors, then members into ministers, and turn an audience into an army." Essentially, Warren is arguing for a paradigm shift where churches determine their purpose and re-envision everything that they do through that lens. The process for moving people into deeper and deeper commitment is also the means by which people become full members of the ministering body of Christ. In the "purpose driven model," visitors are moved along through a highly sophisticated series of classes and mentoring relationships.

This concept is good at its foundation, but it is easily corruptible. Some churches have made it their "purpose" to become wealthy, elitist, racist, or other perversions of what might be seen as the biblical purposes of the church. Another problem with this model is that the church is limited by the vision and interests of their pastor. If the pastor does not have a plan to incorporate a ministry into the regular functions of the church, church members are not free to explore those opportunities as they do not line up with the pastor's vision. Additionally, and most importantly, on the subject of admittance into the new community, prospective members aren't allowed to "taste and see" or partake in the new community until they pass the tests or complete the process. Also, this process can

take years, and many would-be members can feel as though they are outsiders for too long. Learning about the purpose and mission of a particular congregation is more easily and naturally accomplished by participating in the regular aspects of its communal life.

No one complains in the African village when a father eats a full meal, and the children share a few scraps. The father is seen as a full member and a much more important member of the family and village. The head of the family needs their full strength in order to ensure that there are future meals, even if only scraps, for the children. This is culturally acceptable and beyond question in many African contexts. In the new tribe that is the body of Jesus Christ, this distinction of full and partial members becomes problematic. Questions have arisen throughout the history of the church on how to enforce and distinguish full members from those who are in process. Should partial members be allowed to partake in the Lord's supper? Is it appropriate to reserve the best seating for the core of "full" members within our community? What of leadership responsibilities and voting (or decision-making rights)? These are the issues that congregations the world over have dealt with and still deal with today in regard to who and how people may participate as members of the body of Christ. The separation of members and visitors (or perhaps more rightly, outsiders) may often remain as a barrier for prospective members as opposed to the protective measure for which it may have been designed.

A second, although much less prominent method of welcoming new members, is outlined by George G. Hunter in the book entitled *Celtic Evangelism*. Hunter outlines the methods of Saint Patrick at reaching the pagan peoples of Ireland, who were completely foreign and estranged to the Christian way of life. Hunter makes the point that community

and acceptance into the body are essential to the ethos of the church. In doing so, Hunter summarizes two models for sharing the Christian faith: the Roman and Celtic models. The Roman model is outlined in the following way: “(1) Present the Christian message; (2) Invite them to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians; and (3) If they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship.” Hunter continues by contrasting this model with what is deemed as the Celtic model: “(1) You *first* establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith. (2) Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship. (3) In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them to commit.”

The significance of Hunter’s understanding of the relationship between community and evangelism is significant to this conversation because it places community before commitment. Unlike the modern church’s practice of requiring belief and commitment before community, Hunter presents community and acceptance as precursors to even faith in Christ. Furthermore, the community is constantly shaped and guided by the fact that there are unbelievers in their midst. They must live out their faith in such a way that others are encouraged to make a decision to follow Christ within the fellowship of which they are already a part. There are indeed elements of the Christian faith that are easily gleaned through formalized teaching, but the majority of the faith is learned through encountering Christ in the midst of Christian fellowship.

The new tribe envisions a community that is open and welcoming to all people regardless of context or previous experiences. It calls people into fellowship through mutual acceptance and equal participation. This inclusive way of life is not only a witness to the world that there is a place for them in the church but is also a testimony to the fact

that Christ has already covered the initiation rites of all would-be members. When the time comes, participants should be given the opportunity to become members through some sort of symbolic rite of passage. In nearly all Christian communities, there is some sort of process for entering into the community. But for the Christian faith in general, the typical rite of membership – the coming age of the believer – is often equated to the sacrament of baptism.

Brent Peterson brings up the important distinction between adult and infant baptism in the chapter, “Sacraments” from the book, *Essential Church*. Peterson notes, first and foremost, that there is a dual nature within baptism. “Baptism is both a cleansing from sin and a healing initiation into the people of God. These two aspects should not be disjoined...Baptism, as a symbol of repentance, initiation, and healing, is always a means of God’s grace.” Peterson’s distinction of the two natures of baptism fits well with the new tribe’s understanding of belonging to a community and joining in a more symbolic way as the Spirit leads. This is particularly true in Peterson’s understanding of infant baptism. This subject is widely debated amongst Christians, even those of the same denomination or congregation. Peterson expounds:

While God offers healing and saving grace for the infants, the infants are also empowered to respond to this grace as they grow and mature physically and spiritually. For those infants who have been baptized, it is important for the church to also have them go through the catechism offered to other persons seeking baptism. At the conclusion of this formal catechism, such persons should be brought before the congregation where they can make their pledge and confirm the covenant into which they were initiated.

The important takeaway from Peterson’s thoughts on infant baptism is in its similarity to the new tribe’s understanding of membership. Baptizing infants only makes sense within the realm of community where membership and spiritual disciplines can be affirmed by

the community. Through infant baptism, acceptance and membership can be both affirmed at a young age and scrutinized by the community in accordance with its standards.

Some Christian traditions do not speak of baptizing infants. Rather, they prefer to place a significant emphasis upon the dedication of young children in front of the Christian community. Either baptism or dedication could be supported from scripture (an endeavor for which there is no time to explore at this point), but the focus for the purpose of this study is on the communal and symbolic significance of this rite of passage. With one voice, the community claims responsibility and ownership of the children, vowing to see to their continued growth and development as a follower of Christ in their midst. Similar to Hunter's thoughts about joining the community first and making a decision to follow Christ later, infant baptism, along with dedication, can be ways to nurture and raise up new members of the community. In order to do so, participation and acceptance must not be withheld from the children of any particular congregation. One practical way of ensuring that children are included is by serving them communion whether or not they are baptized.

No matter the rites of passage that may be important to a particular congregation, it is essential that they be carried out with deep significance and practicality. Within the new tribe founded upon Jesus Christ, rites of passage are not merely a way that an individual joins the community. They are also the means by which the community expresses its orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Right thought and right practice are learned by every would-be member – or member in progress – and the new tribe is strengthened for God's glory.

## Family Life: Belonging

Family is an important concept in every culture and context. In the West, churches have often used familial language to speak about members of the congregation, even referring to them as brother and sister, perhaps more during times gone by. In the African context, using the language of family can be dangerous to the church community.

Stephanie Lowery explains:

For one, in African contexts, describing the church as “family” raises issues of ancestors: are non-Christian ancestors included in the church, if church is a form of family. Another concern is just what “family” means. At least in Kenya, “family” carries connotations of blood lines and ethnicity – and ethnic bonds tend to favor insiders. So, family notions can consciously and unconsciously reinforce and borrow from the worst of ethnocentrism and provide justification for treating those who are different or “other” as lesser.

Lowery is right; family is a tricky issue in the African context. But the familial language of the Bible and Christian history cannot be easily ignored or side-stepped. As members of the new tribe, Christians must reclaim the notion of family and learn to belong to one another in healthy ways that do not exclude others. This work looks to redeem the plethora of notions about family to the biblical concept of family as a people who belong to Christ and, therefore, to one another.

Family means different things to different people, and these varied understandings carry deep emotional ties. Even from within the same context, there can be a sharp contrast in what people understand, believe, and feel about family. In the West, for example, those who never had a loving father figure may find it difficult to understand certain aspects of God. Those who grew up without healthy family experiences may not have a healthy view of what it means to belong to a church family.

Some have not experienced the commitment to stay together and work for one another's mutual good. In an African context, as Lowery points out above, family can be an exclusive ideal used to keep people apart. What do family and belonging look like as a part of the daily existence of the new tribe? This section on Family Life attempts to answer this question and others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the important book, *Life Together*, deals mostly with what it means to live in a Christian community. Bonhoeffer puts the foundation of communal Christian life in a fresh perspective for the new tribe. The writer proclaims, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to each other only through and in Jesus Christ." These words put the church's family and community language on the proper foundation. With Christ as the central, uniting factor for all members of the congregation, all previous notions of exclusion or tainted expressions of family fade away. In Christ, all people belong to each other and are called into participation. Another theme that runs through *Life Together* is that Christian fellowship is not something that the church must create or sustain. Instead, it is a reality that God has already created into which believers are called to participate. For Bonhoeffer, there is a very mysterious nature to Christian community. Although affirming that there are important practical implications of belonging to one another in Christ and strengthening its fellowship, Bonhoeffer maintains the notion that community simply exists because of the communal nature of God.

Christine Pohl complements Bonhoeffer's work well by continuing to describe

the practical implications of community along with reasons for why a community exists.

Pohl has this to say about how a sense of community (especially within the local church setting) is built:

Communities in which we grow and flourish, however, last over time and are built by people who are faithful to one another and committed to a shared purpose. Community life certainly has moments of incredible beauty and intense personal connection, but much of it is daily and ordinary. Our lives are knit together not so much by intense feeling as by shared history, tasks, commitments, stories, and sacrifices.

Pohl is keen to argue that the sense of togetherness and community that exists among believers is not something that is based on emotion. There is a real, earthiness to building the Kingdom-like existence that the body of Christ is called exhibit on this earth.

Throughout the rest of the book, Pohl outlines four practices that help to create and maintain a sense of community within the congregation; embracing gratitude as a way of life, making and keeping promises, living truthfully, and practicing hospitality. There are, no doubt, numerous other practices that are useful to living in Christ-like community with those around us. However, Pohl has given a good start to understanding the practical, everyday nature of community building. Perhaps the most important aspect of community-building for a congregation is the practice of hospitality. Pohl explains that hospitable communities are better at keeping their members and are also the ones that others are typically more likely to join. In regard to hospitality as a community-building endeavor, Pohl outlines Eucharist as a central practice for any group of believers; “When the Eucharist is more explicitly connected to regular expressions of hospitality in shared meals, caring, and friendship, a distinctive Christian identity and

way of life are reinforced.”

Family and tribal (ethnic) concepts may be broken in any part of the world, but this does not excuse the church from its call to the mutual sharing in one another’s lives. The new tribe is called to correct its understanding of family and unity in diversity through the practical, tangible efforts and symbols embodied by the church throughout the centuries. Eucharist and hospitality, no matter what forms they may take, will prove to be central community-building themes for any congregation attempting to live out new tribe principals in the world. These practices are essential because they help believers individually and collectively avoid the competition that drives so much of our human existence. Nouwen, McNeil, and Morrison argue that compassion and competition are the polar opposites of one another. They write that divine compassion “is the expression of a new way of living in which interpersonal comparisons, rivalries, and competitions are gradually left behind.”

The new tribe is called to live out the compassion of Christ and to not participate in the destructive, isolating powers of competition. It is a community defined by the existence of divine compassion where competition and the goals of getting ahead do not take precedence over the hospitality and life-sharing to which the followers of Christ are called. Nouwen, McNeil, and Morrison have worked out compassion as a key community-building practice similar to Pohl’s hospitality. The writers note, “Compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.” This “downward pull” requires the Christian to abandon the competitive worldly efforts that the church has become accustomed to. Bigger homes, nicer cars, and a better standard of life do not necessarily line up with, or

even make room for, the hospitable and compassionate call of the new tribe founded by Christ. The call is not to just exist from time to time, but to be voluntarily displaced, set up residence, and exist in community with others.

The new tribe is also deeply shaped by discipleship and mutual accountability. Dean Blevins outlines the necessity of formation for any church community. Blevins relies heavily on John Wesley's different groups and discusses their importance for creating "formational fellowships" within the church. Blevins states that "For Wesley, Christian community provided the context and the means for spiritual formation through an accountable discipleship anchored in shared story, shared practices, and relational bonds." In essence, then, to be a Christian is to belong to a group of people who embody the story of the Gospel and endeavor to live it out. It is not enough to just attend a church. Rather, as Blevins points out, within Methodism, there was a system that accounted for "little churches in the church." These mini churches (or perhaps "small groups" in contemporary language) are a way of creating fellowships where discipleship and accountability may occur. Blevins further explains that most of this was practically carried out through regular conversation and prayer.

Therefore, no mysterious, holy, or other-worldly phenomenon is required for the development of family life and belonging within the new tribe. Instead, it is the daily practices that bind people together and allow them to find fellowship in unlikely people and places. In agreement with Pohl and Bonhoeffer, Blevins confirms that a community is formed through shared practices and stories. What Dean Blevins adds, in particular to this conversation, is the element of formation. This dynamic cannot be stressed enough. Where any local congregation wishes to develop a sense of true fellowship and

belonging, formation must be present in the body of believers through three important dynamics: spiritual growth, group accountability, and opportunities for service. All three are important because neither can truly exist without the presence of the others. In chapter four of this endeavor, the same three practices will be identified for efforts at developing the laity. More will be said about these efforts at that time.

A final aspect of the family life that defines belonging for the new tribe is that of restoration. Beyond the holy call to be one in Christ and the formational dynamics of particular practices within the congregation, community is built through genuine efforts toward restoration. Peter Block writes the following about “restorative communities:”

Restoration begins when we think of community as a possibility, a declaration of the future that we choose to live into. This idea of communal possibility is distinct from what we commonly call an individual possibility. Community is something more than a collection of individual longings, desires, or possibilities. The communal possibility has its own landscape and its own dynamics, requirements, and points of leverage.

The new tribe believes that community is possible and works to bring the necessary restoration required to bring people together. In any given congregation, there are likely to be rich and poor people, powerful and weak, dominant and minority, insiders and outsiders, liberal and conservative. The restorative work of the church is not to make all the individual voices heard. Rather, restoration happens when voices become unified and when the church collectively works towards harmony.

Beyond harmony, the author also outlines a healing aspect to restorative communities. Block writes that “Restoration is about healing our woundedness – in community terms, healing our fragmentation and incivility. It is only out of this healing that something new can emerge.” The new tribe is devoted to restoration and healing

because it remembers that they, too, have been healed and restored through Christ Jesus. It endeavors to create a place where healing is a natural part of what its people experience and what they offer to others. Restoration through harmony and healing not only help create and maintain a sense of belonging for people but they communicate the purpose and identity of the congregation itself.

Using the language of family to speak of belonging in the church is a challenging task. This section has outlined some of the dangers involved in defining community within the congregation along these lines as limitations to human understandings of family, broken family experiences, and ethnocentrism. Despite these challenges, family is an important aspect of life and, therefore, a defining aspect of the new tribe. The new tribe believes that they are called into community through Christ and participates in tangible efforts toward fellowship, formation, and restoration.

#### Storytelling: Evangelism

In the African village, storytelling has been an integral part of life for ages. Even in today's modern context, Africans are still intimately involved with telling the stories that express their values and beliefs. These stories convey important messages about their identities and their way of viewing the world around them. They also communicate history and orient how people are to live today. They are not so much concerned with what the West might call "historical accuracy" as they are with interpreting what events mean for the sake of the community. Even contemporary stories do not focus on telling facts about people or events but attempt to pass on the feelings and emotions that surfaced and how the community is meant to respond in light of these sentiments. This is

not to say that the stories are not true, but rather that they focus on different aspects of truth. In short, storytelling is an important part of the African existence as it draws people together and guides them toward responding appropriately to what they've heard.

Westerners also enjoy a good story. This can be seen, among other things, in their fascination with television and the cinema. This truth also surfaces with the plethora of news outlets ranging from print to the internet and 24-hour news channels. Even if those in the West do not spend as much time telling each other stories, they are hearing them and being shaped by them on a regular basis. The new tribe is one that does not just tell stories to pass the time. Neither is it characterized by the entertainment factor or the simple passing along of information. Stories take on new meaning and new purpose because they are reclaimed and retold with this simple reorientating truth in mind; that in Christ Jesus, God is reconciling the world back to God's self.

The followers of Christ are not called to simply retell this story for themselves. Their story has significance for the world, and they are called to recount the story in their words and in their actions so that others may be exposed to it. "The Weight of Glory," an essay by C. S. Lewis, speaks to the tremendous responsibility that is placed on the community of faith in light of who God is and what God has done for the world. Lewis writes first about Glory, which sounds not too dissimilar from what other groups might call entire sanctification or holiness; "Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for is, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed. By ceasing to consider my own wants I have begun to learn better what I really wanted." This remark in and of itself is not that noteworthy for this work. However, Lewis follows up this statement by arguing that, "The Load, or weight, or

burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid on my back.”

Lewis affirms what so many others have before and since this time by asserting that the body of Christ is called to and feels the weight of telling others the great gospel story. Christine Pohl offers these sentiments on this subject, “The best testimony to the truth of the gospel is the quality of our life together. Jesus risked his reputation and the credibility of his story by tying them to how his followers live and care for one another in community.” The story of what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future is a powerful testimony to the world. However, this testimony is only believed by the world if they can see and experience its truth in the communal story of the church. The local church congregation does not simply tell the story during their times of worship, teaching, and outreach. It tells the story through their regular, daily interactions with the world.

Brian Stone offers further insight into this other-worldly living by suggesting that evangelism is something entirely different than what the contemporary church has been up to through its various programs and “outreach” events. Stone states emphatically that “the most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church – to be formed imaginatively by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ.” Preaching the gospel and testifying to what God has done in the lives of those in the congregation are dynamics that should never be erased from the church. They are an important part of the evangelistic efforts of every congregation in that they remind its members and their neighbors of what God is doing in the world.

However, the verbal telling of the story alone is not enough to do justice to the gospel message. It must be proved true through its physical embodiment in a community

of people. Stone has this to add on the subject; “In considering the relationship between evangelism and narrative, we must examine not only the way a particular story narrates the telos of evangelism but also the way it legitimates (or subverts) political and economic structures within which the practice is performed.” However important telling the story is for the sake of evangelism, it is infinitely more important to live the story out. As Stone argues, doing so legitimates the gospel and the kingdom that it is ushering into the world through its followers. The best kind of story that the new tribe can tell is one that faithfully embodies the counter-cultural way of Christ in their context.

Knight and Powe have equated this type of living out evangelism, as opposed to programming it as one of the aspects of church life, to a two-step process of reflecting God’s love. They elaborate, “The first is us mirroring what it means to love God. The second is humanity reflecting God’s love to others, becoming a ‘mirror’ for them to see God. Evangelistically, this has ramifications for us as individuals and as a community.” In their way of viewing evangelism, it is a reflection of the very nature of the church. Knight and Powe are skeptical about coercive forms of evangelism that force people into decisions before they are ready or in order to receive some kind of help. Christians must tell the story of what God is doing in the world. This will naturally include the verbal message about what God has done in individuals' lives. Doing so will also likely include decisions for Christ, but the focus of evangelism is not to get decisions but to testify about who God is, what God is doing, and who Christ-followers are because of these truths.

In light of these views on telling the story – evangelism – perhaps the church should not be seeking to define its evangelism strategy, but instead should realize that it

itself is God's evangelism strategy for the world. Each congregation is a location where the story must be told and fully embodied. The relationship that members of a congregation have with one another should be a testimony to their relationship with Christ. On this note, Knight and Powe point out that:

To enter into a relationship with Jesus is to become a part of the body of believers. We develop a personal relationship with Jesus, through which we become more Christlike. At the same time, we develop relationships with others in the community who help us to strengthen and express our personal relationship with Jesus.

The local church cannot accurately or holistically evangelize people with whom its members are not intentionally in a relationship. Giving someone a tract as they pass by on the street or offering to pray the prayer of salvation with strangers is a disservice to them if they are not also offered an opportunity to join the community of faith at the same time.

Storytelling is an important part of life for nearly all people from every corner of the globe. The church is no different in this regard, and therefore, the new tribe must take seriously the effort to know and tell its story. Each local congregation can do this regardless of its size and influence. Loving God, each other, and others by entering into relationship with them is how the body of Christ can most simply and effectively tell the good news story of Jesus Christ. Loving God ensures that the church's efforts are pure and well-founded. Loving one another is the experimental ground where the church endeavors to live out their faith by embodying its practical characteristics. Loving outsiders by welcoming them in and allowing them to take up this story as their own proves that the story is true for all of creation.

Walking Side by Side: Discipleship

Discipleship is another natural element of the average African tribe. Children learn at a young age the responsibilities and requirements involved in being a member of their people group. This is evident in the way young children, barely able to walk, can be seen mimicking the chores or work of their parents and older siblings. The African way is not so much to inform children about what they are supposed to do but to do it with them until they are able to do so alone or with minimal help. In truth, what is really happening here is apprenticeship. Discipleship is more closely akin to a way of life rather than learning how to work, but the principles required to learn new skills and apply them are the same. In the African village, children and newcomers join into the regular, daily village life and are showed how to be a good member of that village.

In the West, by contrast, apprenticeship is an almost forgotten aspect of life. Many employers are looking for people with experience, especially in fields where the availability of jobs is scarce. Newcomers and young people alike suffer to find people to teach them a new skill or help bring them into the culture of a particular workplace. Even those who are skilled and who have experience can find it difficult to adapt to their new work environment. Without someone to walk alongside them, many of the particularities of their new workplace can be missed or misunderstood. The same is true for the new tribe. People cannot be expected to join or remain after joining if they do not have someone with whom they may walk side by side and learn the intricacies of their new life as a part of the body of Christ or as a member of a particular congregation. Therefore, discipleship is not only about helping people grow their faith in Jesus Christ, but it is just as much about teaching them to be a part of a new community of transformed people.

Newbigin, in speaking about republics as a euphemism for groups of people,

insists that “no one becomes a member of the republic who has not successfully completed a long apprenticeship to the tradition under the direction of those who are its acknowledged masters.” In other words, no one can successfully join a community of people without learning from those who are considered experts or elder members of that group. This conversation on discipleship goes beyond the dialogue about rites of passage from above. Rites of passage must be learned and completed before someone can be considered a full member, but it can take far more time to learn about a group and what it means to be a member than it does to actually join. For this reason, in regard to the church, even mature Christians who are new to a particular congregation are in need of someone to walk alongside them and show them what it means to be a member of their particular community of faith.

George Hunter’s *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* has outlined a communal and missional approach to reaching people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Hunter’s work cited above was used to argue for a way of welcoming people into the congregation that places fellowship and community-building before a decision to follow Christ. Hunter’s work is once again relevant in this discussion about discipleship and induction into a new community of believers. Hunter notes that the Celtic way of evangelism was to establish “monastic communities” that would move into an area and embody the other-worldly Christian principles that defined the early church. Hunter writes:

The Celtic Christian Movement proceeded to multiply mission-sending monastic communities, which continued to send teams into settlements to multiply churches and start people in the community-based life of full devotion to the Triune God...In two or three generations, all of Ireland had become substantially Christian...

The miracle of the Celtic movement was in the community life that it developed and

spread throughout the country, and eventually on to the rest of Europe. This movement put “an emphasis upon the role of community experience in people finding truth, life, and a new identity, and the role of daily rituals in reinforcing that identity.”

Christians in the Celtic movement understood that there was no individual or personal salvation apart from a community of believers. They lived out their faith together and trusted in God to transform them through their times of worship, service, and communal living. This way of being formed together as the body of Christ is the same type of life that is required upon those that would join the new tribe founded upon Jesus Christ. It ensures that new believers and new members – or transfers – into a local church have a group of people to surround them, walk side by side with them, and help them know what it means to follow Christ as a part of their family of faith. Discipleship efforts should not only help new members be acquainted with the practices and rituals of the Christian faith. These efforts at walking side by side with new members should also include helping them to know the stories that are important to them as well.

Rick Sessoms highlights this dynamic well by sharing some important thoughts about the role of storytelling in discipleship. The biblical stories and others from Christian history are important for the church to be able to avoid short-sightedness in their faith and to grasp its truths on a deeper level. Sessoms argues that most of the world enjoys learning through stories, but most people insist on discipleship efforts within the church that resemble systematic theology classes. Sessoms emphasizes the role of feelings in the journey of faith and notes that they are more naturally conveyed through stories. Walking side by side with new members of the congregation does not simply mean being together; it must also include telling the stories of the faith. Learning what

God has done in the lives of individuals, communities, and in the wider Christian faith must be a natural component of life for the new tribe. The new tribe is one that walks alongside others, teaching them the practices and stories that are vital to their existence. Practices find meaning in story. Stories are validated through their faithful implementation in practice. True Christian discipleship can only take place when the two are thoroughly combined.

H. Jurgen Hendriks adds two important aspects to this conversation. First is the notion that discipleship is equated in some way to empowerment, and second, that mentoring is very closely akin to discipleship. Hendriks writes:

One cannot acquire this kind of leadership merely by following a particular academic curriculum. It is not program-driven but needs to flow from deep inside a person like a fountain that flows from an underground reservoir. The yearning to belong and to share, to harmonize, and to enjoy the beauty and message of a song illustrates the deep relationship-based community awareness that makes choirs so much a part of the African life. “I am because you are” may easily be translated to include “we are because we sing” and “we believe because we witness to what we sing.”

Hendriks may have been specifically speaking about empowering – or discipling – leaders, but these principles apply to the wider body of believers. Whether speaking about discipling people towards following Christ more faithfully or mentoring others in becoming a Christ-like leader, the truth is that the classroom setting alone will not be sufficient. Members of any group, and especially those of a congregation, need opportunities to grow and be shaped, challenged, and encouraged. Discipleship and mentorship alike need to take place in small groups where people are given the opportunity to learn, have new experiences, serve, and worship God in community.

Hendriks notes that in order for any of these things to successfully take place,

“mentors and leaders have the distinction of being accessible...Mentorship is a process of leading and teaching by example in an interactive and personal way.” Discipleship that is related to mentoring and personal relationship is much more difficult and time-consuming than discipleship that takes place in the classroom setting. Being truly available to another person (or persons) requires more time, honesty, and effort. Mentoring is similar to how Christ related to the disciples. They lived together, sharing food, work, and all ordinary aspects of life. The Lord showed them what to do and taught them from a great wealth of knowledge. In the end, Jesus was much more than a teacher – passing on information. Christ was also much more than a mentor – showing how to accomplish specific tasks. As a disciple-maker, Jesus was both, and then some.

Sharing life with one another is a foundational aspect of existence in the new tribe of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not something that the new tribe chooses to do or not do; it is who they are. Walking side by side is the essence of what it means to be a member of this new community. Members of this tribe are being discipled and are simultaneously discipling others through their everyday interactions and relationships with one another. In order for walking side by side with the intentional growth of both parties to take place, Hendriks’ aspect of accessibility is once again relevant to this dialogue. If people are coming together only on Sunday mornings, how will relationships grow? If people are not in regular dialogue, how will they capitalize on important formational opportunities that may arise throughout the week? Walking side by side means regular, continual fellowship that provides practical teachable moments for any new Christian or member of that particular congregation.

Each local representation of the new tribe is unique, and its identity is closely

upheld by its members. Senior members of the tribe – senior by Christian maturity, not by age – are charged with handing down the heritage of their congregation. Because no classroom could adequately instill this information, it is the job of these members to walk side by side with visitors; teaching them in word and deed. Simply put, walking side by side implies that Christians live in harmony with one another and together discern what it means to follow Christ faithfully in their particular context.

#### The Council of the Elders: Lay Development and Mobilization

The African tribe loves and respects its leader, who is typically known as the chief. Although contexts and cultures are varied, and there is no one style or method of leadership on the African soil, it is true that most tribes have some sort of council of elders. This group represents the collective memory and experience of the entire tribe. The chief may be technically allowed to make all the important decisions himself, but the chief is also bound by a respect for the elders of the tribe and their efforts to improve the village. For this reason, most tribes have some sort of council that assists the chief in making important decisions. The West is not so different in this regard. Leaders, whether in the domain of politics, business, or church, usually have a group of people that advise and help them.

The new tribe of Jesus Christ understands first and foremost that they have but one chief or leader. In spiritual terms, this person is undeniably Jesus Christ. In practical terms, the leader of most religious groups is identified as the pastor. Leadership in the new tribe is not meant for one person but is passed on to other members of the congregation. The following section will explore what it means to involve the local

church in ministry beyond supporting their pastor. Before moving to analyze leadership and its impact on the mission of the church, it would also be helpful to identify some of the problems that exist in the mobilization of the church for the mission. It will be argued that a pastor's relationship with those whom the pastor serves will have a direct and significant impact on the way that the laity of the church understands their role and responsibility in the mission of the church.

There are three significant challenges to the participation of the laity in the mission of any local church. First, there is a lack of a sense of calling. Many laypeople do not even know that they are called to serve as a Christian and assume that ministry is left to a select few pastors or clergy members. Second, it is often the case that pastors themselves impose barriers upon lay people who wish to serve in the kingdom. The pastor is seen as someone who is paid to provide a professional service, sometimes so that the rest of the congregation does not have to. Third, when laypeople do hear the call and have opportunities for ministry, they are frequently ill-equipped or under trained for the task ahead of them.

Now that the three significant challenges to lay development and mobilization for the mission of the church have been identified, the remainder of this section will make the argument that leadership directly affects the entire church's participation in its mission. If some churches are weak with respect to fulfilling God's mission, then there are two dynamics that can help bring them back on task. Pastors, and other leaders of the body of Christ, must work to foster a sense of belonging and participation within this body. Leaders must be prudent to distinguish for those under our care that a sense of belonging does not mean that congregations are hoarders of its resources or that its people are

charged with protecting our view of what the church should be. Instead, a sense of belonging to the church should mean that Christ-followers sense a call to be a part of uplifting the community and mission of that group of people.

In light of these principles, this section will explore how leaders ought to function, go through a transition, and be developed as a part of fostering ownership and participation in the body of Christ. What would it look like if each church trained members of the body of Christ for mission and intentionally sent them out to be salt and light into the world? If pastors were free to use their members' strengths, passions, and willpower, their ministry could be multiplied many times over. A pastor's main task then shifts to casting vision and training their people to implement this God-given vision into their congregation's various contexts and communities. If the church is the body of Christ, it ought to do what Christ did and unleash all people into Christ's service.

In their work on developing leaders, Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini talk about the importance of deploying people in the church for mission. "Thus, deployment involves our winning lost people to faith in Christ and then moving them to spiritual maturity. God has gifted all to serve him and some specifically to lead for him. Deployment is key to seeing disciples become involved in leading a particular ministry." Perhaps the language of "winning the lost" is not the best way to speak about the church's task of evangelism. However, the concept of helping people move from an initial acceptance of Christ to an active, vibrant life of service is spot on.

Another issue that may arise is the selection of those who are sent out, or deployed, into God's mission. In the quotation above, Malphurs and Mancini seem to imply that all people are called to serve, but not all are called to lead. Therefore, not all

disciples should be deployed. They continue:

It is unbiblical to assume that all disciples have either the spiritual gift of leadership or unique God-given leadership abilities. So, while all leaders are disciples, not all disciples are leaders. If the church makes leadership development the standard for all disciples, it is in effect dishonoring believers who have other gifts, such as teaching, mercy-giving, hospitality, counseling, and so on.

This understanding of leadership selection puts further limitations on who could and should be in service to God's mission. Leadership pulls people into more profound faith and service. In John Wesley's comments cited above, it is noteworthy how the co-founder of Methodism broke down would-be barriers for leadership within the Church of England, resulting in the unparalleled growth and maturity of the church. However, this does not necessarily mean that Wesley would have been in favor of just putting any person in a place of leadership. In considering Jesus' sending of the seventy-two, it is also likely that Jesus did not just send out the first seventy-two people that were happened across. Rather, Jesus most likely chose the right seventy-two people to go out and fulfill the mission for which the Lord had trained them. These were people that Christ had taught and observed over a decent period of time.

Nevertheless, the difficulty with the selection and deployment of specific leaders, as seen in Malphurs and Mancini's quote above and repeated throughout their text, is that it seems to confuse what a leader is. Do leaders not also teach, practice "mercy-giving," hospitality, giving counsel, and have other gifts? If leadership is in of itself a spiritual gift, then leadership cannot be something that is taught, either through mentoring, education, or experience. After all, Wesley's qualification of a leader was in regard to their faith above other skills. The book of Acts speaks about mobilizing leaders to be sent out "who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:2-4, NIV). The

leadership qualifications of faith, wisdom, and being full of the Holy Spirit are elements that may already exist in people's lives but can be nurtured and grown in the lives of less mature Christians as well.

Pastors, and other leaders in the church, must not be too quick to dismiss individuals from leadership roles because the gift of leadership has not already been made evident in their lives. Leadership is learned through the practice of leading others. Giving responsibility grows responsibility in Christ's disciples. What pastor or lay leader was identified as such without first being given a chance to lead? It is vital to realize the potential in every follower of Christ to be deployed into God's mission for the world. Pastors need to walk closely with people of strong faith, encouraging them, and creating space for them to lead so that leadership qualities may be grown and nurtured. Pastors, and other official leaders, are not the solution for God's mission in the world. Every believer, all members of the body of Christ, are designed to be God's solution for reconciling the world through God's abundant love. Leaders, then, should not be seen as the ones who "take on" or carry out the ministry of the church. Leaders are obligated to train and give vision, multiplying their effectiveness by raising up devoted and committed laypeople who exemplify diverse gifts and talents.

Leadership transitions within the church can be times of turmoil if the pastor alone has been charged with the task of ministry. Churches who have lost their sole leader may feel as if they were boats lost at sea, adrift in a vast ocean without knowing where to go or how to get there. Most church traditions do not do a good enough job of raising up or preparing leaders to take over a particular church congregation. Leadership development should be such a natural and ongoing process that transition, even a pastoral

change, becomes a simple matter of selecting the next vision caster and strategic coordinator to keep guiding the body of Christ in God's mission. The Holy Spirit has endowed all churches with potential leaders so that every leadership need could be fulfilled from within that body, without necessarily looking outside the local congregation. Even though the biblical model testifies that leaders should arise out of the body of believers in question, local churches so rarely consider individuals from within a congregation to replace their pastor or provide new leadership when necessary.

Perhaps the reason that pastors do not always equip people for ministry is that others never equipped them to do the work for which they are now responsible. It is true that many pastors have been educated, but formal education does not always lead to successful leadership development. Volunteering and mentorship are key aspects to developing all leaders, not just members of the clergy. In speaking specifically about developing leaders in Africa, Wanjiru Gitau states that "Volunteering puts young, energetic, and unengaged youth to work. In turn, the embodiment of the service ideal allows participants to learn, socialize, discover, and develop their gifts, become integrated into their communities, and resist negative peer influences." It should be noted that the understanding of youth in Africa often extends to those in their mid to late thirties, and even though Gitau is commenting on Africans in particular, this principle applies in western contexts as well. Volunteerism, in the church and the community, is the proving grounds for new leaders.

When young leaders have the chance to take small steps into the leadership realm, not only do they learn what it means to lead, but they also whet their appetites for service. Through giving freely of one's time and other resources, young or new leaders get a better

understanding of their calling, interests, and gifting. Like volunteering, mentoring is an essential aspect of developing young or new leaders. Traditional methods of training and education are not usually able to account for the spiritual or character growth of an individual. However, a mentor relationship is different. Through mentorship, education is accompanied by practical advice and specific, individualized counsel that helps up-and-coming leaders be molded into the image of Christ. Truphosa Kwaka-Sumba and Elisabet le Roux address the issue of mentoring and its importance by stating that, “Mentoring, if structured well, can be a powerful tool because it provides a context in which mentees can practice their leadership and get feedback, the opportunity for growth, and exposure to real-life situations.”

If the church is serious about the task of developing new leaders, the components of volunteering and mentorship should also be taken seriously in its developmental efforts. Pastors will need to implement these essential aspects into personal relationships through discipleship. This is not to say that pastors alone should carry the burden of mentoring and mobilizing potential leaders. Multiple layers and levels of leaders may need to be developed, trained, and installed into the fabric of the congregation. Churches today need this kind of relational accountability in the church, not as some bureaucratic method for helping people feel important, but to train as many people as possible. Leaders within the congregation should be discipling others and should be being disciplined by someone else.

Rick Warren has understood the importance of a highly thought out and well-implemented process of training leaders. It is helpful to note that Warren understands that the goal of the church is to work all believers into a deeper commitment to Christ and

their congregation by becoming ministers. The innermost level of commitment is the group of ministers. This is not to say that these are “staff” members, but they are the core of people “who are committed to *ministering* to others.” Warren recognizes that the goal is to move people towards leadership and ministering to others. Even if everyone in the congregation does not make it all the way to this level, it is still the goal. Forming and developing a body of people who identify themselves as those who minister or serve others is still what the local church should be aiming for. The new tribe founded on Jesus Christ understands the importance of working together for the purposes of the Kingdom. For this reason, the new tribe is dedicated to uplifting and supporting its chief, or pastor. At the same time, the pastor is devoted to the tribe and seeing them mature and develop in a variety of ways. The new tribe’s pastor exists to build up the council of elders, not to rule alone. The leader knows that they have done a good job when transition takes place, and the tribe moves forward, working through difficult times.

#### The Essence of Ubuntu: A Path Forward

For most Western Christians, *ubuntu* will be an altogether unfamiliar word based upon foreign concepts. For this reason, it will be helpful to explain the essence of *ubuntu* before attempting to apply it as a path forward for the new tribe founded on Jesus Christ. This section will attempt to make an argument for the value of putting together the concept of the new tribe of this African philosophy by exploring the three following aspects: 1) The concept of “I am because we are,” 2) Its insistence upon high ethical standards, and 3) The natural affinity to build on the examples of model individuals.

What is *ubuntu*? If you were to ask this question of one hundred different people,

you might receive one hundred different answers. However, many of those who attempt to describe *ubuntu* will do so by intoning the phrase, “I am because we are” in one way or another. This simple phrase captures the *ubuntu* spirit better than any other attempt at defining this dynamic concept. Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee argue that *ubuntu* is “the argument that the heart of relational humanism is that the individual human being only finds meaning in community.” While not using the exact phrase above, Hord and Lee have expanded it in their introductory chapter to the compilation of what they call “Africana” philosophy. They further explain that this *ubuntu* way of thinking replaces the starting point for most European and Western philosophies. Instead of depending upon Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am,” *ubuntu* says, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” Hord and Lee have no place for individualism but argue for an understanding of life and humanity in which people only find their place or value from within the greater society as a whole.

Nungi Ngomane has tried to come to an understanding of *ubuntu*, which incorporates all of life. Her work is an effort to make this way of thinking a natural and normal part of life with practical implications. Like Hord and Lee, Ngomane sees the importance of *ubuntu* in its ability to express the necessity of the community for understanding any particular individual. Ngomane explains the essence of *ubuntu* in this way:

Originating from a Southern African philosophy, it encompasses all our aspirations about how to live life well, together. We feel it when we connect with other people and share a sense of humanity; when we listen deeply and experience an emotional bond; when we treat ourselves and other people with the dignity they deserve.

She continues elsewhere, arguing that “Ubuntu refutes the notion that a person can ever

be self-made, because we are all interconnected. We should not be fooled by the myth of the self-made individual as no one exists in true isolation.”

Most authors typically shy away from associating *ubuntu* with religion, preferring to equate it with some sort of humanism, philosophy, or ideology. This work will attempt to equate this concept with Christianity in the following paragraphs, but it is worth mentioning at this time that *ubuntu* has a deep spiritual-ness for those who adhere to it. Orobator, in the helpful book *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, notes that African spirituality, before the arrival of Christians, was always community-based. Insisting that people make decisions for their personal salvation entirely alone was strange and uncertain for people who were accustomed to making decisions in light of familial, tribal, and ancestral realities and commitments. This emphasis upon individual spirituality is perhaps a clue as to why this disdain for associating Christianity with *ubuntu* persists up until today.

A second important aspect of *ubuntu* is its propensity towards ethical standards and high expectations that these standards be reflected throughout society. At this point, Hord and Lee are helpful once more in stating, “We see...[The] challenge as that of encouraging the possibility of ‘a different system of values’...when it comes to thinking about African traditions of thought and culture.” This “different system of values” points directly at two unique characteristics; that of community and humanism. To say that “ubuntu ethics” are communal is to be redundant, but this exploration will do so for the sake of those who are new to the concept. Humanism, however it may be defined elsewhere, is often described in an African mindset by a sense of working on adding value and honor to the community.

Julius Nyerere speaks about this communal set of values by placing them in the realm of work. In the traditional African society, “it was taken for granted that every member of society – barring only the children and the infirm – contributed his fair share of effort towards the production of its wealth.” Elders receive more respect than young people because they have contributed more to the community’s wellbeing. Nyerere also relates the availability of work, access to land, and building up of the community with a different set of values than those that they received at the hands of the Western colonizers. But what of right and wrong, is there no moral aspect to *ubuntu ethics*? Yes, indeed! However, the great sins of *ubuntu ethics* are sins against the community, either a failure to work towards the community’s well-being or putting your own needs above the needs of others. Theft, corruption, and abuse of power, for example, are all sinful not because of some set of rules that tells us so, but because they harm the community.

This high ethical standard is meant to be embodied by every member of the community, but *ubuntu* demands that leaders be prime examples of this new set of values. Reuel Khoza has done extensive work on leadership in the African context. Khoza argues that “leadership must be ethical or it is not leadership at all, but misleadership.” Khoza goes further to make the point throughout the work that leaders should neither be held to a higher standard nor allowed to operate outside *ubuntu ethics*. These ethics exist in all of humanity, and people are able to live them out in as much as people see them embodied in one another. “Ubuntu assumes that we are by nature moral, again because it would not be possible for humans to exist collectively, or even individually, without an innate ethical sense.” Khoza’s thought process seems to be somewhat cyclical here. It is essentially this; that all people are born with a sense of communal ethics, they grow and

thrive through living out these values in community, and in doing so, others are inspired and strengthened to live out *ubuntu* ethics. *Ubuntu* is not only an idea that only makes sense in community, but it depends upon a communal agreement in order for it to have an impact on society.

In this way, *ubuntu* ethics insist that people are essentially good or that they have good in them somewhere, even if it is buried deep down. The essence of *ubuntu* comes out in relationship through a sort of give and take. People act hospitably if hospitality is shown to them. On the negative side, if selfishness is extended toward someone, selfishness is what one can anticipate in return. Kindness and aggression are repaid in equal parts. For an *ubuntu ethic* to become the dominating politic of a group, community, or larger society, Ngomane argues that “we must choose to act on the good” of those that are around us. Just as our actions draw out similar actions from others, our emotions and sentiments do the same. Ethics, when encompassed in *ubuntu*, does more than provide a measure of what is right or wrong. In this case, ethics teach people how to act so that others may grow and flourish, having the same impact on the community as a whole. *Ubuntu* ethics value individuals in hopes of adding value to everyone in society by insisting that everyone is good and should be treated as such.

The third important element of *ubuntu* is its use of “model individuals.” In endeavoring to see the good in everyone, there are automatically a few personalities that come to mind. These are people who embody the *ubuntu* spirit and ethic in such a way that they are used as examples for others to imitate. These rare, exemplary individuals create a sort of paradox where individuals are singled out in a system that usually recognizes that the entire community is responsible for any single person’s achievements.

Consequently, the existence of these model individuals is not proof that it is the people themselves who are extraordinary, but rather the communities that created them. Hord and Lee, Khoza and Ngomane all identify Nelson Mandela as an individual who personifies the spirit and ethics of ubuntu faithfully. Their thoughts about Mandela are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Hord and Lee do not directly mention Nelson Mandela, but they do include one of the “ubuntu-esque” leader’s speeches in the collection of works that the pair co-edited entitled, *I Am Because We Are*. They also place an emphasis on the necessity of “moral teachers” or sages who can help “nurture cultural memory.” For millions of people, Mandela is one of these moral/cultural teachers. In the speech cited above, Mandela writes, “A Chief is primarily a servant of the people. He is the voice of his people.” The former South African president continues, “We have a duty to look beyond our own ranks and our immediate concerns. We must strive more earnestly to unite all the people of our country, and to nurture that unity into a common nationhood.” These are inspiring words delivered to a country that had been abused by its leaders and sharply divided by tribe and race. The quotes above demonstrate the two core aspects that must be present in the character of a leader who embodies the essence of *ubuntu*; servant leadership and broad vision. Nelson Mandela is seen as *ubuntu*’s model individual because Mandela led as a servant and extended grace across ethnic boundaries to create community where it had never existed before.

Reuel Khoza picks up on Mandela’s leadership qualities in the development of the work on leading from the middle. While speaking about Mandela’s willingness to be placed in the service of the masses by serving as a moderator to peace talks in other

countries, Khoza notes:

Attuned leadership is an extension of the servant idea but with the added ingredient that true leadership devises pathways and goals for the followership that they might not themselves have dreamed possible. The leader brings a sense of efficacy to the relationship, filling followers with the confidence that they have the power to succeed: yes, they can! The leader gives hope where there was none, purpose where there was confusion, vision where there was emptiness... The attuned leader leads from the middle, not from behind (servicing the mob) or from in front (imposing on the group), but literally from within.

Mandela put himself in the service of entire communities, nations, and continents. This highly respected individual did so without demanding respect or honor but while seeking counsel and considering what was best for all who were concerned. Mandela was able to find common ground with former enemies through understanding their stories and the communities that bore them. Ngomane notes that this is what allowed for so much progress and reconciliation to take place in the nation of South Africa.

Nelson Mandela was known for bringing people together and valuing their stories. People were united by the fact that their leader suffered with them and was involved in their very real, earthly struggles. Embodying the essence of *ubuntu* requires empathy and servant-style leadership. It requires Khoza's notion of leading from within. The leader who leads from the middle is able to sense the needs of the group and convince them of where they need to go. An *ubuntu* leader has the vision to unite peoples outside of themselves in hopes of creating community and harmony where it had not existed before.

These values sound a lot like what Christians have come to expect from their leaders and, as this study will soon argue, cohere to several essential values that are seen in the person of Christ. This section has explained the essence of *ubuntu* by introducing the African proverb, "I am because we are," It has outlined *ubuntu* ethics as a new set of

communal values, and it has elaborated on the idea of model individuals by looking at the life of Nelson Mandela. In the coming pages, this work will attempt to Christianize *ubuntu* by finding common links between these two ways of life. It will not only argue that these two creeds, Christianity and *ubuntu*, can be combined, but that they can do so quite harmoniously.

If these two ways of being and living in the world can be brought together, it is only in and through the life of the church that fully embraces the new tribe way of life. The church is that group of believers which endeavors to embody the gospel in ways that testify to God's love for the entire world. Any congregation from any corner of the world can adapt to the new tribe way of being in the world by embracing *ubuntu*. This unique worldview can be brought into harmony with the Christian faith in at least four areas: communal accountability, leading from the middle, Christ as model, and natural evangelism.

Communal accountability is the notion that people are responsible for and to one another. It is multidirectional and utilizes a network, or web, of connectedness to secure a sense of community. People in community challenge each other to be their very best and trust one another to put the needs of the whole first. At this point, Christianity and *ubuntu* find common ground through what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls Christian brotherhood (or fellowship). It is a new reality in which God calls us to participate through Christ. Additionally, Bonhoeffer's notion of Christian fellowship is built upon love, which "recognizes the true image of the other person which he has received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all [people]." The essence of *ubuntu* is that all people have worth and value and that what happens to one

person, happens to the entire community. Christianity proposes that the image of God, recaptured through Christ Jesus, is the reason that all others are worthy of participation in the fellowship of the saints.

Working to build community should be one of the main efforts of any body of believers. Christine Pohl explains that communal relationships are the most durable when people are connected at several different levels or spheres. In other words, when believers allow themselves to be connected with people through multiple avenues beyond worship, their bonds are the strongest. It is not just that a community of faith should care for the people who are within the walls of their church or only when they are within said walls. The essence of *ubuntu* in the life of the church requires that a faith community be together for the regular, ordinary, earthy parts of life above and beyond what is typically defined as the “churchy” times.

Reuel Khoza is cited above in noting that leading from the middle, as Mandela did, is at the very core of *ubuntu* ethics. Similarly, God did not accept to lead from afar. In the Exodus story, God claims to have “seen, heard, and come down” as a result of the suffering of the Hebrews (Exodus 3: 7-8). God continued to meet with Moses, and God’s presence was seen as a pillar of cloud by all the people throughout their wanderings in the wilderness. In Jesus Christ, God’s leading from the middle is seen in its fullness. The first chapter of the Gospel of John states it emphatically, God became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14). If God had been distant at times, God was then present in the person of Jesus and remains present until the very end of the earth through the Holy Spirit. God lives among Christ-followers, leading and guiding them from the middle to the benefit of the community and the entire world. God is the perfect example of *ubuntu* through the

incarnation and indwelling of the Spirit.

The stories of Jesus and the disciples invite the subscribers of the *ubuntu* way of life to explore Christianity because Jesus is the ultimate model figure worthy of imitation. Jesus expressed the “otherliness” of *ubuntu* ethics through righteousness, and most importantly, in community-creating inclusion. Jesus ate and associated with sinners, outcasts, and ethnic outsiders. The Lord called together a group of people to be his disciples who were not the religious cream of the crop, and the community that this intimate group forged together has since spanned the globe. Jesus’ community was not founded upon status or selfish gain, but on the notion of love; “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). As the living head of the church, Christ is the model for us as Christians. Christlikeness is the ultimate goal for all Christ-followers. For *ubuntu*-minded individuals who need an example to point to, Jesus can be that model. No one in human history has more fully embodied the spirit and ethics of *ubuntu*, given more to a group of people, or done more to build community as has Christ Jesus.

Christianity and *ubuntu* also stand on common ground in their emphasis on caring for others. In the small section on *ubuntu* ethics above, it was noted that the great sin, according to *ubuntu*, were sins against the community. Essentially, selfishness is the opposite of *ubuntu* living. People must consider the whole of those around them in their planning, words, and deeds. The early Christian community of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 2, is a great example of this type of mutual community. There are many aspects of the early church that could be expounded upon in relation to *ubuntu* living, but there is no space in this limited exploration to do so. What is important for this discussion is the fact

that when these early believers lived together in genuine community, “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NIV). Living as Christians is meant to naturally bring others into the midst of that fellowship. Evangelism becomes an important side effect, but not the goal, of what Christians do. Both *ubuntu* and Christianity, when lived out faithfully, should naturally draw people into community.

Even though there is always a certain amount of hesitation that arises from combining worldly points of view with the Christian faith, the above section has argued that doing so is highly appropriate in this case. The *ubuntu* and Christian ways of living have many of the same goals and aspirations, such as communal accountability, model individuals, and a natural gathering of people to their respective causes. The proper contextualization of the ideology of *ubuntu* to the Christian faith is to start with Christ as the foundation. Christians are gathered and call others to this gathering because it is what Christ commanded of the followers of this new way of life. The church is the best place for the marriage of these two concepts to be lived out in tangible ways amongst believers.

Up to this point, this sect has referred to the new tribe as the model or endeavor to build congregations of calling and belonging. The new tribe is one that embodies the characteristics that this chapter has outlined; calling, service, belonging, membership, evangelism, discipleship, and group involvement. This vast array of thoughts and concepts about the new tribe can be expounded and concentrated upon through the principles of *ubuntu*. For this reason, it would not be too much of a stretch to call this theoretical congregation that is being imagined in this chapter, the “*ubuntu* tribe.” Even though Africans who subscribe to this way of life often find it difficult to discuss its correlations to Christianity, this difficulty likely exists because Africans were often taught

by western missionaries that the two concepts were at odds. At most, this kind of dismissal has been brought on by perceived cultural superiority. At the very least, putting Christianity and *ubuntu* at odds is a failure to capitalize on good soil for planting the gospel.

Foreign language and concepts have not only been used in this chapter as a way of learning from the growing church of the African continent. It has also been evoked to identify with the fact that the gospel calls Christ-followers into a different way of existing in the world. The language of the new tribe, with its *ubuntu* similarities, can help any local church seeking to build a congregation of calling and belonging. Chapter three will carry this work forward by exploring the historical, theological, and biblical justifications for this way of thinking. After doing so, chapter four will begin to outline the process of moving towards transforming congregations into a new tribe where all hear the call and where all belong.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Evaluating The Need For Clergy**

#### *Introduction*

Building congregations of calling and belonging is an effort to build and sustain a community, or new tribe, founded upon Jesus Christ and the New Kingdom that the Lord established here on earth. This point has been thoroughly examined in the second chapter. Chapter three now takes up the task of validating the formation and mobilization of this new tribe considering the biblical, historical, and theological implications that may arise. The assumption that there should be much less of a distinction – or gap if using the

language of chapter one – between the clergy and the laity is genuinely at the heart of what it means to build a healthy, new tribe congregation. This chapter will continue to argue that there is no basis in scripture that supports a separation or distinction resulting in different Christian classes. It will make the case that every congregation's goal should indeed be to become a royal priesthood and a holy nation, as described in the first epistle of Saint Peter.

There are no spectators in the Kingdom of God. There are only ministers and future ministers. The healthiest congregations are those which recognize that each one of its members is a minister. They also recognize that fringe members, visitors, and those who have yet to come into their midst are future members and are, therefore, future ministers in their community. Outsiders are only outside because they have yet to join; not because they are unworthy or unwelcome. Upon joining the community, and perhaps even before accepting Christ, prospective members are called into service as they respond to the local church's invitation that they are entering or exploring. To more fully bring to light the implications of this way of viewing ministry and to support the notion above that there should be no significant separation between the clergy and the laity, this chapter will explore Old and New Testament examples from scripture. They will be the endcaps – the justification and confirmation – for taking the stance of this chapter. Between these two ends, historical and theological norms will fill out the middle section of this study.

The Bible can be seen as, among many other things, a sort of record of God's people. Many of these records have something to say to the church today about how the body of Christ is mobilized for mission. How the people of God lived, worshiped, and interacted with one another speaks to Christians today about how they should relate to

each other and to the world. Many of the stories from the Bible can give modern congregations insights not only about personal relationships but about how bodies of believers (God's people) related to those around them. It is imperative to consider their interactions with God, other believers, and the world if the goal is to ascertain a complete understanding of what it meant to be God's people.

This chapter will look at stories from the Hebrews' time in the wilderness, Jesus' ministry, and the early church as an effort to outline biblical principles concerning what it means to be the people of God or, in other words, what it means to do ministry. After looking more closely at the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and discussing some of the historical shifts that have caused the rift between clergy and laity to form and grow over time, scripture will once again be employed as a discussion in forming a new tribe community. This will lead to the fourth chapter and its discussion of this work's practical implications as it proposes new models of calling and belonging. The aim is to allow scripture to reframe and develop this doctrine for practical application to any particular modern context.

### *Hebrew Wanderings*

In Exodus 18, Jethro, Moses's father in law, pays a visit to the Hebrew camp. Moses has been leading the people for some time, and Moses has been taking the entire burden upon himself. After staying with him for a while, Jethro rebukes Moses saying, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:17-18, NIV). Jethro continues by giving the leader of God's people some sage advice.

After exhorting him to teach faithfully and be a model for the people, Jethro counsels

Moses saying:

But select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you (Exodus 18:21-22, NIV).

Here, Jethro and Moses validate ordinary people's abilities to participate in God's work by sharing authority and giving away responsibility. Perhaps sitting as a judge over disputes seems trivial compared to testifying about the risen Lord, but keep in mind that the Hebrews were just coming to understand who God was. Through the settling of disputes, they learned the practical implications of the Ten Commandments and God's sense of justice. The Israelites were learning what it meant to follow God and what it meant to live as a redeemed people.

Through this lens, Jethro's plan can be seen as a leadership development strategy to foster belonging and participation. No longer does Moses sit and judge the people's disputes alone; now, there is help. These helpers are organized in groups and have a responsibility chain that looks quite similar to today's small groups within a larger church congregation. If Moses was encouraged to give away power and responsibility, it stands to reason that most pastors could stand to benefit from doing the same. Doing so would most definitely free up some of the pastor's time, but more importantly, it puts others, especially the laity, on the front lines of ministry. In this way, belonging and participation feed off of one another; the more one participates in what God is doing, the more they become a part of the body of Christ.

Some leaders are hesitant in taking bold actions to involve lay members in ministry. Education and training are excellent and essential but can, in many contexts, become barriers for people who are called to ministry. Laird points out that John Wesley took steps to break down these traditional barriers of the day, noting:

Wesley's call to faith as the measure of leadership opened a door for many to step into preaching, teaching, and administrative roles that countered the model of Oxford-qualified ordained as the singular leader in the church. Wesley's impulse to renew the church through the laity returned people's energy to mission.

According to Laird, Wesley's new qualification for leaders is that they are people of faith. In this case, unleashing the church's leadership to those who exemplified faith reenergized the church and allowed more people to participate in God's mission. Laird continues by noting, "God's mission is to reconcile all people and every purpose under heaven to the ways and will of God." If the church is going to be faithful to God's mission, it will take more than pastors; it will take all those who call themselves Christians. God's purpose of reconciliation in the world is now the task of the church. No barrier should be unreasonably placed before those who feel called to serve, and as Wesley notes above, have a good measure of faith. Therefore, training and education, although necessary to equip the church for God's mission, should not be a precursor to or requirement for mobilization.

The above story from Exodus 18 is not the only example of Moses sharing power. Numbers 13 records another instance of Moses developing and mobilizing leaders for the sake of the kingdom. Before arriving in Canaan, the Israelites stopped short and gathered leaders from every clan. Each tribe was represented and sent their leader to spy out the land. Perhaps it is because of the precarious use of the word spy and Christianity's

modern understanding of what ministry means, but the significance of this “scouting party” is often missed. It is remarkable that in a short amount of time, Moses went from guiding the multitude of people as its sole judge and leader to establishing a system whereby tribes had their own leaders and methods for offering up capable men to undertake the job at hand. Moses stays back with the people and leaves this critical task to others who were, perhaps, more well suited to it based on their age, skills, or experience.

### *The Master’s Method*

Jesus’ leadership style also teaches the church today about mobilizing God’s people for mission. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus invites the disciples to participate in the Father’s mission by pronouncing, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Lk 10:2-3, NIV). Jesus tells the disciples to go and gather what has already been prepared. The fields are ready to be harvested; the Father will bless their ministry. The seventy-two disciples are then sent out with instructions for what they should do and how they should go. They had been observing Jesus’ ministry for some time and had learned what they ought to do. They had been presented with a vision and were encouraged to take ownership of this vision as if it was their own. Undoubtedly, the seventy-two disciples had benefited from a close relationship with their leader. Now, Jesus sets them free and opens the door to unleash the life-changing power of God’s love upon the earth by multiplying himself seventy-two times over.

Notably, the above story from Numbers 13 and the one from Luke 10 are quite similar. They both affirm that the leader, however skilled, gifted, and experienced they

may be, is not the only person who is meant to take part in the mission of the Kingdom of God. Each story implies the importance and necessity of raising up and sending out others. Members of the clergy should not be threatened when leaders come up out of their congregation but should be excited to deploy them into the field of God's Kingdom work. Doing so allows the ministry of the congregation to be multiplied many times over for the sake of the Gospel message.

Sue Mallory has written a book about equipping the entire church for ministry. Mallory writes, "Ultimately, a church's faithfulness can be measured by this question: To what degree does each member understand herself or himself to be connected to Christ and accountable to him for the way that they live and serve?" Above, Laird pointed out that Wesley's criteria for an individual's readiness to serve in ministry was primarily dependent upon their faith. Mallory would add that a community's measure of faithfulness is rightly attached to Christlikeness and service. It is not that education, experience, wealth, or other traditional factors of worth no longer have any value for the church. Indeed, this is not the case. However, these determinants should help distinguish functions and locations of service, rather than ability and readiness for service.

To some, this may seem like semantics, but this distinction represents an essential difference. Not only should a local church's faithfulness be measured in its ability to mobilize its members for ministry, but all those who believe are automatically qualified for service. One's experience, education, training, and status only help determine where they serve, not if they serve. This dynamic is evident in the way that Jesus calls the disciples into service. All that they had to do was to believe in him. They were not well educated, from the higher social classes, or members of the religious elite. Some would

have been unclean and impure based on their work or personal associations, as was the case with Matthew the tax collector. Nevertheless, they were enough to serve Christ, based on their faith in him and their availability to respond favorably to Christ's call.

Some may argue that the way that Jesus selected the disciples is not relevant to Christ-followers today. After all, Jesus was God and knew the hearts of the men and women that were chosen to follow. What may seem haphazard to an outside observer was very likely a deliberate choice based on existing leadership skills. This is how the argument usually goes. Besides the fact that there is no evidence of this in scripture, the fact remains that these were not the people one would choose if the attempt was to start a revolutionary movement aimed at changing the world. The fact that Jesus has unique insight into a poor fisherman's capacity to lead does not mean that Peter would have been the natural choice to be the foundation on which the church would be built.

Furthermore, as the Gospel narrative would suggest, Peter had a great deal of learning to do and lacked significant capacities of a good leader. According to the prominent leadership criteria, Jesus' choice in Peter as a disciple and eventual successor as the leader of this new way of life makes no logical sense. The Lord's selection of Peter is a testimony that faith in Christ and readiness to serve are the primary qualifications for leadership in the local church's ministry.

### *The Early Church Example*

The Apostle Paul is arguably the best model for leadership that the body of Christ has outside of the person of Jesus. Much can be gained from observing Paul's actions and teachings recorded in the New Testament. Paul casts a unique vision for the people of

Christ in Ephesians 1 when speaking of the elect. Ferguson's work on election is once again relevant as it relates to Ephesians. Ferguson notes, "The emphasis is that God's election occurred 'in Christ.' Those who are 'in Christ' through hearing the word of truth, believing in Christ, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit are those who are 'holy and blameless' children of God, according to God's love and good pleasure." This passage moves the reader from being urged to remain holy by explaining God's love for the church to an account of how Christ-followers came to receive the Holy Spirit. Similarly to Laird's understanding of Wesley, faith is outlined as the primary criterion or sign that a person is elected.

Ferguson continues by making the connection that the language of Ephesians here is similar to that of anointing, which is simply another way to speak about God's choosing. Christ is literally "the anointed one," and all of those who wear the name of Christ share in this anointing. In this way, God chooses us all to complete the mission that Christ started in the world. No person is excused because of a lack of knowledge or skill in the areas of leadership or service. These skills are cultivated in every believer through time and practice. Each person is a leader in one group or another, despite their lack of leadership in their community of faith. Furthermore, as it will be outlined in the next section, God has often preferred to use those with the fewest qualifications for service. Usually, God does so for the sake of proving that God is the one who acted and who is worthy of praise.

It is evident from Ferguson's work that whenever God has chosen (anointed) people throughout the biblical witness, it was never for salvation but always for a particular task or service to be rendered to the Lord. In the passage mentioned above, Paul

is speaking to the church in Ephesus and all of creation today, charging the church to take up the task to which it has been called. As the church, its people have put their faith in Christ, they have received the full measure of the Father's love, and they go forward through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul argues that believers in Christ have already received redemption and forgiveness through God's grace. And now, "with all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will" (Ephesians 1:7-9, NIV). The church knows what God's will is because it has received the Holy Spirit and has been chosen, i.e., anointed, to serve God in this world. Paul's teaching in this passage obligates every Christian to make use of the life-changing grace that they have so freely received, both in their own lives, as well as in the lives of others.

This powerful dynamic is also seen in the way that the Early Church fellowshiped, spent time together, and took responsibility for one another. Acts 2:42 – 47 gives us the following example:

[The Early Church] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This is the sort of ownership that the Church of Jesus Christ needs today. Belonging goes hand in hand with participation. If one belongs to the body of Christ and its mission belongs to them, then they must participate in all that the church can and should be. Each believer must see themselves in the greater narrative of what it means to follow Christ Jesus and how they are transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit for participation as co-

laborers in God's mission for the world. While taking time for the care-related aspects of their work, pastors must also be intimately involved in casting vision, equipping, and sending out the people under their responsibility. If the church is going to faithfully embody the new tribe's way of life, the laity will have to recognize its role as principal actors in the mission of the church. If the laity is going to realize the importance and necessity of this calling, it will be the job of the pastor to bring the mission before them at every available opportunity.

### *The Use of Underdogs*

God has a preference for the underdogs of society, those members of God's creation who come from the margins. An underdog is simply defined as anyone who does not hold power, influence, or wealth. They are usually poor, immigrants, women, or children. They are the forgotten parts of society who are, more often than not, omitted from most historical accounts. In Christ Jesus, however, underdogs are valued and validated for mission. Christ – the ultimate example of an underdog – came to earth not in the form of a conquering king but in that of an infant. Jesus was not born into the lap of luxury but made the entry into this world in a lowly manger. This section will argue that God prefers underdogs, those who are on the margins, to accomplish God's plans for the world. The first epistle to the Corinthians captures the Apostle Paul's understanding of this truth, saying:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate..." Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the

wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1: 18-19, 21-23, NIV).

It does seem foolish to start a revolution for Nazareth instead of from an important city like Jerusalem. It does seem foolish to establish a religion solely upon love while the local population was looking for a movement that would change their socio-political standing. However, this is what God does, “God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1: 28-29, NIV).

The insinuation that God prefers to work through underdogs is not a new idea. The history of the church is full of stories where seemingly unimportant and insignificant people accomplished amazing things for the Kingdom of God. Particularly essential to the argument of this study is the fact that throughout the biblical witness, God chose regular people to impact the world. Instead of operating through the powerful, God often chose the powerless. Instead of calling the most influential people to service, God frequently called otherwise forgettable people to take part in God’s restorative mission for creation. God has been doing mission from the margins since the very beginning. This preference for the margins will be explored by highlighting some of the less-than-ordinary people from the biblical witness whom God used for the mission of the kingdom.

Thuo and Stanton suggest that it takes people who have suffered to “fight and eliminate the scandal of human suffering.” They go further by suggesting that if Christians loved one another and the world in the ways that they are instructed to do so in the Bible, much of the world’s suffering would cease. This paradox may seem contradictory, but this very same dichotomy is evident in the life of Christ, and therefore it should be evident in the lives of Christ’s disciples. Jesus endeavored to end suffering by

the healing of infirmities, casting out of evil spirits, and the confronting of unjust socio-political practices of the day. In other words, those who are suffering are more apt to help others who are suffering. They are better suited to know the needs of those who suffer and respond in empathetic ways.

While working to end suffering, our Lord and Savior also seemed to regard the marginalized of society as the preferred model for all of humanity.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth... Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5: 3-5; 10-12, NIV).

This dualism is troubling if the church is meant to be downtrodden (poor, mourning, meek, persecuted, insulted, and falsely accused) while also working to end suffering and marginalization in the world. If the body of Christ strives to end the oppressive forces at work in society, there will come a day when suffering ended, bringing God's inclination toward the marginalized to a close with it. Perhaps this was God's plan all along; to create a preference for the "lowly, despised" things of the world that will eventually nullify the systems and forces that ostracize people in the first place. For this brief overview, those from scripture who serve as examples of missions from the margins can be separated into three categories; Israel's leaders, the disciples of Jesus, and the Early Church leaders.

Israel's Leaders – Perhaps it is difficult to think of Abraham as a marginalized person, but here is a bit of what is known about the man that God chose to be the

founding father, so to speak, of this new people. Abraham lived in a sparsely populated area. Even during Abraham's time, there were influential cities where people could use power and cunning to get ahead, and yet God chose a herdsman who roamed the countryside. Abraham, at the time of God's selection, had no children. God's promise must have seemed like pouring salt in the wounds by declaring that Abraham will be the father of many nations while the man did not currently have any children. Finally, Abraham does not even seem to have extraordinary faith at the beginning of the narrative. Right at the start of the story, Abraham doubts God's promise of protection by concealing Sarah's identity out of fear of being killed. In looking at the story of Abraham, it is easy to note that the man was not powerful, had no hope for the longevity of the family line, and was not already personifying trust in God. And yet, God used Abraham.

Moses is a conflicting image of power and powerlessness, having both been an insider and an outsider to the Egyptian royal family. This polemic narrative quickly chooses its side when the story is taken from the beginning to the end. Moses was supposed to be put to death as an infant but was abandoned and floated down a river instead. After living in the lap of luxury for the next major part of his life, Moses was then a murderer – a fugitive of the law. Afterward, Moses spent another good portion of his life in the desert, raising cattle. By his own admission, Moses was slow of speech and probably not an excellent choice to be sent to speak to a pharaoh. As an outsider, Moses was unknown and almost a complete stranger to the people that the man was meant to lead. A glimpse into Moses' life tells us that it was nearly ended as soon as it started. This hero of the faith was a fugitive, a poor speaker, an alien to his people, and an all-around curious choice to free the Hebrews and lead them into the promised land. And yet, God

used him.

David is another figure who stands out as a questionable choice for service to the Lord in this particular context. In a culture where respect comes with age, David was a mere child and not even considered by his own family as worthy of anointing when Samuel came to their home. David, although known to have proved himself in fighting off animals when defending his flock, had never been put to the test in battle. It is likely that the young man had not the faintest clue about the art of war. David also lacked the necessary strength to wield the traditional tools of combat. This narrative quickly reveals that despite having a great relationship with the Lord, David must have also struggled with lust. King David eventually murders a man so that David can take the man's wife as his bride, and ultimately allows this woman to lead Israel's King into idolatry. David's story reminds the church that the young man was a poor selection as the one to fight the Philistine's greatest warrior. The young man was not well regarded even in his own home. David fell into sin and eventually collapsed as the leader of God's people. And yet, God used him.

The Disciples – The first-century followers of Christ were not people of any extraordinary notoriety. If Jesus were attempting to start a new socio-political movement from Palestine with the intent of reshaping the world, one would imagine that Jesus would have chosen people of special importance to be his disciples. The Lord's choice in some of the disciples must have seemed quite odd. Among the insignificant fisherman, there was also a tax collector and a zealot with them. It should not be forgotten that Jesus chose Judas, knowing what Judas would eventually do. This rag-tag bunch of followers from the margins often bickered and completely missed the point of Jesus' teachings and

what the Lord came to this earth to accomplish. Knowing full well their weaknesses, Jesus assembles them regardless of their insignificance and pours himself into teaching them and shaping them so that the bunch would be able to carry on in ministry after Christ was gone. However, in Jesus' darkest hour, the disciples were nowhere to be found. Judas betrayed the Lord, Peter denied the Lord, and the rest were scattered except for perhaps one, John, depending on the particular gospel rendition.

It would seem that Jesus' team of twelve was a terrible choice as the apostles who would be building upon the foundation that Jesus himself laid. John 15:18-21 seems especially troubling as the Lord tells followers that they will be hated by the world just as Jesus was hated. This is the life that the disciples can expect from that moment forward; to be a follower of this new way of Jesus Christ is to be hated and persecuted by the world. Therefore, there is also a sense in which the more faithful the followers are to living into the way of Christ in the world, the more that they can anticipate being hated by the world, pushed to the margins of their society, and written off as insignificant on the world stage. Despite all of this, Jesus repeatedly calls and sends out the disciples to be salt and light in the world.

There are two stories from the Gospel of Luke that can also bring new insight to Jesus' preference to work with those who are on the margins of society. It is interesting that Jesus does the opposite of what many may expect him to do in these stories. Jesus rejects the important person from chapter 18 and accepts the underdog of the story from chapter seven. Only in Luke's gospel is the anointing of Jesus undertaken by a "sinful woman." Being in the home of a Pharisee, this woman displays extraordinary courage to come to Jesus, washing the Lord's feet with her tears and anointing them with perfume.

Jesus then tells a short parable where two servants' debts are forgiven, and the reader is left understanding that this woman is a model for Christ-followers.

The story of the rich young ruler is equally disconcerting as the reader is left bewildered at the thought of Jesus' rejection of someone of such high esteem. Upon meeting on the road, the rich young ruler is found to be a good and righteous man, but instead of being invited to follow Jesus in that instant, the young man is required to first sell everything the young man owns before coming back to do so. It is evident that such an endeavor, even if the man had attempted to carry it out, would have taken some time. A fortune is not so easily dispensed of that it would allow the man to begin following him instantly. The story closes, telling us that the young man went away sad because the ruler was wealthy, but it is unclear as to which aspect has made him sad. Is it the desire to hold on to his possessions, or the desire to run after Jesus and serve as a part of his inner circle?

As has been expressed above, Jesus did not seem to mind choosing seemingly unworthy followers to be his disciples, so why did the Lord put such stringent conditions upon a would-be follower at this point? In other instances, Jesus seems to encourage people to drop what they are doing and immediately follow him, such as in Luke chapter nine. Through these occurrences, the reader is told that there is no time to say goodbye to one's family or even to bury one's father. The time to follow Jesus is now, with no conditions. The lesson of Luke 9 speaks to the rejection of the rich young ruler. Perhaps it is precisely because the young man is rich, influential, and otherwise a social insider that Christ rejects him. Jesus was inclined towards the underdogs – those on the margins of society – and remains so to this day.

The Early Church Leaders – Peter’s failures as a disciple were partially mentioned above. The disciple was hot and cold, sometimes able to speak inspired words in one instance and be chastised for his words at other times. Peter denied Christ three times and was questioned three times in a row as to his love for Christ. Simon Peter would seem to be an odd choice for leadership in the new world order that Jesus created. Could Peter be trusted? Would Peter fall back into his desire for Jesus to be a conquering Messiah-king, or would the former fisherman understand this new way of love? Peter had not always been the most apt of the disciples, nor the most faithful, but Jesus uses him as the clear leader of his new movement in the early pages of the book of Acts. Peter’s character flaws continuously lead him to the margins of society, which as this work is pointing out, is God’s preferred place from which to find and to send out individuals for God’s mission.

This exploration of underdogs has made it clear that the biblical witness is full of examples of God using people from the margins in order to serve in God’s plans in the world. Through all of these efforts, the passage discussed above from 1 Corinthians 1 gains context and clarity. It is not just in Christ Jesus that God chooses the “lowly, despised” things of the world, but it has been a part of how God has intervened in the world from the very beginning. As verse 31 of that passage notes, God’s peculiar choices are made to “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” Who can boast when God uses a young shepherd to slay a giant war hero? God alone. Who can claim that the Lord was only victorious because Jesus was surrounded by the rich and powerful when the contrary was the reality? God chose an enslaved people, and later a group of underdogs to transform the world. If they were able to succeed with God’s help, so can every believer

in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

It is vexing that despite the biblical witness to the contrary, the church today has placed so many qualifications and restrictions on who can be a part of God's mission. Not only is every Christian called to take on God's mission, but especially those who are on the margins of society. Van Gelder and Zscheile note that the old models of "Christendom" and "churched culture" from the West are no longer able to account for the complex nature of Christianity today. There has been a juxtaposition of Christianity moving to the Global South while the old world powers are becoming increasingly less-Christian. This global shift is why the church in Africa and other traditionally marginalized areas is so essential to Christianity today. They have a growing voice, and the church desperately needs to hear it today. God's inclination to do missions from the margins does not exclude those at the center for service. Instead, it opens the door for everyone to participate in God's mission, even if God reserves some of the most surprising outcomes through transforming and sending out those who are called from the margins.

In *The Mission of God's People*, Wright argues, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's Mission." Wright suggests that mission is the essence of all of scripture and that God's people are meant to carry out God's mission all over the earth. The church is defined by its missional presence in the world through which God is made known as uniquely revealed in scripture. Therefore, if there are members of the church, any local church or congregation, who do not participate in God's mission of restoration for the

world, they are not fully living into their call as the people of God. Underdogs are too often overlooked for most aspects of life. The church needs to take its cues from the Bible in looking to empower and deploy the marginalized into the service of the congregation if it wishes to be faithful to God's inclusive, upside-down, missional nature.

In summary of the biblical analysis above, it was noted that (1) leaders are meant to train and equip their people for ministry by looking at Jethro's advice to Moses for leading God's people through the wilderness; (2) that this practice was embraced and carried out by the entirety of the people of God within a short period of time through the account of sending spies into the promised land; (3) that leaders are obligated to send their people out into the world to bring about change, through considering the story of Jesus sending out the seventy-two; and (4) that leaders have been chosen, even anointed, by God for this very service by examining Paul's words to the church in the first chapter of Ephesians and the record of the early church in the book of Acts. It was also noted that God has preferred to use underdogs – people who are on the margins of society – to accomplish God's purposes for the world by looking at a number of examples from throughout scripture. This study has endeavored to support the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and thereby close the gap that separates the clergy from the laity. The next section will explore how and why divisions within the body formed and some of their resulting effects.

### *Historical Gap Widening*

Was there always a distinction between the clergy and laity in the mission of the

church? What roles should laypeople typically hold in the church beyond funding and supporting the pastor? Is the distinction between “professional” and “amateur” classes of Christians helpful in some way? It would appear, from the exegetical analysis above, that all believers are sent out into ministry. But if this is the case, why are there so many in the church who do not seem to take part in Christ’s mission today? The following paragraphs are devoted to answering this question by explaining where the split between clergy and laity first came about in the centuries following the establishment of the church and the resulting implications for churches today.

Alexandre Faivre, in his book *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, provides a detailed look at the evolution between the clergy and laity over the first five centuries of the Christian faith. Central to his argument, Faivre points out that there is no use of the word “lay” or “laity” in the New Testament. The author notes that the early leaders, bishops, and authors preferred calling the first believers all simply by the same name of believers, disciples, or Christians. Throughout the extensive look at pre and post-Constantinian eras, Faivre shows how the term “laity” came into existence and how it evolved into today’s current usage of the word, which has remained the same for the last fifteen-hundred years. Faivre elaborates that the Early Church considered all of its members to be the *kleros*. Therefore, priestly functions were expected of all Christians. Faivre’s work seems to call into question the modern separation that the church places between clergy and laity, for the New Testament makes no such distinction.

If all Christians are members of the *kleros*, perhaps it is the stripping of this name from the entire believing community that has made it so that so many believers do not have a place in ministry or feel the need to serve the church in any way. It is likely that

the first believers understood that all of creation made up the people (*laos*) while all believers made up the ministers or clergy (*kleros*). The reality that so many Christians do not see themselves as the *kleros* is perhaps what leads James Garlow to say in a critique of the church that “as many as 95 percent of God’s people are unemployed.” Through the help of Volf, cited back in chapter 2, it was established that all work can be in the service of the Lord if the Christian enters into God’s divine purposes for the world. However, those who see themselves as ordinary people or lesser Christians may always struggle to see their work as contributing to the kingdom of God. Perhaps recapturing the title of *kleros* could serve as a first step in helping all Christians see themselves as employed in divine work.

Garlow adds to the discussion of contrasting *kleros* with *laos*. This author sees *kleros* as those who are called out and the *laos* as the entire people of God. While Faivre denies the clergy/lay distinction in scripture, Garlow still finds it in the use of the word that is often translated as “the people.” Faivre sees that there was no distinction between the two “classes of Christian,” while Garlow’s interpretation is that all of God’s people are simultaneously *kleros* and *laos* at the same time. Furthermore, Garlow understands that the clergy and laity are not separated by status but by function, noting several key differences between the function of these types of ministers.

Not only do Faivre and Garlow disagree on the specifics of the use and implications of New Testament Greek, but these two authors also differ on the fundamental notion of the separation of the clergy from out of the laity. Faivre argues that this separation does not exist in the New Testament but comes through the evolution of the church into a more institutionalized religion. Faivre explains that “in the first

Christian communities, all believers formed the lot chosen by God, all were called to be saints, and were elected and all were equal in dignity.” It was nearly 150 years before the terms lay and clergy would be used regularly by some of the early church fathers. The laity, at this time, began to be people set apart to support the church, priest, and bishop. They were expected to give financially and served the parish through acts of service. Effectively, the laity began to stop seeing themselves as ministers or witnesses to the world. Instead, they began to see themselves as supporters of the clergy who, with the blessing of the bishop, were involved in the duties that were previously considered the rights and responsibilities of all Christians.

Gift Mtukwa picks up on this dichotomy between the clergy and the laity as well. Mtukwa notes that many attempts to develop a more vigorous theology of the laity are often thwarted by the reactionary natures of the two leading voices in this debate – clericalism and anticlericalism. Instead of favoring one side of this debate over another, Mtukwa prefers a reinforcing of the understanding of what it means to be the people of God. This discussion is very similar to this work’s outlining of the new tribe founded upon Jesus Christ. Mtukwa, similarly to Faivre, asserts that Christians were initially all considered *laos and kleros*, and that these titles referred to all the people of God. In Mtukwa’s assessment, the dichotomy is neither biblical, nor helpful for the church to embody its call as the people of God.

Perhaps it is the case that Garlow, and Faivre are not in agreement about how this clergy / lay separation came about, but the fact remains that this division still exists today and has become a hindrance to the mission of the church in the world. The two may find common ground with Mtukwa’s insistence that Ephesians 4 argues that all saints should

be equipped for the work of ministry and given the space to carry out their ministerial callings. What the church of Jesus Christ needs today is a people who are devoted to God's mission - people who embody Christ's way of living in and ministering to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even though the gap between those who do ministry and those who are ministered to did not exist in the New Testament or in the Early Church, as the church aged and matured, this separation arose and continued to widen. There have been a significant number of correction attempts to bring the church back to its purpose of embodying Christlikeness in community over the years. But before looking at some of these corrections, this study will explore a narrative from outside the North American context.

### *Modern Contextual Gap Widening*

It is always easier for people to evaluate problems or inconsistencies from other cultures. These evaluations may not be correct, or they can be unfairly harsh. Regardless of this, people typically find it easier to participate in the critical analysis of other cultures than of their own because they are usually blind to their own culture. How can one evaluate something that one cannot see or that they do not even know exists? For this reason, this exploration offers a reality from the Central African church in hopes of highlighting some truths about clergy/lay relationships for all contexts. Its aim is to serve as a modern reflection of the division between pastors and the people.

A Christian from outside the USA might look at American pastors and see them as movie stars who promise great blessing for contributing to their ministry. This is the dark side of the Christian faith in America. The dark side of the Christian faith in Africa

may be the image of pastors as the great village chief. Because they reside almost entirely in city centers these days, these great chiefs have come to have significant power over entire cities. Many of these pastors find themselves holding political office or several influential jobs in addition to their pastoral work. The pastor-chief is too busy to allow congregants to come by their home or make an appointment to see them at church. This type of pastor will usually travel with bodyguards, have a private driver, and shows up at church only when it is time to preach. On the rare occasion that the pastor-chief accepts to offer a prayer for someone, they are usually expected to pay for this private audience. Congregants under this kind of leadership find it difficult to express their faith without citing the name of their pastor. The average believer can do nothing because they are nothing without “the man of God” and because their service can be seen as a threat to the pastor’s leadership.

When the pastor has become a miniature god, how can one rise to their level in order to join the ministry? If the pastor is everything for the local church, how are they to go on when the pastor moves on to another church, leaves the ministry, or passes away? The hard truth is that if the laity is to be involved in the mission of Jesus Christ for the world, the leadership of the church will be the defining factor. Most readers, after reflecting upon the example above, can understand why the laity under African pastor-chiefs is unable to be mobilized for the kingdom. In looking at contexts closer to home, one may find that poor pastoral leadership is at the root of a church with an uninvolved, detached laity.

Despite the fact the clergy/lay separation has become a great rift dividing the church into two parts, there have been attempts throughout history to lessen the divide.

Garlow notes that Martin Luther made great strides towards allowing lay people to preach during the reformation. But more than preaching, Luther seemed to advocate for the full priestly status of all believers by arguing that no believer has secular status. Luther continues by arguing that people are not called to be priests just for (or to) themselves but must be priests before God and others. Garlow sees Luther's main contribution as providing an understanding that no matter one's occupation, as a Christian, they are called to ministry and must participate in this ministry as a part of their regular vocation.

Garlow also notes that John Wesley makes excellent progress in providing a place for the laity to be involved in ministry. From his point of view, Wesley's theological contributions are secondary to the example that Wesley leaves the church in "his extensive training and utilization of the laity for meaningful, systematic, and consistent ministry." As a primarily lay-lead effort, it is evident that Methodism would have never become a significant movement without Wesley's efforts in providing a place for lay people in ministry. Considering the different groups of people and all the effort that it would have taken to keep track of and provide pastoral care to the masses joining the Methodist movement, it is inevitable that it would have failed if it had been left to the clergy alone. Early Methodism is an excellent example of how the clergy and laypeople can work together.

Roy and Jackie Trueblood propose a similar teamwork model for a modern movement of bringing the clergy and laity into a better working relationship. For the Truebloods, providing a place for laypeople is dependent upon the pastor's ability to build a good team. In their book also entitled *Partners In Ministry*, they affirm that all people are called into service of the church, but particular emphasis is given to the support of the

leader/pastor. Their work is less of a theological understanding of why laypeople should be freed up for ministry and more of a practical guide to helping a pastor welcome more people to his or her leadership team. Even if the leadership team is likely to represent only a small percentage of the congregation, the Truebloods' work is crucial because it can help pastors understand that they should not be doing everything themselves. The natural implication of their work is that pastors have a responsibility to invest in the laypeople of their congregation. These authors support the notion that, as this work is continuing to elaborate, clerical leadership is critical in providing a place for lay people to be involved in the mission of the church.

If it is true that leadership directly affects the mobilization of the laity in the mission of any local church or congregation, then leaders will be held accountable for their efforts in involving others in ministry. This section has briefly identified some of the origins of the schism between clergy and laity, as well as some attempts to bring them back together. At this point, it will be helpful to recognize five styles of leadership that exist in the local church and discuss their abilities to provide a place for the laity to take part in mission. The five types of leadership are Pastor as Boss, Pastor as Delegator, No Defined Leader, Seasonal Leadership, and Shared Leadership. Antonio Settles talks about the unhealthy use of power and control in communities of faith. Settles argues that when "the pastor loses its direction or focus, the church cannot be the authentic body that the creator intended for the body to be... This can set the church up for unhealthy power to take hold." To say it another way, when a church's leader employs a method of leadership that is not faithful to the Christian witness, the mission of the church suffers. Unbalanced power creates unbalanced and ineffective congregations.

The image that best describes the leadership style of the pastor as boss is that of Moses before taking his father in law, Jethro's, advice about organizing the people. Before organizing the people into groups, Moses was managing every person in his congregation, and his congregation was a great multitude of people. The whole of the Hebrew nation was an exceedingly large number of people to have direct contact with and who depended directly upon him for care, guidance, and instruction. In the boss style of leadership, the pastor takes all of the responsibility for the ministry that is taking place in their congregation. The boss-pastor makes all of the critical decisions about how to spend money and how to manage the church. There is no place for anyone else to be involved in ministry unless the pastor specifically appoints people to take ministry roles. The church may have a clear vision but at the risk of having a congregation who does not own the vision. After all, this is the vision of the pastor and not their own. When the pastor is the boss, too few people have a chance to join the mission of the church.

The pastor as delegator can be summed up with the image of the CEO or chairmen of the board. The pastor who subscribes to this type of leadership is still the primary visionary of the church but prefers to hand down some decision-making and ministerial responsibilities to others – usually staff members. Although this style of leadership does naturally involve more people in the mission, they are mostly comprised of members of the clergy as well. Most people outside of the few staff members still are not able to easily join the mission of the church. Unfortunately, the pastor can become the CEO, the person whom the congregation has hired to take over the ministerial tasks of the church. When a group views their pastor as the CEO or the great delegator, there are still a very limited few who are encouraged to take part in the ministry of the local church.

If having no defined leader in the local church sounds like chaos, that's because it is. Barring pastoral transitions, there is not likely to be a congregation with no defined leader. However, local churches are not the only type of Christian communities that exist. There are many other types of groups and organizations out there, usually on the more informal side of things, where there is no leader. One example where this type of leadership still exists is in accountability groups of peers or informal Bible studies. By some standards, these meetings can be considered churches, and yet there is no well-defined leader. These groups, although few and far between, do exist as part of the Christian reality today. In many cases, these sorts of groups lack any clear vision, and the mission suffers as the group can lose its sense of purpose. In some cases, the chaotic leaderless group may become a lot of fun but usually cease to be about its original mission in less than a year. Groups with no leader often do not participate in ministry, not because they do not have access or are not allowed, but because they lack the vision and guidance to do so.

The seasonal (or cyclical) leadership model looks something like the ministry of Paul in those early days of the church. Paul understood that there were seasons of leadership and Paul went through periods of working with different groups of people. To the Corinthians, Paul insists that his leadership was for a time, but then another came, and God was in the midst of it all. Pastors who employ the seasonal leadership model understand that there may be people who lead in certain aspects of ministry or people who lead for a time, but that things may change. Also, in this model, there may be aspects of the ministry of the church that the pastor enjoys leaving entirely to others. The main concern with this leadership model is that ministry continues from the church, regardless

of who the pastor is. Seasonal leadership also serves to continually bring new leadership into different ministry positions. Doing so may cause brief periods of chaos during transition, but they also provide others with the opportunity to lead and develop ministry skills.

Shared leadership is often the result of a husband and wife pastoral team, but there are other types of ministry teams where two or more people share the leadership responsibilities for a group. A defining image for the shared leadership model is the village chief and its council of elders. The village chief knows that the leader has the authority to rule but chooses to share authority with the council. This image may seem to be similar to the delegator model above, but only on the surface level. The difference here is that these council members love and appreciate their “village” (or church) so much that they are willing to sacrifice and work hard for it. The pastor that employs the shared leadership model is less concerned with titles and authority but cares more about seeing the council members flourish in their ministry assignments. Therefore, pastors who subscribe to this leadership style often spend most of their time with a select few who they are developing for leadership. Shared leadership is really about affirming and developing other leaders, and for this reason, it is the preferred leadership style of the new tribe.

It takes different kinds of leaders for different kinds of Christian communities. There may be moments when pastors and leaders in the new tribe employ different leadership styles during varying seasons of their ministry. For this investigation, it is less important to fully understand the numerous styles of leadership that exist in the church as it is to understand that leadership is essential if the aim is to involve a group. The leader

who controls or does too much on their own will take the opportunity to serve away from others. The new tribe brings people in, develops them, and makes space for them to participate in the ministry of that local congregation or Christian fellowship.

### *Theological Corrections*

Previously in this chapter, it was mentioned that Martin Luther and John Wesley have been extremely influential in making room for lay leaders, preachers, and ministers during their respective times. It will not be necessary at this time to bring their contributions to light in detail again. However, it should be noted that their solutions were reactionary. In other words, these efforts were responding to the failures of the church to embody its calling to be a priestly nation. They were not arguing for the priesthood of all believers because it was a new idea, trend, or fad that no one had ever thought of. Neither did either of these men understand that emboldening average believers to take part in the mission of the church was a strategy to be applied to modern church efforts. It is clear that both leaders understood that a body of ministering followers of Christ was the original intention of the gospel message. Christ died for all, transformed all, and continually sends all people out into the world to fulfill the priestly calls.

Developing the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is not without its own challenges and risks. Uche Anizor and Hank Voss understand the risks of discussing priesthood as the temptation to reduce its understanding to either clerical or individualistic aspects. They note, “The former manifests itself in unhealthy hierarchy, the latter in unfettered democracy...” Anizor and Voss are not arguing that the clergy be replaced by the congregation, but that both are needed for the body of Christ to be

healthy. Ultimately, they offer the following understanding of priesthood:

Being a priest is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. It is an identity, not simply a set of lofty but optional tasks one might perform should he or she choose. Priesthood connotes a dignity before God and a responsibility to creation. That such a motley crew as the church should be given such a designation seems completely out of touch with reality. Nevertheless it is true, and therefore must be regularly restated.

The church has a short memory and must constantly be reminded of the fact that joining the Christian faith is synonymous with joining Christ's mission for the world. Anizor and Voss have no problem with the distinctions between lay and clergy so long as the two of them are in a balanced ministry setting.

Beyond the necessities of being balanced and inclusive, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers rightly puts together the benefits and responsibilities of the Christian faith. They are two sides of the same coin; receiving one means receiving the other. If someone is saved by grace, they have a responsibility to serve the church through their local congregation by grace as well. Anizor and Voss note that, as seen in scripture, this doctrine; (1) is "ultimately rooted in the church's familial relationship to Christ;" (2) includes "spiritual sacrifices," caring for the temple, and the proclamation of the word of God; and (3) calls every member into active ministry. This understanding does well to put the major points of the doctrine simply for the average believer to hear. Through God's saving grace, all people are called into relationship through Jesus Christ and into Christ's service.

Yet, is it enough to speak about the priestly duties of believers without mentioning the secular parts of their lives as well? At least in the global West, it is the case that many believers do not understand how to mix their work lives with their

church lives. They may be happy to serve their local congregation as an usher, greeter, board member, or in other way, but have no clue about what it would mean to serve in God's mission for the world outside of their church building. Newbigin's work is once again relevant on this point. Newbigin argues that each individual congregation ought "to equip its members for the exercise of this priesthood in the many different areas of secular life." The church gathers together so that its people may be refreshed, restored, and equipped to go out and again into another week of ministry.

Thus, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers also implies that the average church members – not the pastoral staff – are the evangelistic class of the church. The clergy help to equip and orient the laity back to Christ and thereby empower them to minister to the world. This concept is reminiscent of Anizor and Voss's concept of balanced ministry between the clergy and the laity. If the pastors and other "professional" ministers understood this concept, their churches could have a great impact for the kingdom. More specific thought about how this is to be accomplished will follow in chapter four; however, the formula for the application of the priesthood of all believers to the modern church is becoming clearer. It is imperative that pastors minister to their members with the expressed intent that they may go on and minister to others. One member of the clergy is multiplied many times over in terms of reach, expertise, and impact whenever they deploy their congregations into the service of God's mission for the world.

If the ministry of the clergy is multiplied by the number of laypeople in their congregation, there still remains one question; when does someone join the laity? This question is further muddled when trying to determine who the members of the

congregation are, and therefore, at what point they join the ministering class of believers. The answer lies in making a difference between a member of the congregation and a believer. One can believe in Christ and endeavor to follow God's ways without being a member of a worshiping community. They will, however, most likely fail. Christianity is not meant to be lived out in isolation. Endeavors to follow Christ blossom in the midst of fellowship while it tends to be rather anemic in isolation. Christians need fellowship with one another for mutual edification, encouragement, and accountability. For this reason, it can be said that believers in Christ may exist in isolation without a worshiping community, but followers of Christ may not.

Chapter two sufficiently worked through the issues regarding membership, fellowship, and a number of related issues concerning the new tribe community. What this work is now concerned with is an understanding of when a new Christian joins the body of believers as the laity (*laos*). Hunter's work suggests that all those who come into contact with a group of Christians should automatically be welcomed into that fellowship. Hunter notes that Irish Christians were sent out as monastic communities and that they "knew what it meant to be a Christian family or tribe." Visitors to these communities joined them almost right away because of their great emphasis on hospitality and care for strangers and visitors. Hunter even suggests that people would join the communities because they were so attracted by them, and that faith in Christ would follow later.

The Celtic methods of evangelism described by Hunter suggest that there is no clear starting point for those who join the laity. Perhaps it is once again Wesley's requirement of faith that is the guiding criteria for determining when an individual joins

the “labor force” of the kingdom of God. However, it is true that faith grows differently for different people. Some people come to faith in Christ slowly, while others express their faith right away. Some believers are up and down, on a sort of roller coaster, while others experience a steady climb followed by periods of significant plateaus.

Is there some sort of measure by which it can be known that a new believer, Christian, or member has joined the laity and is, therefore, ready for service? Anizor and Voss seem to have found a response to this question within the context of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. They suggest that all Christians are ordained at the moment of their baptism. In the same way that Jesus’ baptism prepared, empowered, and mobilized the Lord for the mission of God in the world, so too is every Christian who undergoes the waters of baptism. As a believer identifies with Christ in this significant way, they also identify with Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and – most of all – with Christ’s mission.

This section has served as a sort of survey of theological ideas and concepts that have attempted to bring the church back on track in its understanding that all of its members are ordained priests, serving in the mission of God for the world. The efforts to reclaim this doctrine are not new. They are not methods for growing the church and should not be employed as some sort of program to be implemented one day and forgotten the next. There is so much more at stake. The faithful and robust embodiment of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is an effort to be the new-tribe people that Christ established and unleashed upon the world. One final look at scripture will be used to close this chapter and anchor these thoughts once again to their biblical foundations.

### *A Biblical Case Study: Paul's Conversion*

Paul is first known by the Christian community as its greatest enemy. Paul despised Christ and hated his followers with a passion. Paul's conversion and nearly instant mobilization, or sending out into the world, for God's mission can serve as a model to the congregation that wishes to send its people out into the world to minister. Acts 9:15 makes it clear that Paul was chosen by God even before the man believed in Christ. Paul, in turn, becomes quite the example of the transformation that occurs when one gives their life to Christ. For these reasons, Paul is also known as the first and greatest Christian missionary in the history of the church. Paul traveled the known world and was subjected to incredible persecution and suffering from both natural and human causes. While doing so, Paul was responsible for planting the church throughout the Mediterranean and raising up the next generation of church leaders.

God alone was able to use Paul in such a way as to have a favorable result. The church's first missionary was not necessarily on the margins of society but would have been an all-around terrible choice with respect to the Christian movement as a Pharisee and self-proclaimed persecutor of the church. Through human eyes, Paul would have been a rather questionable choice to lead God's newly re-formed people. Yet, God is often inclined to use the least of us, or the least-expected among us, to transform the world and thereby reserve all glory for God's self.

What is most important about Paul's conversion and subsequent mobilization into the mission of God is not just the aspect that Paul was an underdog and a rather unexpected choice. For this study into building congregations of calling and belonging, it

is most significant that Paul was chosen before his faith in Christ. Keep in mind also Paul's words above from Ephesians and his frequent use of the "chosen" or "anointed." Practically speaking, it may be easiest for pastors to choose individuals who are the best prepared for a particular task. In looking to get things done in the church, pastors will naturally look to those who are born leaders. If they want to empower people in a way that is similar to Wesley's criteria of faith as the prerequisite for service, they may choose to use those who can clearly explain and who most passionately express their faith on a daily basis. All of these things are good and correct. But if these were the only ways by which members of the laity were called into the priesthood of all believers, it is likely that Paul would never have been chosen to join its ranks.

Paul neither believed in nor exemplified the character of Christ. Yet, Christ himself met his number one persecutor on the road to Damascus and selected him for service. By all means, Paul had not joined a community of faith but was nonetheless journeying towards his fate. Although Paul headed down the road to Damascus to persecute the church, Paul was actually unwittingly heading down the road to baptism and ordination. Using Anizor and Voss's understanding of baptism as ordination holds true in the case of Paul. Paul was in service of the world until being chosen by Christ. Once the great persecutor of the church recognized the calling of the Lord and professed belief in Christ, Paul was then baptized and joined the ranks of the saints in carrying out the will of God on the earth.

It would seem that there is no person whom Jesus Christ hasn't already anointed (chosen) for ministry. The necessary next step is that individuals would join a community, believe, and respond to their anointing through the sacrament of baptism.

This was the case for Paul, and it is the case for every human being on the face of the earth. Christ has chosen every person for service through his saving grace. The essential evolution of the Christian faith is that those who are chosen unbeknownst to them find their way into a community of faith that can nurture them towards their ordination through the expression of their faith in the act of baptism. For those who have grown up in the church or who were baptized at a young age, confirmation can take the place of baptism as the “ordination event.”

The story of Paul’s conversion applies to congregations everywhere. Note that the order is: (1) selection; (2) conversion, (3) baptism/ordination. Paul was chosen in the same way that all people are chosen. Paul’s specific function as a missionary to the Roman Empire was based on his skills, circumstances, and abilities. Somewhere after this selection on that road to Damascus, God was made real to him, and Paul believed. Before partaking in ministry, Paul confirmed his newfound faith before other Christians, and Christ confirmed the selection of Paul publicly as well. Paul was then ordained, and the drama of his ministry has been recorded for the edification of Christians everywhere. This three-step process applies to every believer. Those who fail to take up an active role in the mission of God have failed to understand the importance and significance of how God has called people in the past and how God is calling people today.

For those who find themselves stuck somewhere in the middle of this process or who may have completed it without realizing the significance of their baptism as their ordination, there is hope. The aim of chapter four is to outline a method for calling, preparing, and deploying – which can be known as the process of mobilization – any

group of believers to be more faithfully active to God's mission in whichever context it is being called.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Building A Way Forward**

#### *Taking Stock*

The introductory chapter of this work introduced the idea of *Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* by explaining this study's thesis and its related challenges for the church's modern context. Stated simply, this study's view has been that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is essential to the faithful existence of the church. Each member must faithfully embody their priestly roles by joining a new tribe community and living out their faith in practical, tangible ways. The significant challenge for this task has, thus far, been outlined as the gulf of separation that divides the Christians into two main classes – the clergy and the laity. It has been argued that every believer and follower of Christ has been chosen for service, thereby making each Christian a member of the *kleros* (or clergy). The problem still resides in the modern interpretation of what it means to be a clergy member.

Chapter two has outlined what it means to be a faithful community with a robust embodiment of the priesthood of all believers. Using African tribal language has served to signify the importance of being a new community founded upon God's mission for the world. This strange and new existence is vital for the church to exist faithfully and

proficiently carry out its priestly functions. Living out the essence of *ubuntu* was ultimately championed as the method of operation for this new community. *Ubuntu* within the Christian context essentially puts the well-being of the congregation before the needs of the individual. It encourages believers to find their identity in Christ. It challenges them to participate actively in the continued expansion and development of the whole for every individual member's benefit. By living out the spirit of *ubuntu* in local churches, congregations will build a sense of calling and belonging that empowers them to find their place in God's mission for the world.

Chapter three identified key theological, historical, and biblical norms related to the thesis that there should be no real separation between clergy and laity – not at least a distinction of ministers and non-ministers. Any distinction between the clergy and laity should be regarded as a distinction of the type of service they render to the Lord. Indeed, all followers of Christ are called to active service within their community of faith and to those who are on the outside of their faith community as well. Chapter four now turns to the task of imagining what it would look like to build a congregation of calling and belonging in the spirit of *ubuntu*. Or simply put, chapter four will describe the solutions and methodology that will encourage full participation in the kingdom of God as a missional community for any congregation in any context.

### *Identity Through Longevity*

Besides the obvious differences in culture and expressions of faith, Central African Pastors and Western Pastors are quite different. In Central Africa, most pastors will experience their call to ministry while serving as lay leaders in another congregation.

They will likely confirm and hone their skills through the mentor/disciple relationship until they leave that local church and plant one in another part of town or somewhere in the surrounding area. This process is typically slow, and a pastor will not dream of starting a church until they are in their forties and are more financially stable. This procedure's slowness is most likely related to cultural norms concerning what it means to be a leader in a community and a pastor to a congregation.

What is even more noteworthy is that, in nearly every case, the pastor who planted the church will lead it until his or her death. Transitions in leadership usually mean that a local church will close down. The congregation's identity is so wrapped up in their founding pastor that it is often difficult for the congregation to imagine themselves as a church without them. The exceptions to this rule usually come when a child takes over for their deceased parent or when the church has strong leadership from a higher source that is keen to act quickly and find a pastor to continue serving in that church. In the latter case, the church will usually struggle significantly for an extended period of time.

Longevity is important in ministry because it sets the tone for the congregation and allows for a consistent vision. In the Central African context, longevity can indeed become a negative issue when the congregation cannot imagine its existence apart from their pastor's presence. A communal identity confused with that of the pastor is the dark side of longevity that appears when a leader stays too long in one place and makes the church's ministry all about themselves. Rather than being centered around their human leader, congregations should be centered around their spiritual and heavenly leader – Jesus Christ. Even though good pastors may be highly influential and bear much fruit, the church's ministry should be devoted to God's mission as it applies to the local context.

If the problem concerning longevity in ministry for the Central African context is equated with staying too long in one place, it is an opposite problem for many pastors in the North American context. Some pastors are only staying in their places of ministry for a few years at a time and are never able to foster the kind of community that it takes to build calling and belonging. The average tenure of a pastor in the United States is only between three and six years, causing transitions to occur in what should be critical years of growth and development. When pastors switch churches every few years, there is a general lack of ownership, accountability, and imagination. Surely clergy members aren't meant to change churches every few years only to repeat the very difficult beginning aspects of ministry such as relationship-building, trust-earning, and vision casting. Most faith communities need time to develop before really hitting their stride, but this is next to impossible when changing a pastor every few years.

### *New Tribe Paradigm Shifts*

The new *ubuntu* tribe needs longevity in its pastoral leadership. The construction of congregations of belonging and calling is only possible when pastors and congregations commit to each other and what God will do through their unity. For the right kind of new-tribe communities to be formed, those who recognize their calling as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, four paradigm shifts must take place within the pastoral role. Pastors must; (1) plant new churches, (2) become trainers of ministers, (3) form missional, outward-focused communities, and (4) seek to replace themselves from within the congregation.

Pastors must plant new churches. New pastors starting new congregations are

non-negotiable in understanding the church as a new community formed around God's mission for the world. A seminary professor once said that 2% of church growth comes from programs and evangelistic efforts, 8% comes from small groups, and 90% comes from planting new churches. No one in the classroom dared to ask the professor to cite sources, and thus, the validity of this claim cannot be affirmed or refuted here. However, the professor was trying to point out that the vast majority of church growth comes from planting churches. Therefore, if pastors wish to reach the most people possible, then planting a church is the right step. Beyond the fact that planting churches accounts for the majority of church growth, it is also important to do so in order to form the alternate reality that is the people of God.

New churches are free to worship however, wherever, and whenever they want. New churches can decide for themselves what is important to them in practice and belief. They typically have fewer financial obligations and can be more agile with their use of funds. However helpful these dynamics are, there is another reason that surpasses them all; planting a new church forms a new community. Whether people join a new pastor as a part of some kind of “seed group” or the pastor starts a church as a solo adventure, it is clear that a new community is emerging. Orienting new believers and members joining the new *ubuntu* tribe is natural as they are already accepting to do something new by putting their faith in Christ Jesus.

Starting a new church can be a very difficult task, especially if the new church makes it their goal to reach the previously unchurched in their midst. Pastoring an established church can also be quite challenging, so it is not that one is easy, and another is hard. What is significant is that starting new churches is hard in a different way to

pastoring existing churches. Still, church planting more naturally leads to transformed lives and the compulsory formation of a new community. Brian Stone writes:

Evangelism will have to be understood not as an adventure in “winning friends and influencing people” but as a fundamentally subversive activity, born out of a posture of eccentricity (living “off center” or “outside the center,” at the margins) and out of the cultivation of such deviant practices as sharing bread with the poor, loving enemies, refusing violence, forgiving sins, and telling the truth.

The point that Stone is laboring here is that evangelism is a way of life, not a program. Indeed, this way of life calls for a continued devotion to the gospel and a re-orientation of what it means to be born again. Many life-long Christians have never had experience participating in the practices that Stone outlines above, and therefore will have trouble adapting to the new tribe. The newly formed church community will more naturally adapt to a new socio-political way in the world with all its accompanying practices than the congregation that wishes to implement them after many years of not doing so.

Planting new churches also allows pastors to start something that has never existed before, putting their calling as a clergy member to the test. More importantly, starting a church allows the pastor to reproduce what they have learned and extend the ministry of their sending church. Imagine the implications and impact for the mission of God if twenty Bible school, college, or seminary graduates from any institution automatically represented twenty new congregations in the kingdom of heaven. There are indeed churches looking for head pastors or staff members, but this issue will be addressed when discussing paradigm shift number four. As Stone rightly affirms above, a call to pastoral ministry should be a call to form a new kind of people. If churches are functioning as they should, and pastors are being nourished and called from within a faithful new tribe community, the only place for them to go is outside of the congregation

if they wish to fulfill that pastoral call.

Pastors must become trainers of ministers. This paradigm shift makes a vital difference in understanding the priesthood of all believers as it is practically applied to any congregation. The prevailing notion is that some Christians are called to extreme obedience through full-time service, others are called to partial service, and still others are allowed to be mere spectators as they live out their faith. The pastor who understands that all people are called into service knows that each member of the congregation needs to be developed into the minister they are called to be as they endeavor to follow Christ.

For pastors to adequately prepare congregations to be involved in active ministry, they will need to become nurturers, developers, and senders. Perhaps most pastors do well at one or two of these tasks, but without all three coexisting in a balanced way, it will be nearly impossible for the congregation to reach its full potential as ministers of the gospel. Nurturing comes naturally to many pastors. This includes visiting and praying for people. It also includes cultivating their spiritual growth as they walk with the Lord. Developing is another indispensable aspect of the pastor's ministry who wishes to train a congregation for ministry. Developers help their congregations learn new skills and cast vision so that individuals can see their place as a member of the kingdom of God. Senders are those pastors and leaders who understand the importance of testing and honing ministry skills by providing opportunities for people to minister to others. Without ever being sent, be it to a neighbor, co-worker, another part of one's home country, or the other side of the world, many followers of Christ will not arrive at an understanding that they are members of the priestly kingdom.

All of scripture affirms that God is calling people into a new community and

sending them out for God's mission in the world. As a pastor charged with training ministers, nurturing a congregation plants the seed that God is re-making the world through the church. Developing the gifts and skills necessary for ministry sees that the seed sprouts and grows as ministers learn to take their priestly calls seriously. Sending members of the congregation out into the world for ministry allows the vision to flourish and bear fruit. It takes all three aspects of training ministers for a congregation to catch the vision of what God wants them to do in the world and join in to actively participate in the mission to reconcile the world back to God's self.

In speaking about the significance and importance of work for all people, Volf notes, "As human beings work, they change themselves as well as their social and natural environment in the course of history." Volf is not speaking about what has been traditionally called "ministry" but about work in general. However, the same transformational power of work should be applied to how Christians understand all of their work and ministry. These two aspects are only rightfully combined when congregations have been trained and empowered to do so. Instead of only providing opportunities for ministry within the walls of one's local church building, pastors need to consider empowering the congregations' members to take their ministry into the daily, non-church-going aspects of their lives as well. For the Christian, there is no separation of normal or church time, secular or holy life. Pastors must train the members (all of whom are ministers) of their congregations so that they may take their faith into their professional and personal lives with the goal of ministering with all of their passion, expertise, and time. As Volf noted above, working for God should transform oneself and the world around them. What better understanding of ministry does the church need?

Pastors must form missional, outward-focused communities. One of the dangers of a maturing church is that ministry becomes inwardly focused. The search for Sunday-school teachers, nursery workers, ushers, maintenance people, and other volunteers can consume much of the labor force of the body of believers. Even when securing volunteers for ministries within the church, the focus is often on bringing people into the building. Pastors who wish to develop congregations of calling and belonging must encourage their people to look outside of themselves and focus on the lost in their midst.

Missional communities leave the safe confines of their buildings and choose to go out among those who don't already know the Lord. George Hunter's study of St. Patrick has been referred to several times thus far and is worth mentioning here again. Hunter's statements on missional communities (or "monastic communities" in his words) make it clear that an essential element was that they lived and worshipped together. They invited people into community and accepted them before they had faith in Christ. Sending groups of believers into unreached areas to live, work, recreate, and worship can still be accomplished today. It is no happy accident but comes through a coordinated effort to orient and send out the congregation as an effort to bear witness to the gospel in the world.

Pastors will have to lead their congregations in ways that help them to think beyond themselves, their needs, and sending in their reports to the denominational hierarchy. Preparing, sending, and maintaining missional communities will require significant changes to the local church's spending and personnel distribution. It may require meeting in the church building less and being more present in other locations. These variables are unknown as they will depend on each specific context to define and

carry them out. However, what is certain at this point is that without a coordinated effort to involve the entire church in reaching the lost of their community and beyond, such efforts will always remain secondary at best. Individuals do not make as good of evangelists as a group of Christians living out their faith in community and inviting outsiders into their fellowship.

Transforming any congregation into an outward-focused missional community is an arduous task (which is why planting a new faith community seems so favorable to many new pastors). This task is not without hope. It is possible through a concept that Woodward and White call “the church as movement.” Their concept of the missional community dares to imagine a way of being the church that “focuses on the ‘small’ grassroots work of developing a discipleship core that builds a missional community together.” Missional communities place an accent on discipleship and developing a new testament-like community. Members of a missional community can grow their faith, number, and maturity even though many of them are not tied to a church building. They claim responsibility for an entire geographical area, not pinpointing the types of individuals or groups that they wish to reach. Instead, missional communities seek to create Christian fellowship and make discipleship efforts the central practice of their identity.

Discipleship is too important to be a program that the congregation commits to from time to time or in some small number compared to the whole of its members. Pastors must grasp discipleship as the crux of what it means to be a Christian. In this way, missional communities are not just focused on being present in a given community but also on bringing people into deepening levels of commitment to Christ at the same time.

Jesus formed and disciplined a community of thousands, hundreds, seventy-two, and twelve. Similarly, missional communities recognize the necessity of inviting individuals into a deeper relationship and commitment to Christ. As people commit more deeply to Christ, they commit more deeply to their community. As they are being disciplined, they disciple others. Missional communities understand that all of creation belongs to God, and they call others around them into communion with the Father in the same way that they, too, were first called.

Pastors must seek to replace themselves from within the congregations. This is a hard subject for churches all across the world, no matter their context. Some may find it hard because they do not see the qualities of a pastor displayed in the people that they are leading. Other pastors may find it difficult based on the availability of people willing to serve in this way. Still, even if they would never admit to it, others may harbor a sense of insecurity that would keep them from raising up someone to replace them. What if they attempt to do so before the current pastor is ready? These are real challenges to preparing the next leader to come from within the congregation itself. Yet no amount of challenges should stop pastors from making proactively replacing themselves from within their goal.

Christ's departure from the earth may have seemed hasty to some, but the Lord had prepared for the new movement's leadership to carry on in his absence. With the exception of Paul, whose choice was for the purpose of bringing the gospel to the gentiles, the leaders of the early church came from within the budding Christian community. Following Jesus' example requires pastors to make a serious effort in raising up leaders from within their existing congregations before they have any notion that they are leaving. A pastoral transition can be such an uncertain and difficult time for any

congregation. Imagine churches that never go through these challenging times because their transitions are moving pastors from one place of leadership to another.

As one leader steps out of ministry for any reason, another leader should be prepared, affirmed, and ready to take over. This is the natural way to secure a smooth transition and ensure that the community of faith's context and culture remain intact. In most cases, a new pastor means a new direction and a painful process of adaptation. If the church, no matter its size, was full of ministers, it would be much easier to pick one to be the pastor than to find a pastor and bring them in from another community.

The benefit of picking a pastor from outside of the congregation is that they bring something to the community that they may be lacking. One church may discover that it had lacked vision, another might uncover that it had not been comfortable with the style of preaching of the former pastor, or perhaps a pastor who is more concerned with outreach – the list could go on and on. Instead of working as a community to foster development in these areas of weakness, it is easier for congregations to pick a strong pastor in the areas that their former pastor (and therefore their entire church) is weak. However, imagine what God could do with a congregation committed to relying on the Holy Spirit to endow the community of faith with strengths to support the pastor's weaknesses. Imagine the burden lifted off of a pastor who is able to raise up and send out leaders in such a way that the impact of the local church is strengthened like never before.

In short, transitions are difficult for churches and pastors alike. In order to keep them from being destructive or detrimental to the community of faith, pastors must be thinking of their replacements from the moment that they take charge of a congregation. Churches of every size are capable of having multiple pastors and leaders that can help

carry a church through difficult times of transition. But doing so is never a haphazard, last-ditch effort. Replacing pastors from within requires a constant, intentional process of vision casting, training, and empowering to foster ownership and belonging that causes members to become leaders whenever the Holy Spirit should call.

### *Three Movements Toward Priesthood*

The aforementioned paradigm shifts that pastors must apply to their ministries are non-negotiable if they wish to build congregations that fully embrace the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Planting new churches, becoming trainers of ministers, forming outward-focused missional communities, and preparing pastoral replacements from within the congregation are all vital aspects of helping a church adopt the priestly kingdom mandate from scripture. It has been argued above that the way to do this with the least amount of resistance is to start new churches where a missional community's culture can be the vision from the beginning. But what about existing churches? How are they to recognize their priestly calling to a new tribe community? Three steps can be implemented into what any congregation does on a regular basis that will help its members recognize their priestly role.

The steps that will help move a congregation towards a more active participation in the kingdom of God are simply described as invitation, belief, and baptism. For the first Christians, or even those today who come from contexts that are extremely detached from Christianity, these events were radical. Lives, families, and communities were turned upside-down by their very occurrence. They were signs and symbols of the new kingdom that were meant to carry unapparelled significance for the new tribe. Today,

these aspects of the Christian faith do not hold the same significance. They have been relegated to regular aspects of the human existence to the point that the message of the new kingdom that Jesus established through them has been lost. It is vital to take these seemingly ordinary aspects of the Christian life and assign them fresh meaning with renewed purpose if a congregation wishes to move towards a new tribe community that is faithful to its priestly calling. Because of the fact that the radical nature of invitation, belief, and baptism have been all but lost within the church today, it is imperative to give them new meaning and reclaim their subversive nature for any modern context.

#### From Invitation To Calling

One of the greatest things that the church can do is to invite others to know God through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Inviting people to church has been a significant way that the laity has been involved in ministry for centuries. It is true that evangelism should be seen less as personal invitations for people to come to church and more of a lifestyle that attracts people to God. Yet, it cannot be denied that both verbal invitations and an invitation that comes through new-tribe living are vital to the health of the church. In most cases, congregations see the essential value of inviting people to church in one of two ways; either that the church will grow or that people will eventually come into right relationship with Jesus Christ. However positive and helpful these dynamics are, they are only part of the story.

Any invitation to visit a church for the purposes of joining in ministry, participating in fellowship, or gathering for worship is really about calling. Do not think of calling in the way that modern Christians typically do, understanding it as the special

call to full-time ministry that only goes out to a few people. Think of this calling as the invitation to know God, follow Christ, depend on the Holy Spirit, and join the Christian community. Those who aren't already a part of the body of Christ have not yet heard their calling. The invitation to participate in any aspect of the congregation is an invitation to hear the call of Christ and to become a member of his body, otherwise known as the church.

For those who have already heard the call and responded faithfully, an emphasis on calling within the local church helps move them into deeper commitment and deeper relationship with Christ. Extending the biblical invitation and calling to others also helps members renew their own sense of vocation. Whether they take on more responsibility, find new avenues of leadership, or serve through allowing others to hear the call, current members also benefit from a congregation that puts an emphasis on calling beyond an invitation.

### From Belief to Conversion

After inviting people to church, the emphasis always seems to turn to belief. Now that the congregation has heard the call and is gathered together, it can focus on what it believes. The problem with the question about belief is that, particularly for modern Christians, beliefs have very little to do with actions and life transformation. Talking about conversion, however, is different. Conversion brings about the language of change in heart, mind, soul, and body. By contrast, modern westerners tend to only equate belief with a way of thinking. Those who confess belief or faith in Christ today often find that

their lives change very little. Around the world, in places where the Christian faith is not a part of the dominant culture, one's conversion is well understood as a life-transforming event. Joining the new tribe community is seen as a subversive act that turns their life upside down as they stop sinning and start serving the Lord Jesus in active ways.

The same can also be the case in the West when people are saved out of addiction or intense lives of crime. But for most people who accept to join a church as a transfer or for the first time, the concept of conversion is lost to them. They do not understand the need for transformation as it is described in the gospel. An emphasis on conversion ensures that members of the congregation understand that their old lives are passing away and that the life before them is radically different. Even those who chose Christ at a young age should understand that they are joining a new way of life in addition to their belief. Giving testimonies is extremely helpful in telling the story of conversions as people get the chance to hear how the lives of regular people have changed because of the gospel. Sharing testimonies of transformation also reminds the church of the reason that it exists. It cements in them as a congregation the essential practices that have helped people to come to hear the call and join the new tribe.

Moving from a focus on belief to one on conversion is also important because it makes the concept of learning and doing compulsory aspects to joining the Christian faith. How can one be transformed without learning the skills and criteria for doing so? One does not simply decide one day that they will become an auto mechanic, for example. They must study and practice in order to gain competency. In the same way, after a time of training, a new mechanic would not simply put their certificate up on the wall and then do nothing. They would naturally begin working in the field for which they

have been trained. Although there is a spiritual and emotional side to becoming a Christian, the same dynamics should apply. To become a Christian takes training and practice, and once the initial learning period is over, the new servant of the Lord joins in Christ's mission. For these reasons, the language of conversion is important for congregations wishing to mobilize their people.

### From Baptism to Ordination

The final important step is to correct the church's practical view of baptism. Instead of putting the emphasis on the citizenship or "mark of approval" aspect of baptism, the emphasis should be shifted to one of ordination. This is not to say that baptism is not necessary or even that it is not a vital part of the Christian life. Nothing could be further from the truth! When baptism is seen as the final sign of full membership, not only is the significance of baptism weakened but so also is the symbolism behind calling and conversion. The reason for this is because if baptism is, for the most part, the mark of the true believer and member, then the congregation has not fully called, nurtured, and accepted the new believer up until this point.

Baptism is a mark of entrance into the faith, but it is also an ordination. It is the moment in which the presence of the Holy Spirit is confirmed in the life of the believer. This event marks the death of one's old life and their rebirth into the kingdom of heaven. As such, they have been reborn not as an individual, but as a member of a priestly nation and a holy kingdom. Being fully inducted into the Christian community is a sending activity. Whereas the focus has been upon gathering people together for edification, nurturing, and participating in the safety of the church family, the baptized believer is

now a part of the outward-focused followers of Christ. They take part in gathering others by helping them to hear the same call to which they now respond. At the same moment that a person has been baptized, they have also been ordained to take up God's mission for the earth and to take up the priestly mandate of Christ's followers.

Baptism services should, for this reason, resemble sending services. These services are a prime opportunity for the ordination message and imagery to be lived out for the baptism candidate. This rich imagery can also help serve as a reminder for other members and for those who are still on the path toward baptism. The movement of baptism from entrance to ordination is perhaps the most important of the three steps outlined in this section. Ordination stands as the crux of what it means to be a part of Christ's priestly nation. If all Christ followers are going to understand themselves as priests, they will all need to be ordained. For this ordination via baptism to be fully embraced, it is important to assign new ministry opportunities for the newly baptized. Most significantly, the recently ordained should be trained and sent out into their daily lives with a sense that they are meant to serve their communities, workplaces, schools. If people are ordained, they should have places and opportunities to extend and carry out their ministries in significant ways.

These three movements are essential to forming a new tribe community that embraces its priestly call. These emphases require renewed visionary preaching, a reexamination of goals and measuring success, a reevaluation of how money is spent, and a reorganization for ministry impact. Congregations must remove the individual nature and language from the aspects of invitation, belief, and baptism so that they may be exchanged for the communal responsibility of calling, conversion, and ordination. When

these three steps are taken in community and applied to the context of any particular body of believers, they can help any congregation move towards a more faithful embodiment of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Forming a new tribe community is a challenging task for any congregation. It is akin to creating an entirely new experience of following Christ. The first and most vital goal of the new tribe is to faithfully embody the new way of life that Christ modeled for his followers. Embracing the call to becoming a nation of priests, sent out to preach the gospel and baptize people to the very ends of the earth, is an endeavor to respond faithfully to God's grace. Change can be scary for many Christians who wish that the world (and their church experience) would return to some former state. For this reason, the priestly paradigm shifts and movements listed above are likely to evoke strong reactions. They will not be simple to employ but are vital to eradicating the gap that divides the clergy and the laity so that all Christ-followers become active in God's mission for the world.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion: A New Community**

#### *Summary Of The Problem*

This dissertation's goal has been to address the gap, or the vast vocational separation, that divides the clergy and the laity into two distinct Christian classes.

*Building Congregations of Calling and Belonging* is an effort to “mind the gap,” or more importantly, bring the two groups of Christians closer together. It is vital to see this

problem and the solutions offered by this work as more than simply improving relationships between pastors and congregants. It would not even be appropriate to talk about this project as an attempt to involve more people in God's kingdom-mission for the world. Both of these summaries are correct but only represent a partial understanding of what is at stake. The essence of the problem is more closely likened to the soul of the church. In other words, the real question is, "what does it mean to be the church of Jesus Christ in a particular context?"

The problem manifests itself through the Western context in the way that most members of a congregation are mere spectators when it comes to participating in the life of their church. Even more problematically, many Western believers have become consumers, shopping for the church that can provide them the most amenities. Whenever one church fails to meet their expectations, members easily swap one community of faith for another. In recent decades, along with this church-shopping phenomenon has come the advent of the mega-church. These are the bodies of believers that have swollen into the thousands, and sometimes, the tens of thousands. Many of them provide a great host of ministries, first-class music, and celebrity pastors that attract people to them in droves.

It is not that these kinds of congregations are bad; many of them are up to great things and are significantly impacting the kingdom. The problem is that they typically tend to reinforce the idea that church is a place to be served, and they drive the quality of that attractational, service-providing mentality up for the other churches around them. The laity and the clergy are further divided because instead of the clergy being one out of fifty congregants, they have become one out of a thousand or more. But the loss of identity that many Western Christians are experiencing as spectators in the lives of their

congregations is not a problem isolated to large churches. Truthfully, this problem exists in many smaller congregations as much as larger ones. Therefore, the problem has not been outlined as an issue related to mega-churches or small churches. Instead, the problem has been outlined as the church's failure to recognize its call for every member to exist as a part of a holy nation and a priestly kingdom.

In the Central African context, the problem has still been laid out as a problem with identity. It is one in which respect for one's leader and self-perceived unworthiness have caused many people to shy away from participating in their local congregation's various ministries. For these reasons, a church will usually only know one pastor for its entire existence. The same pastor who plants a church will, in most cases, pastor it for their entire life, and it will disappear as a community of believers if the pastor dies or decides to leave the ministry. Most members see themselves as helpless to affect, support, maintain, or build up their church outside of the identity of their "pastor-chief." Once again, the problem is about failing to understand that the pastor is one of many priests in the holy nation that God established through Christ.

Keeping a vocational distance between the clergy and the laity has not only caused there to be a distinction between those who serve and those who are served, but it has systematically created a church that has forgotten the reasons for which it exists. One pastor may be multi-talented in such a way that allows for adequate ministering to a congregation as well as to the surrounding community in effective ways. But even in this case, the ministry of the church is limited to only a few, instead of to the entire congregation. For this reason, the gap that separates the clergy and laity is an issue of faithfulness beyond identity. No individual can be what Christ invites them to be without

actively participating in Christ's mission.

### *Claiming The Solution*

Understanding the problem being addressed by this dissertation as one of a sort of identity crisis for the modern church puts the understanding of the solutions proposed by this work in a new light as well. If the faithful representation of Christ through the church is what is at stake, then the solution is an ecclesiological one. Understanding who the church is meant to be will help solve the problems that arise through an inactive laity and a controlling or burned out clergy. Tim Suttle is primarily writing to the Western church in his book *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture*, but it is relevant to either of the above contexts. Suttle writes the following about the apostle Paul's understanding of what it meant to follow Christ:

Paul understood that the church was more than just individuals who had a common association; it was one body with many parts. Who we are as people is constituted by the church. To be a "person" names not a thing, but a relationship. In other words, what it means to be a human being, as human was intended by God, will only become clear as we find our lives and our identities in this new community.

These words capture the significance and importance of Christ-centered identity for every body of believers. It is in this same spirit that the tribal, cultural language of Central Africa was presented as a way to imagine the church as a new tribe with Jesus as its chief.

The solutions that have been offered by this work take into account the "building" of a new tribe community through significant paradigm shifts and new emphases that move local churches into a more comprehensive embodiment of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Some may read this endeavor and come to the conclusion that

the author is against the idea of pastors and that perhaps churches should be led without any sort of formal leader. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Pastors are vital to the clear vision and direction of a body of believers. However, pastors must do everything in their power to create opportunities for everyone in their congregations to join the mission of the kingdom of God. This will involve planting new churches whenever a pastor is called and qualified but without a significant place of ministry. Pastors will need to become trainers of ministers more than simply teachers or providers of care if they are going to transform static bodies into movements for the kingdom of God.

However, bridging the gap between the clergy and the laity is not only about mending relationships and keeping people busy. It has been argued at numerous points throughout this project that the only real distinction between the clergy and the laity resides in the ways that they serve. The clergy prepares the laity for ministry. In other words, pastors serve their congregations and, in turn, the members of the congregation go out to minister to the world. In this way, when the day arrives that the pastor retires, dies, moves on, etc. the church is not left with a huge gaping hole right through the middle of its purpose, mission, or identity. Instead, any member of the congregation, having proved their call through their regular service to the community and beyond, could be selected as the next pastor of that body of believers.

### *Stories Of Getting It Right*

In the opening chapter of this work, there were stories of “getting it wrong” that gave life to these problems as they were manifested in particular churches. These stories

of struggling churches summarized the problems in a practical way. For the same reasons, it would be beneficial to share stories of “getting it right” in this closing chapter. These stories are meant to give practical examples of a more faithful formation of a new tribe community that embodies the priestly kingdom calling of scripture. In so doing, they help define the proposed solutions in practical ways through real-life application. It is not suggested that the reader should simply choose one of these models to copy and paste into their congregation. Rather, these stories are intended to encourage and inspire those who would seek to build congregations of calling and belonging from within their own contexts.

Church A is located in a bustling city in Central Africa. Life is hard in the surrounding villages, causing the city to swell and expand at a regular pace. The members of Church A were from a number of different tribes and villages throughout the region, and they all knew that there was a great need for the church in their hometowns. But who would go there? Where would they find the people and the resources to minister to the surrounding area as they were called? Instead of continuing on in their current way, just wishing that something could be done, the leadership began asking one simple question. “Do you know anyone who needs to hear the gospel?” This question was asked from the pulpit, in various small groups, in meetings, and in all other facets of church life. It was the question that drove their discussion for some time. Before long, the answers started coming in. Each time the question was asked, someone would answer yes. The response to someone recognizing that they knew someone who needed the gospel message was, “Then you’re a minister.”

This one congregation didn’t want to take for granted the fact that when the Holy

Spirit revealed to one of them that someone needed the life-changing power of Jesus Christ, that it was for a purpose. The pastor began to gather people together, help them identify their call, and provide them with training. Before long, this one church of no more than one hundred members was sending out church planters to the surrounding area. They had become a church planting factory, helping to send out twelve church planters during a three-year period. What is even more significant about this achievement is that many of the church planters did not see themselves as pastors. They were lay people who understood that the Spirit of God was moving in them for the sake of their neighbors and those in their hometowns.

Instead of being worried that they would lose people, the pastor began encouraging and empowering his members to start prayer groups and Bible studies in their homes, even if it took them away from other church activities. Even with so many people being called, trained, and sent out for ministry, the church's numbers never really seemed to go down. One way to understand what was happening is that the more connected that a person was to the church, the more they understood that they had to leave the church (or at least be less present) for the sake of carrying out its vision to be a community of ministers reaching their city, province, and beyond. For Church A, it all started with the formation of an outward-focused community. Little by little, the individual members found themselves in the midst of a congregation that was called to be a community of priests, and the Kingdom of Heaven was advanced all the more.

Church B is located on the other side of the world in North America. As is the case for many churches situated in small towns, this one had shrunk to just a fraction of their size from a few decades before. In fact, there were less than ten members in the

congregation when they welcomed a new pastor to their congregation. This pastor was fresh out of seminary but eager to make an impact and bring transformation to the local church and to the surrounding community. The last few pastors that had attempted to lead this group of people had given up after less than two years, citing the fact that there were no people and that there were little resources available to make their visions a reality. They had tried to start new ministries but quickly burned out when their efforts failed to bring any fruit despite the considerable time and energy that the pastor had invested.

Their new pastor took a bit of a different approach. Pastor B started by calling a meeting where the pastor simply informed them that they were a building with no people and that this was their last chance before the district leadership closed the church altogether. The six people that showed up were a bit hurt until the pastor explained a bit further. “The seven of us,” Pastor B clarified, “are the pastors of this congregation, only there are no people for us to minister to.” From there, the Pastor outlined the vision of helping them discern how the Lord was calling them, training them to fulfill that calling, and sending them out into the surrounding area. They started an after-school program, a low-cost secondhand store, food assistance programs, and a number of other community-focused programs. Most of these activities did not take place in the church, and there were far too many things happening for this one pastor to manage it all. Fortunately, the people of Church B heard the call, submitted to being trained to meet that call, and accepted to devote their time, energy, and financial means toward making their vision come to fruition.

In telling the story in this condensed form, the message could be received that this was a quick and easy process. This was not the case. These seven people lost two more

members after that first meeting. They failed at several ministry attempts and struggled with finances, yet their resolve was strengthened throughout the process. Church B's story is specific to them and their journey as a people. It would be a mistake to imitate this vision without adapting it to a congregation's specific context, location, calling, and circumstances. What should be imitated from this story, which consequently is the reason for its existence in this dissertation, is the embodiment of the priesthood of all believers that this desperate community of faith exemplified with the help of their new pastor.

The hope would be to not allow a church to be in crisis or nearly come to ruin before these major shifts in thinking take place. There is a delicate balance between ministering *to* a congregation and ministering *through* a congregation. Ministering primarily to a congregation often translates to providing the best services and amenities that will encourage people to join a congregation and remain there. Making the distinction of ministering through a congregation often involves an understanding where the community of faith sees itself as active ministers of the gospel. Instead of attracting people because they offered a plethora of amenities in their building, church B attracted people because they believed that they were called to more and were looking for a place to live out their priestly calling in community.

The examples of churches A and B, although they should not be copied and pasted directly into other locations, serve as great models of what can happen when a congregation makes the commitment to be a priestly kingdom. Each of them applied the method of calling, equipping, and mobilizing their people as it is outlined in scripture – particularly through Christ's ministry model in the gospels. Thomas Zatel adds a fourth aspect to this process that is worth mentioning here. Zatel argues that it is important for

congregations to acknowledge “mature” members of the church as ministers. The argument being made is that many of the works of preaching, teaching, evangelizing, and other activities are often reserved for the pastor or members of the clergy. Experience shows that even when congregations are fully mobilized, and nearly every member is active in the ministry of the church, there are still some activities that are reserved for the clergy alone.

Without sharing in some of these higher or clerical tasks, it is likely that a gap will still remain between the clergy and the laity. Practically speaking, reserving special tasks as off-limits to most members of the congregation will continually create barriers to ministry. It will also likely discourage highly motivated and mature members from participating in their priestly call as a member of the body of Christ. In the stories of Church A and B above, regular members were integral to the growth of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. If they weren’t preaching, teaching, and evangelizing their neighbors, it is most likely that neither of these churches would have been successful in mobilizing their people for the sake of the kingdom of God. As pastors and other leaders consider some of the steps outlined in the previous chapter, it is important to consider the emphasis that should be given to recognizing and empowering regular people to take on the priestly tasks to which they are called.

### *Learning From An Epidemic*

This work is coming at the end of a three-year process. As such, the current COVID-19 pandemic could not have been planned for as a part of preparing to undertake this endeavor. However, it is interesting how *Building Congregations of Calling and*

*Belonging* seems to have been created for responding to the current state of the church. Even though these events come as a surprise to the writer, they come as no surprise to God, and it would be a mistake to miss out on the opportunity to outline the significance of helping the entire body of Christ be mobilized during this isolating and difficult time. The Church of Jesus Christ, and indeed every local congregation that is included therein, is in uncharted waters.

The long-term effects of this pandemic upon church and society are still yet to be decided. However, the immediate implications for the church are a bit clearer considering that most parts of the world have experienced their first wave of outbreaks and begun to open up their doors and be active and present again. At the time of this writing, a second wave is hitting Europe and the United States, making it clear that this pandemic is going to be around for quite a bit longer. The church must commit to being proactive in adapting so that it can remain faithful to its priestly call in a time where its defining activities for the last few centuries are no longer an option. Churches are no longer free to meet in the ways that they have met in the past. Social distancing and virtual streaming have forced congregations to be further spread out and less connected than ever before. Pastors are no longer able to give adequate time to caring for, training, and leading their congregations as these conversations are happening in smaller groups and multiple times over.

In light of the COVID-19 global pandemic, each local congregation must be formed into a new tribe *ubuntu* community. Churches must be defined not only by a desire to be together by whatever means are appropriate in the midst of social distancing restrictions, but they must also commit to working for the growth and development of the

congregation. They must embody the notion that each member exists for the good of the others. In doing so, they will naturally resemble the New Testament Church that was characterized by love and service to one another.

There is a movement coming out these times that recognizes the faithful Christian life, not as simply participating in the activities of a congregation. Rather, this new movement recognizes that each Christian is called to minister to those around them. IT people have become especially important as even smaller churches have made a move to be more virtually present. Lay leaders have found themselves checking in on their neighbors and fringe members of the congregation. Larger gatherings have been converted to small groups, requiring the involvement of more people than ever before. Discipleship is happening on an individual level more than a corporate level. All the while, pastors are only personally responsible for a small part of the actual labor involved in these developments. Lay people (spectators) are being transformed into a priestly kingdom (active members) at a faster rate than any other time in modern history.

Despite the many health and social challenges created by the current state of the world, COVID-19 has given the church of Jesus Christ the critical push it needed to adapt to a world that is becoming increasingly disinterested in a passive faith. Instead of one minister attempting to disciple their congregation and evangelize the surrounding community, congregations are being transformed into a community of ministers that evangelizes their community and cares for one another at the same time. They are accomplishing this by being faithful to their call to love God, love one another, and to join God's kingdom mission for the world. Each congregation must do the hard work of calling, training, and ordaining its people to be faithful to its priestly call if they wish to

make it to a day where the Coronavirus is no longer a hindrance to its current way of being the church. Even when this day comes, it is the hope of this writer that the church would not go back to active and passive members, but that the body of Christ as a whole would be transformed into a new tribe characterized by their faithful and robust embodiment of the priesthood of all believers.

### *What Was It All For?*

The wide-scale transformation of the church would be an exceedingly lofty, albeit impossible, goal to try to bring about from any dissertation. Some may have suggested an outline for more explicitly moving a congregation toward better participation in the church's mission. The problem with a model or template to follow is that each faith community is unique and distinct from others. There is no substitution for pastors and other leaders building an *ubuntu* community and discerning the way forward themselves. Any effort to replicate what others have done would risk the integrity of the group unless it was faithful to their specific calling, circumstances, and giftings. With that said, this dissertation has at least brought transformation to one person – its writer. Perhaps that will be enough to make all the years of study, reflection, and writing worth it.

Certainly, there is plenty of work that has been dedicated to pastor leadership, mobilizing the church, forming a new body of believers, various African cultures, and any other theme that could be pulled from this text. However, the way that these themes are intended to work together in this document is unique in at least two ways. First, when taken together, these themes recognize, value, and affirm African expressions of faith. As the center of Christianity continually moves south, new leaders and fresh methods of

engaging the world are coming out of Africa. This work has hopefully provided some practice in adapting African concepts to a Western expression of faith – something that could become increasingly important in the future. Second, these themes uniquely work together in redefining the church. This dissertation has tried to point to a body of people who are characterized by their love for God, each other, and the world. Getting back to this portrayal of the Christian way of life may help the church weather the storms that will undoubtedly present themselves as the church struggles to be relevant in a changing world.

In short, this dissertation has been written in hopes of finding new ways to describe the Christian community both locally and internationally. The Christian tribe is one that grows together for the purpose of more effectively proclaiming the gospel to those around them. It invites people into a relationship by putting more of an accent on community and less of an emphasis on programs. In becoming an outward-focused *ubuntu* community, congregations grow ever more faithful to Christ's commandment to love one another. Each follower of Christ must understand their place as a part of a community actively serving in their priestly role as they are called, prepared, and sent out into the world.

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