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Candler School of Theology

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Ecosystem Theory and Boundary Leadership as applied to the Church: Developing a Method and Analytic Framework to Restore the Place of Churches in their Local Communities.

A Study Submitted to

the Faculty of Candler School of Theology

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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A Useful Metaphor

In 1996, economist James F. Moore instructed the reader of his book, *The Death of Competition*, to "adopt a different vocabulary and see yourself and your environment in what might strike you as an unusual way."[1] At the time the idea of business ecosystems was a new concept which was little understood and underappreciated. Today the concept of ecosystems is ubiquitous in ecological and business thought. Ecosystem theories have proven critical to the understanding and guidance of both natural and business environments. Given this interpretive and strategic success, I suggest that we adopt and extend the concepts and vocabulary of ecosystems to the field of church analysis. I believe that the metaphorical use of ecosystems will provide important insights and guidance in the study of church life, identity and strategic management. "It may not be easy for everyone to make this shift," writes Moore, "most executives don't naturally think of themselves as gardeners or foresters or wildlife managers working to shape the futures of ecosystems – but it can mean the difference between success and failure."[2] Likewise, church leaders do not often imagine themselves as social managers or "boundary leaders."[3] As I will argue, however, it is critical that they make this shift in thinking. The success or failure of many churches may depend on their ability to understand and guide the role of the church in their changing social environments.

Economic language is certainly not foreign to church, community and ministry analysis. Phrases such as "social capital," "asset-based development," and "community economy" are

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[1] James F. Moore, *The Death of Competition: Leadership & Strategy in the Age of Business Ecosystems* (New York: Harper Business, 1996), 7.

[2] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 25.

[3] The concept of "boundary leadership" will be developed in the course of this paper. It is a particular understanding of leadership introduced by Gary Gunderson which meets the demands of building and maintaining social and economic ecosystems.

common in studies concerning the role and place of the church in society.[4] As a capitalist society, it is only natural that we would extend our common economic based language to other areas of understanding. It is a helpful frame of reference but limited in its ability to assess the wider interdependency of organizations, institutions, and societies. It owes its conceptual framework to an earlier understanding of economic systems which is based more on a manufacturing, mercantile, and industrial economy than the more relational, interdependent, collaborative, and organic views of current economic theory.

The idea of "industry," for instance, is "really an artifact of the slowly paced business evolution during the middle of [the twentieth] century."[5] "The presumption," writes Moore, "that there are distinct, immutable businesses within which players scramble for supremacy is a tired idea whose time is past."[6] Instead, we have come to appreciate that businesses exist and coevolve within a wider ecosystem of relationships. Therefore, knowing one's place within an ecosystem is essential to the survival and success of any business or congregation.

Moore uses the example of a neighborhood restaurant to describe a small ecosystem of relationships.

> A neighborhood restaurant often becomes entwined with nearby institutions and populations: the senior citizens home on the corner, the insurance company that needs takeout every weekday, the Little League team in search of a sponsor. The restaurant's centrality to the community enables it to both give and receive. Those are the sort of reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships that can define a business ecosystem. More important, cultivating that network of relationships could and should become a conscious strategy for the restaurant manager.[7]

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[4] These and other economic based phrases can be found in the work of a variety of authors including Nancy Tatom Ammerman, John P. Ketzmann, and John L. McKnight.

[5] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 25.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Churches often behave in a similar manner, developing and maintaining beneficial relationships with the people of the community and various organizations. Historically, churches have played a central role in the life of the community, something akin to a "keystone species."[8] This, however, in many communities is no longer true.

Ecological and organic concepts have made their way into much of church analysis. In *Studying Congregations*, for instance, Nancy Eiesland and Stephen Warner suggest that congregations be viewed "through an ecological framework."[9] "Scholars who study congregations," writes sociologist Mark Mulder, "have found the metaphor of ecology useful as they consider how congregations adapt, or don't adapt, to their contexts."[10] Yet these ecological concepts never seem to capture the essential, existential, reciprocal, constructive, and relational connections that exist within social ecosystems. They are used for wider descriptive purposes which do not approach the practical and focused explanatory power of ecosystem theory.[11]

It is important, therefore, that we have a definition of what defines a social ecosystem. While there is no specific public definition, I will seek to adapt Moore's business ecosystem definition to the purposes of this paper.

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[8] Biological keystone species maintain the health of their ecosystems by contributing essential behaviors or resources that are foundational to the entire system. In medieval Europe and Puritan New England, argues Eiesland and Warner, these dominant churches "were the overlord, or steward, of society." In other words, these churches played a keystone role in the ecosystems of their time. The loss of this role in contemporary society increases the need to find a role in today's social ecosystems, given that religious institutions are no longer essential institutions in many communities and societies.

[9] Nancy Eiesland and Stephen Warner, "Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context," in *Studying Congregations*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 40.

[10] Mark T. Mulder, *Congregations Neighborhoods Places*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2018), 49.

[11] There is also a difference between natural and business ecosystem analysis. I wish to pursue something closer to the business form of ecosystem theory, whereas, much of the sociological analysis tends toward naturalist ecological forms of description. Business ecosystems theory affirms a higher degree of agency and the self-constructed nature of business eco-systems. While the terms ecology and ecosystems are occasionally used interchangeably, ecosystem theory is capable of scaling far beyond the concept of ecology.

> **Social Ecosystem.** A relational community supported by a foundation of interacting organizations (churches, schools, businesses, government, etc.) and individuals. This community seeks to provide the goods and attain the goals and social objectives which are valued by the community. Over time, the members of the community, which include the constituent organizations and individuals, will coevolve their capabilities, roles, and identities, seeking to align themselves with the changing objectives set by the community. Those organizations and individuals which hold leadership roles may change over time, but the function of ecosystem leadership is essential because it enables members to move toward shared visions by aligning their efforts and finding mutually supportive roles.

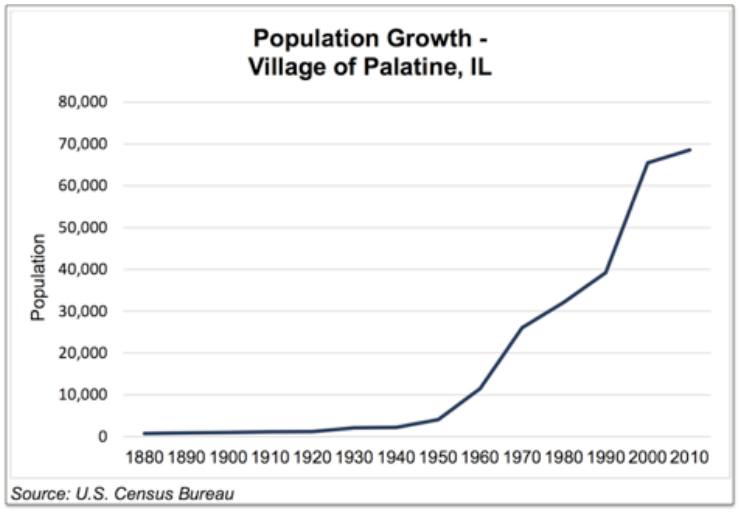
Social ecosystems can be small and narrow in purpose or large in scope and number of participants. Thus, churches can participate in a range of ecosystems from the entirety of the community to small and temporary projects. In this study, we are concerned with all forms, given that churches participate in a wide range of social ecosystems. Yet, it is the more comprehensive social ecosystems which connect the church to the people and culture of the community. These community-based ecosystems are often determinative of the survivability of a church and congregation.

First United Methodist Church

Founded by circuit riders in Deer Grove, Illinois, First United Methodist Church is the earliest congregation in the Palatine area. It began as a loosely affiliated group of settlers, eventually becoming one of the largest United Methodist Churches in the Northern Illinois Conference. As it grew over the years, the church and congregation adjusted from the small rural church of the late 1800s to the affluent and educated congregation of the recent past. I write "recent past" because the church membership, programs, and ministries are approximately one-fourth of their former size.

Beginning with the Native American population, cultures, and communities have been replaced over time by more “dominate” communities. As a result of the Black Hawk War of 1832, a rural Protestant agrarian people and culture forcefully replaced the indigenous Native

Americans. While there exist artifacts of the native people who populated the Midwest, the tribes in the Palatine area were replaced by Yankee and German settlers.



Following the end of World War II, we see the displacement of the rural agrarian culture by a more educated and affluent Protestant/Catholic post-war suburban population. This growth of suburbia quickly eliminated the rural characteristics of the community, leaving only historical evidence of a bygone age. With this change, First United Methodist Church transformed from a small country church to a large and growing congregation. The suburban culture of Palatine continued to reflect Western European culture and forms of worship. Thus, the congregation continued to grow without any significant change of culture or diversity.

More recently, however, the Palatine community has undergone a third cultural transformation. The Christian post-World War II community is being replaced by a new highly diverse and pluralistic culture which no longer reflects the uniformity of the Christian suburban culture of the second half of the twentieth century. Instead, Palatine is now a community of multiple ethnicities, religions, races and economic status.

This transition did not happen all at once or at the speed of the rise of suburbia. Rather, one can observe the transition from an exclusively Western European cultural heritage to the

inclusion of a mixture of Eastern Europeans, Latinos, and Asian residences. The founding of new congregations in Palatine in the 1970s marks the beginning of this rise.

- 1970: The founding of *Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church*. Holy Resurrection is unique in that it consists of parishioners of many traditional Orthodox ethnic extractions: Russian, Ukrainian, Carpatho-Russian, Romanian, Greek, and Serbian.

- 1976: *St. Nectarios Greek Orthodox Church* opened in Palatine in 1976, growing and building rapidly in the late 1980s.

- 1979: A large congregational complex (Gurudwara) was built in Palatine by the *Sikh Religious Society of Chicago*.

After a century and a half of serving and reflecting the religious character of the Palatine community, mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations are receding in the wake of a vastly more pluralistic culture and society. The population in Palatine, according to 2016 estimates, is approximately 64% Caucasian, 13% Asian, 19% Latino, 2% African-American and 2% Racially Mixed.[12] During the past 16 years, all ethnic minorities increased by more than 19%, whereas the Caucasian population decreased by 9%. And, as noted above, the Caucasian population has shifted in its ethnic balance toward Eastern European populations.

The established congregations, therefore, that can trace their history to the founding of the village of Palatine are increasingly feeling a sense of marginalization and "niche overlap."[13] Indeed, even the Catholic Church, which has benefited from an influx of Latino and Polish populations, is experiencing a rapid decline in worship attendance and participation. The community has grown more secular and religiously disaffected. Religious institutions are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the lives of people in the Palatine community, except for the

[12] "Races in Palatine, Illinois (IL) Detailed Stats," City-Data.com. Accessed March 15, 2019, http://www.city-data.com/city/Palatine-Illinois.html.

[13] Kevin D. Dougherty and Mark T. Mulder. "Congregational Responses to Growing Urban Diversity in a White Ethnic Denomination." *Social Problems,* Vol. 56, Issue 2, (2009): 338. "In religious groups, niche overlap involves relying on the same potential pool of members. . . A crowed environment means fewer resources for all."

ethnic communities that continue to orient themselves around their identified congregations and evangelical mega-churches such as Willow Creek Church and Harvest Bible Chapel.

Furthermore, in addition to these overall religious and cultural trends, Palatine has divided into economic segments of the population that have resulted in a growing sense of class and racial division. This division was accentuated when, in the 1990s, immigrant communities around Palatine were annexed into the village of Palatine. These communities have resulted in concentrations of low-income housing and poverty. This has added to the demographic and economic diversity of Palatine, creating social and economic divisions which did not previously exist. The complexity of these economic, social, cultural, racial and ethnic divisions has left many of the long-time citizens of the Palatine community and First United Methodist Church confused and disoriented; or, as Nancy Tatom Ammerman might describe it, the members of First United Methodist Church are becoming increasingly aware that their social and religious ecologies no longer exist. This requires, therefore, that the church and congregation learn to adapt to their changing community.

> Adaptation can take many forms, but it is not an easy process. It requires determined effort at finding resources, establishing new partnerships, and developing new leaders, new programs, and new ideas, and often involves fighting among people who love each other. Most congregations do not choose adaptation. They choose not to fight and thus not to change. They may be aware that the ecology in which they were born no longer exists, but they continue doing what they know to do. . . After a period of slow decline, these congregations are likely to disappear from the scene . . . As with any other ecology, death is an inevitable part of the life cycle.[14]

This sobering passage from *Congregation & Community* accurately describes the choices and path before First United Methodist Church. For over twenty years, the church has been on a steady decline in membership and ministry. My immediate predecessor retired after fourteen

[14] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 345.

years of ministry at First United Methodist Church. During his tenure, he managed the congregational decline until the circumstances became too acute to ignore. Over two million dollars in debt, leading an elderly congregation unable to pay on its apportionments, defending the status quo and unwilling to acknowledge the desperate condition of the church, he finally retired. In my interviews with congregation members, all confessed that the former pastor had "retired long ago." Avoiding conflict and any serious attempt to adapt to the changing community and social ecosystems of Palatine, the church has simply grown more isolated and remote, continuing to do "what it knows" for as long as possible.

Even more debilitating, the former pastor developed a "leadership" core that had a sense of ownership of the church, resisting any adaptation which challenged their preeminence or threatened the homeostatic conditions of the church and congregation. Any serious efforts to adapt the church to the new realities of the community inevitably met with opposition and sabotage, confirming Edwin Friedman's observation that "it is only after having first brought about a change and then subsequently endured the resultant sabotage that the leader can feel truly successful."[15] Thus, First United Methodist Church was devoid of successful leaders and meaningful change.

Furthermore, as the former pastor became less interested in guiding the church, unwilling and unable to meet the demands of boundary leadership, he passed his pastoral authority to the staff and complacent congregational leaders.[16] Thus, rather than having a pool of boundary leaders to call upon to begin the process of adaptation and leadership, the congregation became

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[15] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, (New York: Seabury Books), 247.

[16] In my interviews, members and former clergy who served the church identified the Office Administrator of twenty-one years as the most powerful leader in the church, owing to the former pastor delegating unprecedented autonomy and authority to her.

conditioned to seek the safe and familiar definitions of post-World War II suburbia, living in a time that no longer existed.

This is the starting point for my research into ecosystem theory and boundary leadership. First United Methodist Church is an example of a congregation that is poorly adapted to its current community's ecosystems, exhibiting all the characteristics of social isolation, occupying a trivial role within the Palatine community. Likewise, it demonstrates the nature of a congregation which lacks imagination and adaptability. If boundary leadership was applied, however, and social ecosystems fully joined and created, what would be the result? What would be the observable and measurable effects upon the congregation?

Following the example of natural and business forms of ecosystems, I would expect two needed and helpful results. First, there would be benefits to participating in ecosystems. These benefits can be as diverse as the type of ecosystem. If a church is a contributing partner in a healthy ecosystem then there will be significant results and benefits which derive from that ecosystem.[17] An increase in community support and attention, increased membership and activity levels combined with new opportunities for ministry are some of the expected results. Second, the church will begin to evolve to fit the ecosystem. The nature and identity of the church will be influenced by the social connections that are established. The isolation of the church will lessen as the congregation encounters and interacts with the wider community of Palatine. Together, these effects can help to establish a cascading series of actions and events that may eventually restore the congregation to an active and vital role within the social and economic ecosystems of Palatine.

Building New Social Ecosystems

[17] In ecosystem theory, a charity can be part of an ecosystem, but an ecosystem is not a charity. Members of an ecosystem join with the expectation that something valuable will be attained by virtue of participation.

Prior to my appointment to First United Methodist Church, I was the pastor of Marengo United Methodist Church in Marengo, Illinois, a small rural community with a reputation for bars, gun stores, video gambling, and empty storefronts. Following the recession of 2008, the community of Marengo experienced increased levels of poverty and social degradation that left the community in a state of economic and social despair. Needing a sign of hope and social renewal, nine area churches came together to found "Faith and Family Day." This event brought together churches, businesses, government, and social organizations to create an annual festival event in downtown Marengo. Organized by the Marengo Clergy Association, this event was intended to provide hope and inspire the community to build and restore the community's social values. Working as a group of boundary leaders, the church leaders brought together a wide array of organizations around a shared purpose, accomplishing something that could not be achieved in isolation, benefiting all who were a part of this new ecosystem. The Marengo-Union Times described the event in 2015 in these words:

> It was marvelous to see Marengoans from all the churches in town, as well as people not belonging to one, come out and celebrate a day together. If one of the goals of Faith and Family Day was to boost community moral, then by all means it was a success.
>
> Much thanks must be acknowledged to all the volunteers who helped the event run as smoothly as it did, all the performers who graced the stage, the local restaurants and stores that came out to highlight their work, the churches who worked together to make the day happen, and of course everybody who came out to support.
>
> The importance of having events such as this in town, with the goal to bring the community together, cannot be overstated. Here's hoping for another fantastic Faith and Family Day next year, and perhaps even some other community events inspired by the example set![18]

The Marengo United Methodist Church proved to be an important part of the social and economic ecosystems of Marengo by bringing together organizations and residents around the

[18] "Another Fantastic Faith and Family Day," The Marengo-Union Times, August 4, 2015, accessed March 14, 2019, http://www.marengo-uniontimes.com/news/1689-another-fantastic-faith-and-family-day.

unifying values of community, faith and family. It was a celebrated success in the life of the Marengo community and demonstrated the need for other such events.

This was not the only new social ecosystem that Marengo United Methodist Church developed. During the recession, the Marengo Park District, nearing bankruptcy, closed the only public daycare.[19] Perceiving an opportunity to achieve important social goals in a time of desperate need, the Marengo United Methodist Church entered into a contract to reopen the daycare with the support and participation of the Park District. Thus, a partnership was established between the congregation and the Park District leading to the reopening of the daycare facility. This, however, was only the beginning of the relationship as the church shared its gymnasium with the Park District and organized community work projects to maintain the individual parks. While not as expansive as "Faith and Family Day," this small ecosystem continued to grow and involve many new families and organizations. The church purchased vans to expand the program to the local schools, added afterschool care, developed an enrichment program for preschoolers, employed local businesses and expanded its reach to other surrounding communities.

In both examples, the social goals could only be achieved if all the partners were willing to collaborate to meet their shared interests. In each case, Marengo United Methodist Church reached across institutional boundaries to build new ecosystems, and it is only by way of such systems that these goals could be achieved. As demonstrated in Marengo, ecosystems are not only present in the life of communities and congregations, they are essential to their existence.

While the process of building and sustaining new ecosystems was evident in Marengo, a closer examination reveals five basic components to developing healthy social ecosystems.

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[19] John Arient, "Tough Decisions at Park District," The Marengo-Union Times, December 4, 2013, accessed March 14, 2019, http://www.marengo-uniontimes.com/news/1351-tough-decisions-at-park-district.

1. **A Unifying Social Purpose:**

All ecosystems begin with a purpose or goal around which people are willing to build a network of relationships and efforts to achieve something that all parties value. Usually these goals emerge out of some problem or challenge that needs to be addressed. These needs are either self-evident or identified by the initial organizers of the ecosystem. They must be adopted, however, by all of the participants as a unifying cause or objective. As Moore writes, "business ecosystems form around problems to solve and pain to soothe."[20] The initial task of creating any ecosystem begins with getting "to know the people beyond the edge, whose opportunities are cut short by problems we may be able to solve."[21] "Survey and map problems" Moore suggests, "catalogue the pain that needs to be relieved, understand the roots of pain!"[22] Where the point of pain and need converge there is an opportunity to solve a problem and build a sense of purpose.

Typically, the larger and more complex the need, the larger the ecosystem. Climate change, for example, is a problem which requires global partners and resources to solve. The unifying need, therefore, demands a global ecosystem. "Faith and Family Day" addressed a more localized need which encompassed a small community. Despite the size of the goal, however, every ecosystem begins with a shared purpose and opportunity to address some form of pain.

2. **Boundary Leadership:**

The second component is perhaps the most critical in building ecosystems, "boundary leadership."[23] For boundary leadership is required to turn pain into opportunity by envisioning

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[20] James F. Moore*, Shared Purpose: A thousand business ecosystems, a connected community, and the future*, (Scouts Valley California: Create Space Publishing Platform, 2013), 19.

[21] Moore, *Shared Purpose*, 19.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Gary R. Gunderson and James R. Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public: Shifting the Paradigm*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 137.

and building ecosystems. It is boundary leaders who possess the ability to extend thought, imagination, and feeling beyond defined boundaries to "boundary zones" which delineate the "area of ambiguity and opportunity" from which ecosystems are constructed.[24] "Boundary leadership is the practice of leadership in the boundary zone, the space in between settled zones of authority, where relationships are more fluid, dynamic, and itinerant."[25] "Boundary leaders," writes Gunderson, "do not confine their intelligence inside temporary insignificant containers that will change and shift before truly significant phenomena."[26] Instead, they reflect upon whole systems and solve new problems by reimagining what exists to fit new challenges and circumstances. This ability to extend thought and feeling beyond defined boundaries to ambiguous reorientations of systems and organizations distinguishes "boundary leaders from old-fashioned managers."[27] This form of leadership identifies and engages the unifying purpose of a social ecosystem. "Boundary leaders, know very well the reality of what 'is,' but allow themselves to be accountable to what 'could be.'"[28]

Creating new ecosystems requires this form of leadership which can envision and guide the creative process. "Faith and Family Day" depended upon the key boundary leaders who accepted the challenge of finding a way to positively impact the social health of the Marengo community by guiding the creation of this annual event. Such leaders are also required to adapt and coevolve the ecosystem as changes occur in the social ecology of the community.

3. Complimentary Partnerships:

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[24] Gary Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders: Leadership Skills for People of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 14.

[25] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 189.

[26] Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders*, 10.

[27] Ibid., 13.

[28] Ibid., 21.

The third component is the ecosystem itself, the partners who make up the network of complimentary relationships and activities. Boundary leaders seek to bring together the necessary partners under the proper conditions to form a functional ecosystem. To realize this objective, every member must find a place in the system that leverages their particular contribution.

> What is going on in ecosystems and indeed in all natural systems is that the members of the system have coevolved mutual dependencies that work to their benefit. Each member, in effect, leverages the network of interactions in the system to its advantage. . . The health of each depends on the health of the whole: All are bound by these leveraging relationships to a common fate.[29]

"Greed spoils business ecosystems," writes Moore, because it undermines the partnerships that ecosystems depend upon to succeed. It is not enough, therefore, that you have the right arrangement of partners, they must also understand that "it is about gaining your security and your enjoyment and your accomplishments with others."[30] If you can bring together the proper coalition of non-completive partners, truly great things can be achieved.

"Faith and Family Day" included nine churches, over one hundred volunteers, local and regional bands, one international Christian artist (Danny Gokey), stage crews, crafters, game rental companies, local merchants and restaurants, corporate sponsors, waste services, the Park District, the local radio stations and newspapers, government, police, and the mayor who sponsored a pig roast. Each person or organization had an important reason to be a part of this event. Some were not there to support the organizing purpose of the event, but all had an interest in its success. The partners did not relate to each other competitively, but sought an opportunity

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[29] Marco Iansiti and Roy Levien, *The Keystone Advantage: What the New Dynamics of Business Ecosystems Mean for Strategy, Innovation, and Sustainability*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 22.

[30] Moore, *Shared Purpose*, 53.

to bring their special talents, gifts and valued contributions together to invest in an event that was meaningful and socially significant.[31]

4. **A Spirit of Collaboration:**

> An important reason that people sign up to create a new ecosystem is that they want to work on a program both meaningful and important. The excitement of participating in the new, the thrill of forming history, the satisfaction of collaborating to make a difference – these are real pleasures.[32]

Personally, it was extraordinarily gratifying to work with others and contribute to the success of "Faith and Family Day." Every motivating factor listed by Moore, in the quotation above, existed within me and the hundreds of Marengo volunteers and residents. It was exciting to work on something that was life-giving and innovative. A sense of pride and value is a part of any successful social ecosystem. The military, political activism, social organizations, and churches are examples of socially oriented organizations that depend on this sense of meaning to exist. Remove this sense of purpose and value from a social ecosystem and it becomes highly vulnerable to collapse.

Economic ecosystems also require a sense of enthusiasm and hope, but for different reasons. As Moore describes it:

> Only the hope – and ultimately the reality – of significant gains and the anticipation of benefits to both customers and suppliers are going to rouse the enthusiasm and commitment of funds, talent, and other resources essential to starting a new ecosystem.[33]

Even here, however, people will choose to commit themselves to a business ecosystem that is doing something "insanely great."[34] People and organizations want to do something highly

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[31] This is not to say that the nine local pastors did not have a sense of competition with their colleagues. Given the unifying goal, however, we were able to suppress such feelings. Many ecosystems fail due to our inability to recognize that we need others and properly value their contributions to the ecosystem.

[32] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 50.

[33] Ibid., 72.

[34] CEO Steve Jobs promoted Apple products by describing them as "insanely great."

significant and impactful. Ecosystems built around companies like Apple, Tesla and SpaceX are intentionally focused on a sense of greatness to attract talent, investment and sales. Thus, the more meaningful the purpose of the ecosystem, the more likely the participants will work together to see the purpose succeed.

5. **Coevolution of the Partners and System:**

The final component relates to the robustness and longevity of an ecosystem. Social ecosystems are "living" systems that are constantly subject to change. They require, therefore, a capacity to evolve and adapt, both as a system and individual participants. An ecosystem should not be confused with the ecology that it exists within. Profound changes can occur both without and within an ecosystem. Those disruptions are typically felt throughout the entire ecosystem demanding that the system and participants coevolve to meet the changing social and economic environments.

Perhaps, the clearest example of this "need to change" is demonstrated when the demographics of a community shift. As the community's ethnic and cultural diversity changes, churches who are unable or unwilling to adapt and evolve are often eliminated from the social ecosystems of the community. With strong and capable boundary leadership, however, ecosystems and their constituent partners can coevolve and thrive even in rapidly changing environments.

Boundary Leadership and Institutions

Boundary leadership is the key component. Ecosystems and churches depend on leaders who can both identify opportunities to do something valuable and connect them to the array of resources, people and organizations necessary to realize this value. They are leaders who are drawn to issues that matter most in life. When they find an opportunity to change things for the

better, they push against the boundaries that prevent the solving of a problem and providing a sense of hope. Boundary leaders "create webs of transformation, in which their own hope and own responses resonate with the hopes and responses of others, and they create in that resonance patterns of new relationships."[35] Boundary leaders, in other words, move us from purpose to hope, and from hope to relationships, and from relationships to the realization of our hopes. They are a rare and necessary type of leader. But who are they?

They are individuals who *care* about improving upon life. Rather than working from the center of things, boundary leaders "are attracted to the broken, and broken-open, spaces in between formal structure and 'legible' functioning."[36] "Boundary leaders emerge because the force of life draws them out and up toward the vital arenas where the future is trying to be born."[37] They do not believe in the status quo and the permanence of things. Instead, they seek out the pain and brokenness of what exists to "create opportunities to nurture the new for the sake of the whole."[38] This can be seen in economic and social ecosystems. Boundary leaders search on the edges of life for gaps and opportunities to "make things better." They are constantly seeking to reform what "is" into what "ought to be."

They are able to do this, in part, because they have the capacity to *think imaginatively*. "In the boundary zone," writes Gunderson, "imagination is what makes it possible for webs of transformation to emerge out of chaos."[39] "Imagination," he describes, "is the magnet around which relationships form in ways that resonate and then reinforce the images of hope before that

[35] Moore, *Boundary Leaders*, 20.
[36] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 120.
[37] Moore, *Boundary Leaders*, 83.
[38] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 138
[39] Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders*, 97.

hope is visible."[40] This distinguishes the difference between natural and human ecosystems. For, as Moore writes, "social systems are composed of real people who make decisions," and those decisions depend upon "a powerful shared imagination, focused on envisioning the future."[41] "Unlike anything in biology," he argues, "shared imagination is what holds together economies, societies, and companies."[42] In the creation or evolution of any ecosystem, there are always boundary leaders who "capture the moment," and are able to share their imaginative and hopeful visions with others.

Boundary leaders also possess what is often referred to as *connectional intelligence*. Imagination must be coupled with connectional intelligence if the ecosystem is to be formed and sustained. Moore argues this point when he writes: "You need to design business relationships to bring in the most powerful players and contributions, and they must be choreographed into a dance that provides dramatic new benefits for customers."[43] According to Moore, it is not enough to imaginatively form a hopeful vision of the future.

> You want to provide the architecture for large-scale cooperation. In a sense, what you are doing is a form of community organizing. You are forging new economic relationships.[44]

In their book on connectional intelligence, Erica Dhawan and Saj-Nicole Joni list four key questions that must be answered by connectional leaders.

- *What* is the problem?
- *What if* I engaged the resources, information, people and ideas at my disposal in another way?
- *Does it matter?* To me? To others? To the future?
- *How* might I get this big thing done?[45]

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 11.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 54.

[44] Ibid., 49.

[45] Erica Dhawan and Sau-Nicole Joni, *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 21.

These questions are similar to the questions asked by a boundary leader. Indeed, Dahawn and Joni's definition of connectional intelligence echoes Moore and Gunderson's work when they write: "Connectional intelligence is the ability to combine the world's diversity of people, networks, disciplines and resources, forging connections that create value, meaning and breakthrough results."[46] This is precisely the type of unbounded intelligence that Moore is speaking of when he describes the relationship between building new ecosystems and leadership. "New ecosystems require leaders who can work across traditional organizational and cultural lines to form a compelling vision that transcends company, industry, and, often, national lines."[47]

In Michael Mather's book, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything*, he displays a connectional intelligence which is employed on a local level. Serving as a pastor in a low-income community, Mather demonstrates that outside organizations and financial support do not determine local outcomes.

> What you can do is build things with what is already in your hands. The citizens who live in low-income neighborhoods have many resources, gifts, and skills. If you want to lay good and strong foundations, build with what is present rather than what is not.[48]

Boundary leaders possess this intelligence to nurture and build, what Gunderson calls, "webs of transformation." They reflect the ability to "help systems gain many efficiencies through aligning and connecting assets that already exist but are, for many reasons, otherwise inaccessible or invisible."[49] They build the relationships and connections that will constitute the ecosystem's structure and life. Without such intelligence, boundary leadership would lead nowhere.

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[46] Dhawan and Joni, *Get Big Things Done*, 218.

[47] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 55.

[48] Michael Mather, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willian B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 122.

[49] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 130.

Finally, boundary leaders are *resilient*. They must be, given that they are agents of change, and often threaten the status quo in order to achieve either the renewal of an ecosystem or disruption of the existing order to establish new social or economic structures. "Institutions, by contrast, tend to set boundaries and to police them, creating lines of command and accountability defined in terms of those boundaries."[50] "Boundary leaders appreciate ambiguity, not just as something to be endured, but as the experiment in which hope bubbles out of the test tube."[51] This hope, however, often comes at a price as fear and defensiveness meet the boundary leader "head-on" or more likely in acts of sabotage. Boundary leaders, according to Gunderson, must be tenacious and tough.

> If they were boxers, they would be able to take a punch. Because they have hopes that many do not share, they can take a defeat and turn the other cheek.

Yet, they are not invincible, thriving "only when their social ecology flourishes."[52] Nor are boundary leaders plentiful.

Boundary leadership continues to be in short supply at First United Methodist Church. It is scarce in most churches and organizations. In an attempt to share and instruct people in boundary leadership, Gary Gunderson has written a guide book entitled *Boundary Leaders: Leadership Skills for People of Faith*; and in 2017, Joseph McBrayer created, as part of his Doctor of Ministry program at Candler School of Theology, "a visually based curriculum to help educate and create other boundary leaders."[53] These noteworthy and useful resources are

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[50] Ibid., 129.

[51] Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders*, 94.

[52] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 137.

[53] McBrayer, Joseph. *Boundary Leadership: Creating and Implementing a Digital, Video-Based Curriculum for Collegiate Ministry*. D.Min., Emory University, 2017. p 3.

certainly welcome, but in order to maintain boundary leadership over time, churches will need to become "boundary institutions."[54]

Boundary institutions, writes Gunderson, are changing and dynamic organizations, "sophisticated rather than naïve, they are capable of working out of and into many roles rather than being locked into one."[55] They draw strength from working in boundary zones and are "comprehensive in their reach and complex in their response."[56] Ambiguity and complexity are welcomed by such institutions because they see these as conditions for the building of new webs of transformation. They are, according to Gunderson, the "social embodiments of boundary leadership."[57]

> In our world of boundary zones, many forms of organizations are adapting to its fluid, broken ambiguity by acting more and more like webs. And the more weblike organization become, the more boundary leader characteristics emerge among the organization's leaders.[58]

Boundary churches are these weblike organizations connecting and reconnecting with people and the community in a fluid network of social ecosystems. They emulate the characteristics of boundary leadership and give rise to new boundary leaders. This, I would suggest, is the goal of any healthy Christian congregation and ultimate destination for First United Methodist Church.

What about First United Methodist Church?

First United Methodist Church is not part of a healthy social ecology. In my study of the church, I have come to appreciate what it means to be part of an isolated and unhealthy congregation, particularly in relationship to boundary leadership. Living on the margins of the

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[54] This is a serious question for Gunderson. Churches would seem to be highly dependent upon their boundary leaders. How does one maintain such leadership over time? Too many churches depend on their pastors being the boundary leaders.

[55] Gunderson and Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public*, 134.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Gunderson, *Boundary Leadership*, 124.

social ecosystems of Palatine, the members of First United Methodist Church have grown accustom to their social isolation, as they lose their ability to relate to the community of Palatine. Their sense of value and meaning as a congregation diminishes with every death in the church, while their sense of helplessness increases. "I think we are trying," writes an 80-year-old woman in the congregation, "but our 'aging' members are not going to attract younger people."[59] She succinctly describes the relationship of the church to the community by concluding, "Fewer members, thus less contact."

A similar condition exists in the business world, according to Moore. Describing executives in declining businesses, he writes,

> . . . in more cases than [executives] care to admit, they know that their products and services face limited lives, because the economic and social conditions to which they contribute are becoming obsolete.
>
> I know a number of executives who find themselves stunningly helpless in the face of these challenges.[60]

Unfortunately, helplessness is the condition of many clergy and congregations. This is due, in part, because they lack boundary leadership.

A lack of imagination is also present in the church, particularly with those who seek to protect the status quo.

> The image of boundary zones is subversive to people who prefer their perimeters well defined. They often foster a kind of *dis*imagination that disables the future by intentionally walling it within the tribe, discipline, or language of the present.[61]

*"Dis*imagination," writes Gunderson, "moves defensively against boundary zone emergence by promoting the partial as if it was the whole."[62] Hence, we are distracted by small squabbles and insignificant debates while the larger issues go unaddressed.

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[59] This quote is taken from a congregational survey that will be referenced below.
[60] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 4.
[61] Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders*, 99.
[62] Ibid.

In the face of this hopeless and oppositional spirit, I have worked to reacquaint the congregation with the community and expand their sense of self-identity by taking small steps into the boundary zone between the church and community. Without initial support from the church or conference, I have sought to build small webs of transformation.

- The first was building a close relationship with Boy Scout Troop 209, the largest and most innovative scouting organization in the Palatine area. After insisting that we support the troop in building and launching an experiment to the International Space Station, I accompanied the troop to Cape Canaveral for the launch of the experiment. Developing this relationship has resulted in a significant and growing connection between the church and the scouting community.

- After years of denials by our Board of Trustees, we have constructed a community garden. This highly visible outreach to our community and neighbors has helped shift the vision of our church. We have followed this up with hosting community meals and participating in public events.[63] Thus, issues concerning the needs of our community and neighbors are no longer alien to the congregation.

- In an attempt to widen the focus of the congregation, we have developed a relationship with a Methodist church in San German, Cuba. To date, we have contributed over five thousand dollars and collected numerous bags of physical goods that are in short supply in Cuba. These items have been transported by members of our congregation on numerous visits to the island. My intent in developing this relation was not only to help the people of San German but to open First United Methodist Church to the world.

- Most recently, the congregation has established a partnership with the Children's Dyslexia Center of Chicago.[64] Searching for a location in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, we have made available to the Dyslexia Center six classrooms and office space. Underutilized space is now devoted to helping children with disabilities, opening the church up to the community by providing actual contact and care. Rather than closing the church at 3 pm, we remain open and engaged in ministry from 9 am until 8 pm, Monday through Thursday.

- We have even welcomed a Baptist church into our contemporary space on Sunday mornings. Embassy Church is not only a source of needed financial support, but we are forming a partnership in community ministries, social activities and worship.[65] Despite

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[63] Information concerning the community meal can be found at the web address: http://www.thecommunitymeal.org.

[64] Information concerning the Children's Dyslexia Center of Chicago can be found at the web address: http://www.cdc-chicago.org.

[65] Information concerning Embassy Church can be found at the web address: http://www.embassychurch.net.

> our theological differences, we seek to find places of commonality where we can work together as Christian congregations in support of our shared communal interests.

Through these and other efforts, First United Methodist Church has begun to play an increasingly significant part in the social ecosystems of Palatine, demonstrating examples of boundary leadership and connectional intelligence. In an article, for instance, from the local newspaper, *The Daily Herald*, a new identity has begun to emerge in the community and consciousness of the congregation.

> First United Methodist Church board member Greg Burnett of Inverness said Children's Dyslexia Center will be good for the region. He's led the effort for the church to become partners with the organization.
>
> "Community service and outreach is a really, really big part of our church," Burnett said. "And when the dyslexia center approached us about possibly partnering with us to be able to utilize our facilities, we took a good look at the dyslexia center and found it's just an excellent organization."[66]

To measure this sense of community involvement and change in congregational identity, I conducted a Sunday morning survey. [67] As part of that survey, I asked two quantifiable questions.

1) How connected and involved is FUMC in the Palatine community?

   Average response between 1-10: ***5***

2) How important is it for a church to be a highly valued part of the community?

   Average response between 1-10: **8.5**

The results reflected a belief that First United Methodist Church has an average level of involvement in the community. Five is higher than I would have expected. Some comments explicitly referenced our initial efforts to reach the community and sought to support these

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[66] Bob Susnjara, "Dyslexia center to open Palatine campus," The Daily Herald, November 20, 2018, accessed March 14, 2019, http://www.dailyherald.com/news/20181120/dyslexia-center-to-open-palatine-campus.

[67] The survey was conducted on October 7, 2018. The number of respondences was 47. A list of the questions asked in the survey can be found in Appendix 2.

efforts with higher scores. “Rev. Mowry,” comments a 76-year-old woman, “has worked hard to improve the relationships and encourage involvement in the community – strong work in progress.” However, even she admits: “I think that [the church has] become very insular (and membership dropped) under prior pastor.” Others recognized that we are a long way from being a community church. Rating our community involvement at three, a 61-year-old male writes:

> We have some events that the general community participates in. On the other hand, I do not believe the Palatine community actively thinks about what we are doing. I am also not sure how much any church is involved in the community.

He concludes that the church has “minimal importance.” Thus, five is perhaps the ideal score for First United Methodist Church, leaving us with a sense of progress, yet with room for improvement.

Furthermore, with an average vote of 8.5, the congregation clearly indicated an awareness that the church needs to be a highly valued part of the Palatine community. With the average age of the respondents at 68 years, and average years of attendance at 32, it is not surprising that many of the survey comments referred back to a time when the church was socially connected and vital. This was a time when the church and congregation were extremely active in the community. The Swedish Smorgasbords were so popular that they needed to be held in the high school and the congregation grew too large for the existing sanctuary necessitating the building of a second worship space. These long-term members recall a time when First United Methodist Church was a highly significant part of the social ecosystem of Palatine, and they long to restore this relationship.[68]

Restoring this relationship, however, remains problematic, given the perception that the root of the problem is that the community has moved away from the church. Thus, when asked to

[68] This is an interesting condition that I have found among many isolated and failing congregations. They long to regain a significant place in the social ecosystem of their community but feel inadequate to the task.

explain why the church has become marginalized, most respondents indicated that issues outside the control of the church have resulted in this estrangement.

> "The world has changed." "We are not relevant to young people." "The Me generation doesn't see the need to go to church." "People are too busy." "People lost their moral compass, just buy the new Apple." "Parents getting kids into too many activities." "Respect is gone." "Too much moral change and rise of secularity." "Too much technical change." "Cultural change." Etc.[69]

It is the change in people, the culture, morals and values that is blamed for the diminished role and status of the church. The world has moved, not the church. The general sentiment is that the people and community need to move back to meet the church where it exists. Then the relationship will be restored. Given this general understanding and analysis of the problem, it is difficult for the people of First United Methodist Church to know what to do, how to regain a place in their community. Despite the many gains in community involvement, there is a conceptual disconnect which limits action and understanding.

Think Different and Ask Different Questions

In order that First United Methodist Church be able to find a new place in the social ecosystems of Palatine, it must begin to think differently about the church.[70] When a church is as lost as First United Methodist Church, the sense of confusion and anxiety often lead to feelings of panic or resignation. Churches search for simple answers, not knowing or understanding the complexity and relational quality of the proper questions. In the field of economics, Moore suggests that some of the proper questions are these.

> Consider the ecosystem or ecosystems in which you play a role. Are they growing or declining? How effectively are these economic communities being led? Are they innovating and improving their performance with customers? How secure are their futures? How are they faring against competing communities? These questions are vital,

[69] This is a representative sample of comments from the 47 responses to the survey.

[70] I use the words "Think Different" in the header to reference the Apple campaign of 1997 - a call to think differently than IBM. I am suggesting a change of thinking from the status-quo.

> for many executives and companies have focused entirely on their own virtues and altogether missed the decline in the ecosystems upon which they were dependent.[71]

I would suggest that most churches need to ask a similar series of questions.

- In what social ecosystem or ecosystems does your church play a role?
- Are the ecosystems you belong to growing or declining?
- How effectively are these social ecosystems being led?
- Are they and/or you innovating or simply recapitulating what you have always done?
- How are the ecosystems you belong to doing in comparison with others?
- Do they have a future? Do you?
- Have you been paying too much attention to internal issues and missed the decline in your ecosystem, or the fact that you no longer belong to a supportive social ecosystem?

While far from exhaustive, these types of questions are often overlooked by congregational leaders and church analysts.

In Marengo, the clergy association asked the right questions about the social and economic ecosystems of the community. They sought to identify their role in these ecosystems and exercised leadership over the evolution of their community by establishing "Faith and Family Day." In this event, the churches demonstrated their relevance to the people, institutions and organizations in the Marengo community enabling the churches to shape the future of the social and economic ecosystems in Marengo. They also benefited from the increased health in the community and sense of purpose in their congregations. They asked and answered Moore's ecological questions:

> Consider an ecosystem in which you participate: Who are the main organizational members? Who are the leaders? Are you a leader? Are you shaping the future of this ecosystem, or mainly responding to the initiatives of others?[72]

In business and church analysis, we have struggled to appreciate the role of ecosystems and boundary leadership. Our thoughts and ideas are far too narrow to include the complexity of

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[71] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 58.
[72] Ibid., 44.

ecosystem theories. We struggle, Moore notes, to "see the wheat beyond the bread." We do not naturally expand our level of focus to include the ecosystem of relationships that must come together to result in the loaf. Instead, we focus on the most immediate causes and relationships to understand the complexities of reality. We, therefore, make decisions from the shallowest of conceptions. Thus, for instance, churches habitually make five-year plans without genuinely reflecting upon the role they might play outside the congregation. We construct "to-do" and "wish lists" rather than examine the more fundamental questions of our participation and place in the world around us.

We have a conceptual and cognitive problem that Moore describes by quoting the seventeenth-century biologist Albrecht von Haller:

> Nature connected her things in a net, not a chain: but humans can follow only by chains because their language can't handle several things at once.[73]

Try to explain ecosystem theory to a church board or committee, asking them to consider the role of the church as a participant in the ecosystems of the community, and you will think that you are speaking a foreign language. Our language and metaphysical presuppositions are linear and mechanical, whereas, churches exist in social ecosystems which are fundamentally "organic" and relational. We simply do not have a history of ecosystem thinking. We can conceive of the church as existing in a competitive market vying for the time and attention of religious consumers, but not as part of a non-competitive network of mutually dependent organizations who rely upon each other for existence.

Moreover, we are often unable or unwilling to recognize our own dependence upon social ecosystems. It is a difficult concept to accept that "what you do is not as important as how your

[73] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 276.

capabilities relate to what others are doing." [74] We want to believe that we are essential to everyone else's wellbeing, that the church "precedes creation," or that "God made the world in order to make the church."[75] Such ideas, however, are antithetical to ecosystem thinking.[76] It is as absurd as believing that God created the world in order to realize Amazon. All organizations are contingent and subject to extinction, even the church. To the extent that one cannot accept this truth, one is unable to make genuinely realistic strategic plans. As Moore writes in *The Death of Competition*:

> This new approach to strategy makes so much sense today because of a certain truism: The strength that a company derives from its ecosystem can be as much as, or more important than, the competitiveness it derives from its own virtues.[77]

Concentrating exclusively on the virtues of the church, we often ignore how those virtues relate to our particular environment and social ecosystems.

The final significant barrier to ecosystem thinking comes from social isolation. Isolated congregations will acclimate themselves to their isolation and react negatively when attention is shifted toward the world outside the church. The inward focus becomes normative and part of the congregation's definition of church. Seemingly virtuous statements such as "We are a loving congregation that takes care of our own.," or "We should be careful not to forget about this group or that." are often signs that the congregation is not prepared to adapt and reengage the social ecosystems of their community. These objections usually come early in the process of adaptation and change, fading as the benefits of joining social ecosystems become apparent to the congregation. The demand that "nothing change" as the church widens its focus of attention

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[74] Ibid., 7.

[75] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), 23.

[76] This is due, in part, to the fact that ecosystem theories are not based upon any theological or religious thought. The metaphorical concept of ecosystems can be applied to any number of disciplines or activities.

[77] Moore, *The Death of Competition*, 7.

is an existential and narcissistic barrier that must be overcome before social ecosystems can be joined and new questions entertained.

To fully appreciate the place of the church in communities we must learn to think differently about the church and ask different questions. We must "liberate" our thinking and language by developing a new vocabulary and understanding of the church, a sort of ecosystem thinking and speech. As Moore explains:

> Ecology is particularly helpful in liberating our thinking from the narrow confines that the demands of daily life jam us into, and leading us into something broader, higher, and more intriguing. Better than any other means, it connects us with the multilevel, nested, constantly transforming nature of reality.[78]

Rather than focusing on "eight qualities of highly effective churches" or adding a contemporary worship service to solve the problem of church decline, ecosystem thinking enables individual churches to reflect upon their social situations within the community and construct practical strategic plans based upon their specific virtues and strengths. Ecosystem thinking is realistic in nature and points churches and congregations toward hopeful futures. It does not promise quick or easy fixes but leads congregations to take practical steps forward. It does not bring absolute clarity but allows the church to engage in the world while seeking greater focus. Ecosystem theories expect failures but use these to prompt adaption and evolution. Ecosystem thinking is a learning process rather than a technical procedure. It does not seek to make the church more attractive but more valuable. It does not expect congregations to act alone but believes in doing great things with others. It is a hopeful process of growth and change which has the potential to bring new life to almost any church.

If we can think differently about the church and humble ourselves before the necessity to adapt and change, accepting of the church's dependent nature, then new questions can be posed.

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[78] Ibid., 276.

The church can be understood as part of many ecosystems that reciprocally benefit the church and community. Untethered to the standard forms of viewing the church, new perspectives can open for analysis and guidance. Congregations fixed in place are finally able to navigate their social environments in an effort to regain a viable and valued place in the community.

Review and Conclusions

In churches like Marengo United Methodist Church, I have witnessed the renewal of the church through the building of social ecosystems; and I am beginning to perceive hopeful signs at First United Methodist Church. The church is exploring new ways to collaborate with others. It is building relationships and partnerships with other people and organizations around shared social goals. With the steps into the community listed above, a change of congregational leadership, and new supportive staff, the church is beginning to reflect forms of boundary leadership. Hope is reemerging and an adventurous spirit is returning to the church. This, I believe, has the potential to lead the church into new boundary zones of discovery where First United Methodist Church may find its place in a transformative ecosystem, discovering a new identity and social purpose.

This hopeful process of building and joining ecosystems will need to continue at First United Methodist Church. My research is far from complete. The fate of the church is unknown and the results of my work in boundary leadership and ecosystem theory are indeterminant. The greatest benefits of ecosystem analysis and leadership are yet to be definitively observed. Hence, there is a need to apply more time and boundary leadership to continue the journey and assess the results of this study.

What can be positively asserted, however, is the value of joining James F. Moore's work on ecosystems with Gary Gunderson's ideas on boundary leadership. Moore's work on

ecosystems calls for a theory of leadership which is approximated by Gunderson's definition of boundary leadership. Conversely, Gunderson's ideas of boundary zones and leadership require a more coherent explanation of the process and product of these ideas. Ecosystem theory provides a clarifying conceptual framework for boundary leadership resulting in a useful analytic theory of the church and social ecosystems.

While certainly not the only valuable theory, it is a uniquely useful way to consider the church. It is not a theological or biblical approach. Ecosystem theory is silent on ecclesiology and polity. It does not address worship or liturgy. It does not ask or answer the most important questions concerning the nature and identity of the church, but it does help to assess and evaluate the relationship of the church to the community. It orients the church within its environment and challenges it to effectively engage the people, organizations, and institutions of the community. It provides a path out of social isolation, which so many churches find themselves, and suggests ways the church might both give and receive. To a congregation, such as First United Methodist Church, it offers the possibility of renewal and social restoration.

I consider ecosystem theory, therefore, to be worthy of further development. This paper has touched upon the potential of this "useful metaphor." Yet, I believe it possesses vast unrealized potential to elucidate the social characteristics of the church enabling congregations to navigate the ever-changing environments of their communities and cultures.

Appendix 1

Building a New Social Ecosystem

Unifying Social Purpose

1. Focus on a purpose that addresses a need or pain in the community.
2. This must be a purpose shared by a significant portion of the community, justifying the creation of an ecosystem.
3. It must be worthy of sustained attention and commitment by a network of ecosystem participants.

Complimentary Partnerships

1. Identify partners who can contribute to the attaining of the shared goal or purpose of the ecosystem.
2. Build a network of those partners specifically adapted to complement each other's contributions.
3. Leverage these relationships to achieve the unifying purpose of the partners and community.

Spirit of Collaboration

1. Build a connection between the unifying purpose and the network of partners.
2. Sustain their commitment by emphasizing the benefits they will enjoy by working together.
3. Dissuade partners from disruptive, competitive or controlling actions.

Coevolution of the Partners and System

1. Respond to the changing conditions between the partners of the system.
2. Respond to any changes in the goal or purpose of the ecosystem.
3. Evaluate the wider ecology in which the ecosystem exists.

Boundary Leaders and Institutions

1. Boundary Leadership is required to create and sustain any new ecosystem.
2. Care - Boundary leaders feel the pain of brokenness and perceive the opportunity to solve a problem.
3. Imagination – Boundary leaders are able to envision new possibilities and novel solutions to these problems.
4. Connectional Intelligence – Boundary leaders are able to build a network of relationships necessary to achieve imaginative visions.
5. Resilient – They are able to endure the opposition that is inevitable when challenging the status quo.

Appendix 2

Sunday Morning Questionnaire

As a part of Rev. Mowry's doctoral work, he needs some basic thoughts and impressions of members and friends of the congregation. Below are a few questions intended to judge your impressions of the church's relationship to the surrounding community of Palatine, IL. Please put your completed questionnaire in the box on the Lobby table. Thank you for your time!

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Marital Status: _____

Years Attending FUMC: _____

How connected and involved is FUMC in the Palatine community?

No Involvement ⟷ Extremely Involved

Explain:

Has FUMC's relationship to the Palatine community changed over time? If so, how?

How important is FUMC to the Palatine community?

How important is it for a church to be a highly valued part of the community?

Not Important ⟷ Essential

Explain:

Do you consider yourself an actual or potential Church leader?

Extra Credit Questions:

What do you think is happening to the church in the USA?

Why is this happening?

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