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Oneness:
The Liturgy of the Eucharist Inspiring Mission

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Doctor of Ministry

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Abstract

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Central to this final project is how the celebration of the Eucharist at the Lighthouse Church inspires participation in missional endeavors locally and around the world. The congregation frequently celebrates the Eucharist and is highly invested in missional efforts regionally, nationally, and internationally. There are two areas of missional focus that are explored in this project. The first includes discovering how the liturgy of the Eucharist both inspires and builds upon a robust missional framework for regional and international mission partnerships. The second area of focus is the discovery of how the liturgy of the Eucharist inspires the congregation of the Lighthouse Church to be more missionally involved in our local community.

Oneness: The Liturgy of the Eucharist Inspiring Mission

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Introduction

“By Your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.”¹ In the concluding prayers of the Great Thanksgiving, the congregation of Lighthouse United Methodist Church is reminded that the Eucharist is more than solely remembering the salvific work of Jesus Christ. It also serves as an inspiration for the congregation of the Lighthouse Church to be sent to our local community and world in mission.

Central to this final project is how the celebration of the Eucharist at the Lighthouse Church inspires participation in missional endeavors locally and around the world. The congregation frequently celebrates the Eucharist and is highly invested in missional efforts regionally, nationally, and internationally. There are two areas of missional focus that are explored in this project. The first includes discovering how the liturgy of the Eucharist both inspires and builds upon a robust missional framework for regional and international mission partnerships. The second area of focus is the discovery of how the liturgy of the Eucharist inspires the congregation of the Lighthouse Church to be more missionally involved in our local community.

In what follows, I will first situate the Lighthouse Church in its larger context (sec.1). Next, I turn to historical and theological insights that have informed the project and its revisioning of the Eucharist as a means for missional engagement (sec.2). Indeed, the meaning of the sacred meal in the early Church and as a part of the theology of John Wesley, father of the Methodist movement, indicates that this is not a revisioning at all, but rather a return to the roots of the Eucharistic meal. I then discuss how the connection between the Eucharist currently

¹ Neil M. Alexander, ed., *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 14.

inspires missional activity at the Lighthouse Church and ways for which it can in the future (sec.3).

Section I: Context of the Lighthouse United Methodist Church

The economic, political, religious, and social reasons that Boca Grande, Florida was established on Gasparilla Island are varied. The first known industry in the town of Boca Grande was commercial fishing. The island had numerous small fishing villages and docks. In 1890, phosphate rock was discovered in the areas surrounding Gasparilla Island and central Florida. Boca Grande was to become an industrious shipping port and an alternative to nearby Punta Gorda for the shipping of Phosphate. The railroad provided the capacity for phosphate to be shipped around the world and it also allowed wealthy executives a way to travel to the island for business and leisure.

A historic shift in the island population happened between the years of 2000 and 2012. During this time a large part of the southern end of the island was developed with luxury homes and condominiums. The Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce lists the 2012 population as 1705 households with 494 families. In 2000, the island population was 975 with 414 households with 289 families. The percentage of household growth from 2000 – 2012 was 83.6%. The percentage of population growth from 2000 – 2012 was 75.5%. In 2012 the ethnicity of Boca Grande was 93.84% white, 4.93% black, .47% Asian, 2.29% Hispanic, and .18% Native American. 61.4% of the population is 65 years old and older; therefore, revealing the main people group on the island are retirees. Additionally, three-fourths of the population is labeled as being seasonal therefore having additional homes elsewhere.²

² “Demographics,” Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce, last modified 2012, accessed January 10, 2018, <http://bocagrandechamber.net/our-community/demographics/>

The growing population has brought an influx of financial resources to the island community. The bridging of social and economic capital has created a cultural shift in the community as well as in the four island churches. The churches once provided a spiritual home to the working-class island residents. With the rise of the wealthy population, the churches are associations of the wealthy and reflect the income gap that has developed over time. The change in population has changed the social capital of the island. Green and Haines say: “Social capital can be considered as that which contributes to the development of other forms of community - human, financial, physical, political, cultural, and environmental.”³

With the bridging of social capital, financial capital, and the influx of an affluent population, the town has been transformed from a place where laborers and executives once worked together to a retirement and vacation community. Within the present community there is a wide income gap between the wealthy and the island working population.

The Lighthouse Church Congregation

The congregation of the Lighthouse Church reflects the transformed island population. The church has approximately 250 members and average attendance in the summer months is 75-100 and in the winter months 300-400. The worshipping congregation that represents these figures are persons who are both United Methodist and from varying other mainline denominations. One-third of the church membership are affiliate and associate members.⁴ The cultural bubble of the island and the church does not place high importance on denominational institutions. Rather, members and attendees are attracted to the church through social

³ Gary Paul Greene and Anna Haines, *Asset Building and Community Development*. (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 143.

⁴ *Affiliate* members are persons who have full membership in other Methodist bodies. *Associate* members are persons who have full membership in other denominations.

associations. The Lighthouse Church draws from a variety of denominational liturgical resources to enhance the worship of God for the diverse worshipping community.

The Lighthouse church currently is in partnership with 16 international and local missions. The mission statement of the church is “Receiving the Light, Being the Light, and Sharing the Light of Jesus Christ.”⁵ With the wealth of the church members and the island population as a whole, persons committed to the church are supportive of missions. Charitable donations are received throughout the year on an ongoing basis on behalf of the partnered missions from numerous individuals, the budget of the United Methodist Women, and the regular church budget. However, individual designated giving far outweighs the budgeted figures. Individuals have built schools and churches in various places throughout the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Found among the congregation are small associations of people who support various missions both through and outside of the church. The individuals also constitute Christian community often gathering with one another as friends for fellowship. This constructs a modern-day *koinonia* among members and constituents of the congregation.

Section II: Historical Background of the Eucharist and Missional Community

What signifies an authentic Eucharistic Missional community? To begin this discovery, I look beyond inherited institutional ecclesial and ecclesiastical traditions and at the practices of the early church. The first Christian gatherings took place in homes. In the home the scriptures were read, stories were told, encouragement and exhortation practiced, and meals were shared. It is among these early meals that the initial glimpses of New Testament Eucharistic practices are

⁵ “Missions,” Lighthouse United Methodist Church, last modified January 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://bgighthouseumc.com/serve/missions/>.

observed. Whereas someone set apart for the purposes and benefits of others performed institutional rituals in temple Judaism, the early Christian meal was an act of *koinonia*, the participation of all gathered sharing something in common. Though worship would have taken place in the temple, *koinonia* took place in homes. As Ben Witherington states:

It is interesting, however, that the worship is said to take place in the temple, but the fellowship and sharing in common, in the homes. This suggests a meal context for the early celebration of the Lord's Supper but perhaps not an ordinary early Jewish worship context, for the reference to the breaking of bread and prayer can be read to mean the normal things that happened at an early Jewish meal.⁶

Culturally relevant to the early church was fellowship meals among the likeminded. As the early church spread, these fellowship meals began to incorporate the Christian story. Older research on Eucharistic practices tends to be oriented solely in the event of the Last Supper and interpreted through the lenses of the Passover. This research is rich and has formed Eucharistic dialogue for centuries. Among the foci of these trends was the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal, symbolizing of the death of Jesus Christ, and taking on the form of the Passover Seder.

Also, a similar trend is that the practice of the Eucharist stemmed from the Galilean tradition of bread-breaking and that it formed the Pauline memorial rite of 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26.⁷ These traditional approaches have painted a picture of the Eucharist solely as a ritualistic act of Jewish origin and have formed the liturgy surrounding the act of the ritual. Though the passage in verses 23-26 clearly form the words of institution, the Apostle Paul also is noting that the *death* of Christ must be central to the meal. This also must be central to understanding the missional aspects of the meal. Richard Hays states:

⁶ Ben Witherington, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 31.

⁷ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-66. Bradshaw notes in detail Eucharistic theological origins from the past highlighting influential theological research in the field.

The proclamation of the Lord's death occurs not just in preaching that accompanies the meal; rather, the community's sharing in the broken bread and the outpoured wine is itself an act of proclamation, an enacted parable that figures forth the death of Jesus 'for us' and the community's common participation in the benefits of that death. The problem is not that they are failing to say the right words but that their enactment of the word is deficient: their self-serving actions obscure the meaning of the Supper so thoroughly that it no longer points to Christ's death.⁸

Therefore, Hays is stating that true Eucharistic community, influenced by I Corinthians 11: 23-26, is not defined solely by participating in the meal. Rather, it also includes the proclamation of the salvific work of Christ to those in and outside of the community. This alone is the foundation of mission and *oneness* in Eucharistic community.

Beyond the inherited ritual of the Jewish sect, Paul F. Bradshaw notes that there are two recent principle trends in the search for Eucharistic origins. The two approaches lend themselves to researching the fellowship meal practices of the early church within their social contexts.

Speaking of these trends, Bradshaw states:

Although some scholars continue to pursue variations of the dual origin approach, two other principle trends can be seen in more recent New Testament scholarship. One is to look at the Last Supper within the context of the significance of human meals in general and of the cultural background of Graeco-Roman practice in particular, and especially the pattern of the symposium, where drinking wine followed the meal. The other is to locate the roots of the Eucharist more broadly within the context of other meals in Jesus' life and not merely the Last Supper. This largely follows the trajectory established by redaction-criticism, taking seriously various layers of meaning that are within the New Testament, and the different ways that the individual New Testament writers describe those meals.⁹

The theme of gathering in homes for fellowship meals is a common thread in both areas of recent scholarship. In the Greco-Roman world, in the midst of Hellenization, it was the norm of the society to gather for fellowship meals and celebration. A typical evening would have a host,

⁸ Richard Hays, *Interpretation: First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 199-200.

⁹ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 68.

guests of honor, and servants attending to the gathering. Typically following the eating ritual drinking parties would take place and the celebration would continue.¹⁰

As more people confessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ, these fellowship meals became a crucial part of participating in Christ's story. Here, the purpose of the fellowship meal is redefined in the Christian ethos of participation. Christ participated in meals with others following his resurrection as is recorded in Luke 24: 30-32. After his ascension, the early believers confessed that Christ was still present among and within the community. Christ's presence was signified by bread and wine. In turn, the community celebrated Christ's presence among themselves.

Central to the new ideals of fellowship meals was the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Where once these meals were constituted of only like-minded people of similar societal and social status, in Christ these cultural barriers were broken down and redefined to be inclusive of all who professed Christ. Therefore, the fellowship meal inherited ideals and identities to that of the mind and example of Christ. Christ was brought into the center of the frequent tradition of fellowship meals. The presence of Christ within the community gathered fostered ongoing transformation which in turn established a process of growing in grace and mission. As Witherington states:

The Christian meal was to depict the radical leveling that the kerygma proclaimed – whoever would lead must take on the role of a servant, and all should be served equally. This social leveling was meant to make clear that there was true equality in the body of Christ. All were equal in the eyes of the Lord, and they should also be viewed that way by Christians, leading to equal hospitality towards all.¹¹

¹⁰Witherington, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper*. In the chapter, *The Table Entitled and the Table of the Lord*, he discusses in depth Paul's writing to the church in Corinth in a socio-rhetorical fashion. In passages from I Corinthians 10 and 11, he notes that Paul is combating many of the pagan customs of the fellowship meals as they relate to the newly formed Christian community.

¹¹ Witherington, *Making a Meal of It*, 60-61.

A transformation took place on both the individual and communal levels. For the individual, there was a social leveling that took place. Over time, as individuals began to further identify with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they served others and proclaimed the Gospel rather than to serve their own personal desires. This was an ongoing process of spiritual growth and discovery. Also, whereas the communal meals were of a tradition that existed to serve only a gathered select, the new gathering prompted equality and service to others, cultivating a transformation from selfishness to hospitality to those in need. Thus, there was a *oneness* in mission to be in service others.

Early Wesleyan Theological Convictions

Early Wesleyan theological convictions surrounding the Eucharist are found in the writings of John and Charles Wesley. Notable to John Wesley's theology of the Eucharist is Daniel Brevint's *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*. This work was so influential to Wesley that the content formed the preface to *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. In his monumental work Brevint declares:

The main intention of Christ was not here to propose a bare image of his passion once suffered, in order to a bare remembrance; but, over and above, to enrich this memorial with such an effectual and real presence of continuing atone-ment and strength, as may both evidently set forth Christ Himself crucified before our eyes, (Gal iii. 1,) and invite us to his sacrifice, not as done and gone many years since, but, as to expiating grace and mercy, still lasting, still new, still the same that it was when it was first offered for us.¹²

The above statement embodies a generalized central Eucharistic focus for Wesley: God is present at the table actively extending grace to communicants. This grace, which according to

¹² Daniel Brevint, *The Christian sacrament and sacrifice: by way of discourse, meditation, and prayer upon the nature, parts, and blessings, of the Holy Communion. Missale romanum; or, Depth and mystery of Roman mass: laid open and explained, for the use of both reformed and un-reformed Christians* (Oxford, J. Vincent; London, Hatchard and Son, 1847), 219 – 222.

Brevint, is *still lasting, still new, and still the same*. It is active in the conversion of sinners and the ongoing sanctification of the saints. Also, the table was a place of God's response to the personal longings of those seeking God. The Spirit, revealed in the hearts of the communicant and in the partaking of the meal itself, prompted an assuring experience of faith. As Charles Wesley penned:

In the Presence of the meanest Things
While all from Thee the Virtue springs
The most stupendous Works are wrought.¹³

The stupendous work that the early Methodists desired to experience was the inward work of the Holy Spirit that brought forth assurance of their faith. Thus, this stupendous work is inclusive of the totality of the life of God born into the souls of persons, therefore, making them disciples of Jesus Christ. For these pioneers of the movement they experienced the work of Jesus on the cross, pouring out himself for the sins of the world, and were humbled to receive this gift of grace. It was effective to assure them of their faith. Stevick explains:

While Wesley holds that God works through the bread and wine, he shows little interest in what may or may not happen to the elements in the Eucharistic meal. The bread and wine are essential conveyances of divine life, but the wonder is that they are so while remaining bread and wine (57:2. 7-8). Such transformation as does take place in the sacrament happens in the vital encounter between Christ and his people. Wesley asks, 'Come and change me Nature' (87: 7.3)¹⁴

Therefore, every occasion one received the sacrament it could be experienced as an opportunity to receive from God, to grow in grace, and to be assured of one's salvation. In the beloved hymn 'O the Depth of Love Divine' it is expressed that communion with God is conveyed by bread and wine:

¹³ John & Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 61:1 (Bristol: Farley, 1745), 41.

¹⁴ Daniel B. Stevick, *The Altar's Fire* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2004), 33. Stevick discovers his thoughts in the poetry of hymns 57 and 87. These hymns are a part of Part II of the collection and are entitled *As it is a Sign and a Means of Grace*.

O the depth of love divine, th'unfathomable grace!
 Who shall say how bread and wine God into us conveys!
 How the bread His flesh imparts, how the wine transmits His blood,
 Fills His faithful people's hearts with all the life of God!¹⁵

The *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* give a glimpse into the underlying theology of the early movement. These hymns are not only a poetic portrayal of a deep theology of the Eucharist. In addition, the hymns provide a scenic view of the cross – of Christ's real presence among them. Wesley's *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* also involves the systematic approach to one's personal experience of conversion, assurance, and celebration of final and eternal communion with God.

From Inward Assurance to Outward Mission: The United Methodist Great Thanksgiving

Thousands of years have passed since these early fellowship meals and hundreds since the early formation of Wesley's theology. However, the Christian church remains connected to the basic gestures and prayers of them. The United Methodist Book of Worship states:

The Thanksgiving and Communion, commonly called the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, is a Christian adaptation of Jewish worship at family meal tables - as Jesus and his disciples ate together during his preaching and teaching ministry, as Jesus transformed it when he instituted the Lord's Supper on the night before his death, and as his disciples experienced it in the breaking of bread with their risen Lord (Luke 24: 30-35; John 21:13).¹⁶

The United Methodist Great Thanksgiving also contains examples of Jesus' missional engagement among those whom he served: "He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners."¹⁷ The United Methodist Book of Worship contains twenty approved liturgies for use during worship services that celebrate Holy Communion. Within these liturgical texts one is prompted to remember the mission of God. In the Great Thanksgiving for Advent we read:

¹⁵ Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. 57:1 (Bristol: Farley, 1745), 44.

¹⁶Alexander, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

“Your own Son came among us as a servant, to be Emmanuel, your presence with us. He humbled himself in obedience to your will and freely accepted death on a cross.”¹⁸

In addition, in the United Methodist Membership vows new members vow to “faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.”¹⁹ In each of these areas of commitment there is a missional component. Therefore, the members of the Lighthouse Church congregation vow themselves to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church in ways that are missional. At the celebration of the Eucharist, a prayer is made emphasizing the missional orientation of Methodist worship.

The theological convictions for this research stem from the *oneness* prayer in the Great Thanksgiving: “By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.”²⁰ Dr. Ed Phillips provides context to when this prayer was added to the United Methodist Great Thanksgiving:

That became part of the truly official service of Word and Table by action of the 1988 General Conference that approved the *UM Hymnal* and the ritual it would contain. However, it was adopted at part of the unofficial, but recommended text, *The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper: An Alternative Text* (1972). It circulated around in various photocopied forms the year before that.²¹

The Christian community is to be one with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, is to be one with each other, and one engaging in mission and ministry to all the world. Numerous biblical references speak of unity. However, we must look at the totality of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to understand *oneness* with Christ. Philippians speaks to the character of Christ in his self-emptying:

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 93.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹ Ed Phillips, email message to author, August 15, 2017.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!²²

To be one with Christ is to have the same mindset of Christ. This is the theological reality to which we are called. We are to be humble servants who value others above ourselves. We are to look to the interests and needs of others and make them a priority. This requires ongoing self-emptying.

The Church is also to be one with each other in an authentic Christian community. For this theological conviction I look back to the earliest gatherings of Christians. These gatherings took place in homes where scripture was shared, stories told, and meals were shared. The early meals of the Eucharist were far different than the typical customs in our post-Constantinian era. Whereas we often experience Holy Communion by receiving a small consecrated piece of bread and a small cup of juice, the early Christians shared meals of *koinonia*. By bringing together what they had to offer, they were one with each other in care and fellowship.

Through authentic *koinonia* with one another we are sent from the table – or from the Eucharistic gathering – to be one in ministry to all the world. As we are fed the bread and the cup, so we are to feed the world with the same bread and same cup, ever becoming the hands, feet, and body of Christ. This is where the missional aspect of the Eucharistic liturgy arises. In an earlier paragraph of the United Methodist Great Thanksgiving we read these words: "He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners."²³ Throughout the liturgy, we are reminded not only of God's continuing sustaining power of God's people; but of Christ's incarnate ministry

²² Philippians 2:3-8 NRSV

²³ Alexander, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 37.

among the least of these. These words inspire those participating to recall the ministry of Christ, thus transforming the church to be sent from the table.

I center my thoughts on how congregants of the Lighthouse Church are spiritually formed for mission through regular participation in the Eucharist. Does missional spiritual formation flow from an understanding that *oneness* is something that is lived? The contextualization of the communion liturgy is a way this is accomplished.

Contextualization of the Communion Liturgy

Central to the celebration of the Eucharist at the Lighthouse Church is the use of the approved liturgies provided in the United Methodist Book of Worship. In the section entitled *An Order for Sunday Worship*, instructions are given to the one presiding over the meal:

As Jesus gave thanks over (blessed) the bread and cup, so do the pastor and people. This prayer is led by the pastor appointed to that congregation and authorized by the bishop to administer the sacraments there, or by some other ordained elder. The pastor stands behind the Lord's table, the people also standing. After an introductory dialogue between the pastor and people, the pastor gives thanks appropriate to the occasion, remembering God's acts of salvation and the institution of the Lord's Supper, and invokes the present work of the Holy Spirit, concluding with praise to the Trinity.²⁴

The Great Thanksgiving liturgies in the United Methodist Book of Worship correspond to the liturgical year. Each of these versions of the Great Thanksgiving contains the prayer: "By your spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet."²⁵ This missional prayer is one that is used in all seasons and during all celebrations of the Eucharist of the Lighthouse United Methodist Church.

²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

By contextualizing the Great Thanksgiving to respond to missional endeavors, the presider can help focus the congregation's attention on local missional needs on an ongoing basis. Being one in ministry to all the world is large in scope. Being keen on avenues that the congregation can be in ministry outside of the walls of the building, the prayer can be altered to include those avenues of ministry. This not only provides a practical way to share the missions of the local congregation, but it also evokes the imagination of leaving the table to be the hands, feet, and body of Christ as a Eucharistic missional community.

Missional Contextualization of the Great Thanksgiving

The weekend of August 26, 2017 Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas. As the news was reporting images of devastation, there were considerable calls from our local congregation about how we could help. Also, the Florida Annual Conference missions team were deliberating on the best way for the conference to respond. A challenge was issued by the Annual Conference for local churches to conduct a bucket brigade and fill flood relief buckets with needed supplies. In addition, hygiene kits were requested.

The Lighthouse Church took up this challenge on Sunday, September 3, 2017, and included the need in the Great Thanksgiving. The prayer of unity and mission was changed to embody the current need to respond to this natural phenomenon:

By your spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world – especially those who have been and will be affected in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Give us hearts for our brothers and sisters in Texas and help us to generously respond by providing flood relief buckets and hygiene kits. May we always respond generously in times of need, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.²⁶

²⁶ Matthew Williams, “The Great Thanksgiving” (Liturgy presented during worship on Sunday, September 3, 2017).

Following the celebration of the Eucharist, the chairperson of the missions committee shared the details of the bucket brigade project, connecting it with our congregation's reputation of being known as a people who put action with their prayers. Within the following week both funds were raised and supplies were purchased. Some of the congregation put together their own relief supplies. On September 10, following the morning worship service, the congregation remained to organize and ready the buckets and other supplies.

Not long after the landfall of Hurricane Harvey the State of Florida had our own emergency. Hurricane Irma headed directly through the state leaving a path of devastation in Central Florida. This occurred one week before World Communion Sunday. Nevertheless, our plans changed concerning the storm relief project for Texas. A call was issued by the Annual Conference to keep the flood buckets and hygiene kits in our local communities and to respond by giving them to designated relief centers. Also, a call was issued by our Bishop to receive funds designated for Hurricane Irma relief in the State of Florida. On World Communion Sunday during the communion liturgy, the *oneness* prayer was again placed into context:

By your spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world – especially those who are our neighbors and have been affected in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. Let us be the hands, feet, and body of Christ all over our state. Give us your grace to respond in generosity to be one in ministry with our sisters and brothers. May we always respond generously in times of need, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.²⁷

Over the next week a local mission team was formed who collected and delivered storm relief supplies to a distribution site in Alva, Florida. In addition, over 40,000 dollars was contributed

²⁷ Matthew Williams, "The Great Thanksgiving" (Liturgy presented during worship on Sunday, October 1, 2017).

for the special conference fund. Though different in form, the liturgy and practice of Holy Communion contributed to persons being inspired to become a part of missional endeavors to alleviate suffering following these devastating storms.

Section III: Missional Partnerships and the Local Missional Problem

Current Missional Partnerships

The Lighthouse Church currently has mission partnerships with numerous mission agencies locally and around the world. These include: Agape Flights, Caring Partners International, Charlotte County Homeless Coalition, Children First, ECHO, Florida United Methodist Children's Home, Food for the Poor, Habitat for Humanity, Harry Chapin Food Bank, Healing Art Missions, Hope International, Imagine No Malaria, Kids' Needs of Greater Englewood, Solve Maternity Homes, Twelve Churches Nicaragua, Your Missionary Outreach of the Dominican Republic, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Young Life, and ZOE Helps.²⁸

From time to time these ministries are included in the liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving. This calls the attention of the congregation that we are one with these ministries and those who lead and support them. This typically occurs when one or more of these ministries are being represented in a scheduled mission moment in Sunday services.

One of the problems of local missional outreach in Boca Grande is class differences. The island boasts having three exclusive membership-only clubs. Also, the island has numerous restaurants and businesses. The majority of the employees of these establishments are persons who do not live on Gasparilla Island or who are seasonal migrant workers.

²⁸ "Missions," Lighthouse United Methodist Church, last modified January 2017, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://bglighthouseumc.com/serve/missions/>.

The housing dormitories of some of the employees are vastly different than a typical home or condominium on the island. One block north of First Street and on the corner of Palm Avenue are two housing units for island employees. These housing units are hidden from the street with tall trees and shrubbery. Some of these house four employees to a single room who share one bathroom. The dorm buildings are a stark contrast compared to the multi-million-dollar homes that line Gasparilla Boulevard one block east. Considering the established island exclusive associations, these employees offer services to those who are members of the clubs, guests of members, and those who can afford to frequent them. In the limited time-frame I have been appointed to the Lighthouse Church, I have not encountered an island association that comprises both seasonal workers and the affluent community to develop a more holistic island context. This presents an opportunity for the Lighthouse Church to explore new ways of developing *koinonia*, mission, and *oneness* with those who are of a different socio-economic status.

In Block's understanding, the affluent islanders are possibly projecting the idea of a *lower class person* on the small population of seasonal workers viewing them in need of charity. This creates a sense of labeling and projection that perpetuates the class divide. Block vividly explains a different way of living if the labeling and projection would end:

If we took back this projection, we would stop denying that each of us plays a role in creating poverty - by our way of living, by our indifference, by our labeling them "poor" as if that is who they are, by our choice not to have them as neighbors and get to know them.²⁹

Persons of lower socioeconomic status have capacities that are unseen by the greater community. Those who work in the hospitality industry have great gifts of organization, hospitality, and teamwork. However, arriving at a social function guests see only the product of

²⁹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 45.

an event and not the people who have made it happen. The team of persons who provide lawn care at the Lighthouse Church has great gifts of beautification and gardening. However, when one arrives for worship, they see only the grounds and not the people who have cultivated them.

By labeling these persons they are pushed to the margins. Kretzmann and McKnight state:

One effect of these labels is that they keep many community people from seeing the gifts of people who have been labeled. The label often blinds us to the capacity of the people who are named. They appear to be useless. Therefore, these labeled people often get pushed to the edge of the community.³⁰

A practical example of this is the scheduling of religious services on the island. None of the four island congregations offer worship experiences that would allow the seasonal working population to attend. For example, following Sunday morning worship services, there are upscale Sunday brunches held at restaurants and the island beach clubs. The seasonal employees prepare these brunches as well as carrying out other job responsibilities to meet the needs of patrons. Such preparation must obviously take place *before* the brunch which means that such employees cannot attend worship services that take place at that time.

Also, none of the island congregations have on-site Bible studies, counseling opportunities, or recreational activities that include the sisters and brothers in Christ who work here seasonally. The congregations represent the higher socioeconomic status of the island. This is a small example of the income gap in the community. Correlative with this gap is a lack of understanding of the variety of capacities and giftedness of the island population as a whole.

In an interview with a leader of the Lighthouse Church, I posed the following question: “Has the church ever done anything to incorporate the local and seasonal island employees into the life and ministry of the church?” The leader responded: “Your predecessor said he was going

³⁰ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993), 27.

to do something with the Jamaicans but never followed through.”³¹ This brief example illumines Block’s writing on reinforcing self-interest and isolation:

Both institutions and active citizens are sincere and often effective in the pursuit of their own well-being, of matters that occur within their own boundaries. But no matter how effective they are in pursuing their interests, the community as a whole does not change, especially for those on the margin.³²

I have not heard anyone speak of hostility regarding the local and seasonal employees. However, the wealthy affluent residents seem to be indifferent to their existence. With intentions to discuss opportunities to be in mission and ministry with the local and seasonal employees, there has not been much traction. There is a general recognition of these persons, yet it seems that the Lighthouse Congregation is indifferent to whether or not ministry among and with them is a priority. Kathryn Tanner speaks of such indifference in *The Politics of God*:

Treatment is that compatible with respect for human beings as creatures of God must be more than a mere matter of attitude is that respect is to have any potential for criticizing institutional structures of oppression. It is not enough for my purposes here if the privileged recognize that the poor and powerless of their society are equal to them in worth as creatures of God while the oppressive character of their institutionalized relations with them remains unchanged.³³

On the surface, it is understood that the island clubs provide income, opportunity, and in some cases housing for the local and seasonal employees. Also, the Lighthouse Church can say that it is appreciative and supports both the employees and the institution of the clubs since the majority of the church members are also club members. However, to develop *oneness* with these sisters and brothers in Christ the church has to take the initiative to be in ministry with them. This will require ongoing energy, effort, and time as both the institution of the church and the institutions of the exclusive clubs have been in operation for many years. In Tanner’s words:

³¹ Personal Interview with Lay Leader, January 7, 2015.

³² Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 45.

³³ Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 170.

Oppressive social structures do not always deny minimum standards of well-being to those with little power in society. By definition, however, oppressive social relations do take away from such classes of persons their rights to free self-development. In varying manners and degrees, oppressive structures hem in the underclasses of society restricting their activities and choices for fulfilling employment and forcing them to stay in their place.³⁴

Boca Grande is known for being a place where history stands still. Therefore, a plan of long-range impact is needed to measure what sort of missional activity can be accomplished with the migrant employees and the institutional structures. The exclusive island associations, especially the churches, have the opportunity to incorporate the voices and lives of sisters and brothers in Christ whose work is integral to the prosperity of island life.

Signs of Hope

Each year the Florida Conference Cabinet of the United Methodist Church holds its Christmas Retreat at the Gasparilla Inn and Club. My wife and I join the cabinet to play music and lead Christmas carols. There is always a group of seasonal employees readying the private dining room for the cabinet's Christmas dinner. This past year, one of the employees approached me and said: "Her Pastor! Do you remember me?" I responded: "Vaguely, I think I've seen you at the Lighthouse Church." To which he responded: "Yes, I've been there and enjoyed it. I just can't make it that often." I then responded: "We are going to have church here tonight – I'd love for you to join us for some singing!" He replied: "That would be great!"

Within a matter of minutes this gentleman had recruited his associates to join him. As my wife and me rehearsed the music, we found ourselves with a small choir of persons carrying out their work while singing. During the dinner when the time came for us to sing carols together, the Bishop invited them to sing aloud with us and introduced them by name to the cabinet.

³⁴ Tanner, *The Politics of God*, 182.

Everyone had a marvelous time in this thin place. It seemed heaven met earth in a very organic and relational fashion. During these moments together, we were “one with each other.”³⁵ This was a meaningful illustration to me. It provided an example that this gentleman and his friends would joyfully engage. However, my wife and I were the only Eucharistically formed disciples from Lighthouse Church present. The sign of hope is that we encountered this impromptu celebration and were able to take our experience back to the congregation.

An additional sign of hope is the current momentum of the missions committee. In the January 2018 missions committee meeting innovative ideas were shared to help us discover our next steps. Each committee member had been inspired by the Eucharist in some way or another. Furthermore, the committee desires to become more oriented to cultivating *oneness* in ministry. Currently, the missions committee is comprised of silos of persons who have special interests in certain mission partnerships. For meetings, these silos of persons bring to the table what they have been doing as well as any current needs. Each of the silos has a champion for their missional focus. Each champion makes a report to the whole of the committee.

In the January meeting, the committee expressed the desire to see one half of the church budget go to missions. This would require a more centered approach for the church to be one in mission. The meeting continued with great enthusiasm and centered listening. We found ourselves in the midst of innovation and forward-thinking conversation. The committee studied the increase in missional giving in our local church over the past three years. This, combined with the increase in physical participation in mission projects, is leading the committee to reorient and innovate the way it operates. A large part of this reorientation is to be “one in ministry to all the world.”³⁶

³⁵ Alexander, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

In 2015, there were two mission trips internationally. In 2016 there were four mission trips internationally. In 2017 there were five mission trips internationally. In addition to international trips, church members are involved on a weekly basis with the local ministries of regional mission agencies. These local mission agencies are all located off of Gasparilla Island and the town of Boca Grande.

Though certain members contribute in support of the congregation's mission partnerships personally, the following is comprised of those who have given through the church: In 2014 the church gave \$79, 542.64, in 2015, \$106, 113.19, in 2016, \$309, 291.68. The percentage of these funds that were not designated were divided proportionally among all of the church's mission partnerships. In addition, 2015 was the first year that the church began celebrating the Eucharist on both the first and third Sunday's of the month with a full liturgy. It was also the first year that during our high seasons we offered mid-week services of the Eucharist and healing.

At the conclusion of the January meeting I drew an illustration on the smartboard. Representing the current committee structure, it showed a board table (the main table) surrounding by small tables (the silos), with a line drawn from each silo to the main table. In this current committee organization, the line to the main table represents the champion of a specific mission.

After we discussed our vision of an increased budget and *oneness*, I drew another illustration on the smartboard. This illustration represented an organizational possibility where the missions committee became one with each other. In this representation, a board table was drawn, but the small silos were not drawn. Rather, the small silos were redefined as many circles that were drawn upon the board table. Each circle overlapped representing the goal of more inter-dialogue and innovation concerning our missional partnership and projects. To conclude the

conversation, I asked the committee to imagine the table as Christ's table, and that we were one being sent from the table into our local community. We closed with the *oneness* prayer in the liturgy.

Conclusion

Measuring Short and Long-Term Impact

In thinking theologically about measurement and assessment, I center my thoughts on how congregants are spiritually formed for mission through regular participation in the Eucharist. This missional spiritual formation flows from understanding that *oneness* is something that is lived. The project has influenced our missions committee. It has proven to increase both awareness and funding for missional initiatives by contextualizing the liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving and following up with practical ways to be involved. However, the project has not reached the point to make an impact on how the congregation develops *oneness* and *koinonia* with the working population.

It is my chief desire that this ongoing project will impact people in ways that will enable the culture of the church to continue to change over time. For this reason, I desire to carefully monitor the long-term impact that it has on parishioners and not necessarily solely the immediate impact. Cahalan shares the following concerning impact:

Impact is a way of talking about how the project activities affect people, particularly the people who face the problem, need, question or opportunity. Project planners, in considering impact, must answer the following question: How will participants benefit from and be affected or changed by participation in the project?³⁷

To discover how the Eucharist inspires our congregants to be engaged in mission both

³⁷ Kathleen Cahalan, *Projects that Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations*. (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1989), loc. 442.

presently and in the future, I must develop a project plan that clearly measures impact on both individuals and the congregation as a whole. This plan must be adaptable to a changing and seasonal congregation. It will be important to measure the impact that we are having in our missional areas, through our liturgies, and in our celebrations of the Eucharist. Thus far, I have measured initial impact by sharing in conversations, interviewing congregants, and providing inspiration to our missions committee. A part of developing an ongoing project plan is to be attentive to concrete markers for change.

Concrete Markers for Change

Cahalan poses the question: "How does initial impact build a base for the next kind of desired change that is necessary for longer term and more ultimate kinds of change or benefits to accrue?"³⁸ The timing of this project, combined with the seasonal nature of our congregation, has allowed for initial impact. Cahalan goes on to say: "Initial impact refers to the immediate benefits or changes that accrue to participants, including initial changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, or behaviors."³⁹ The initial impact the project has had is that now some in the congregation are making the connection between praying the *oneness* prayer of the communion liturgy and imagining how we are collectively and practically living it out in our context.

How are we one in ministry to all the world? This has spurred conversations around the subject in our missions committee. Some of the responses are as follows:

- "I am paying more attention to what our church does in missions."
- "I now see a connection with communion in what I am doing with ECHO."
- "I will be more committed to Habitat this year than in years past."

³⁸ Cahalan, *Projects that Matter*, loc. 454.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 471.

- “I need to do more for others because of what Jesus did for me.”
- “This is more than just money, but money is our greatest contribution.”⁴⁰

Further conversations have included discussions of the communion liturgy itself, the connection with Jesus in ministry to the poor, and our call to be the hands, feet, and body of Jesus in the world today. I hope that over time the congregation will have a long-range impact not only on the missions that we serve, but that we will see the connection with our service to that of the service of Christ, specifically in the context of the Eucharist being the inspiration.

Moving forward with incorporating missional initiatives in the liturgy of the Eucharist ongoing follow-up with congregants will be required. Despite the seasonal nature of our congregation and the flux of attendance, I intend to convene a quarterly listening group within our missions committee that will review our Eucharistic experiences and the congregation’s missional responses to those experiences.

Two times per month the congregation both celebrates the Eucharist and has guests from mission organization who conduct sharing the light moments in our worship services. These moments have been shared on Sundays when the Eucharist was not celebrated. To further generate traction from the project focus that participation in the Eucharist inspires people to mission, I intend to move some of these sharing the light moments to Sundays when the Eucharist is celebrated. Also, on these given Sundays, the mission that is represented will be incorporated into the *oneness* prayer of the liturgy.

In the forthcoming and lived chapters of this project I am incorporating my theology of revelation. I define my theology of revelation as God’s unfolding and liberating story being told. It has been told from the God’s infinite beginning of time. It requires the openness of the heart

⁴⁰ Missions Committee Meeting, November 2017

and the quietness of the soul to hear and both digest the past chapters and the next chapters. I have begun to utilize this personal theology in my local context as God reveals next steps. Based on the initial impact considering how the Eucharist inspires the Lighthouse United Methodist Church to be in mission, God's liberating story is being told not only through the missional efforts of the church but through the expanding of our minds and actions as we pray the *oneness* prayer on an ongoing basis. Both now and in the future - O God: "Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world."⁴¹

⁴¹ Alexander, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 37.

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