MISSION STATEMENTS: A PRESCRIPTION FOR CLARIFYING
CONGREGATIONAL IDENTITY AND PURPOSE IN MEDIUM-SIZED CHURCHES

A PROJECT REPORT
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BY
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ABBREVIATIONS

ALC is American Lutheran Church

ELCA is Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

St. John’s is St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Montpelier, Ohio

ULCA is the United Lutheran Church in America

WEDCO is Williams County Economic Development Corporation
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research project focused on developing a process that would enable a medium-sized organization or church to get off the plateau where it currently finds itself functioning at the present time. Through the development of a mission statement, a church or any organization is challenged to focus on three areas of its purpose as a community. First, the researcher gathered information regarding the nature of mission statements, as well as the method other organizations have developed to revise their own mission statements. Second, a historical case study was completed to provide helpful insights regarding the background of the church. There were insights discovered regarding the direction the original founders of the organization had intended for its future. Third, the research identified core values through the use of selective interviews. Some of the latent desires and cherished convictions within the church or organization emerged that could suggest a direction for its future.

This research project focused on the researcher’s church, which is a medium-sized church. It currently has a well-oiled infrastructure that maintains the financial and property concerns of the community. There is some anxiety about the future existence of this church because of its location in a former railroad town that is currently economically challenged. There are no outreach or evangelism committees to foster a growth-driven church. The assumption of a mission statement, as described in this project, is that any organization must have a broader purpose for existing beyond its own survival and bottom line. The process of developing a mission statement enables the organization’s leaders to revisit its identity, purpose, traditional assumptions, history, and values.
This research project utilized biblical and theological foundations to develop its ideas regarding the church and discipleship. It is a study in pastoral theology. The researcher believes that theology is a *prescription* for a direction in which the church or any organization *should* pursue if it is to have a stable and hopeful future. Since change often comes at a slow incremental pace, a mission statement is a modest prescription that will challenge this Lutheran church, by identifying its congregational identity and purpose as a medium-sized church.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Context of the Problem

As one drives into Montpelier, Ohio, from the east end of town on State Route 107, he or she observes the “Welcome to Montpelier, Ohio” sign. This town, with a population of 4,299 persons, was originally a mill town operated off the St. Joseph River. It is located on the west end of town. The town was founded in 1845 as surveyors were developing boundaries for township geographical divisions that were the accepted sizes of communities of that time, before the advent of automobiles. The town’s name finds its origin from of the capital of a town in Vermont. This was the native home of one of the early residents, Dr. John Paul (Cooley 1995, 67).

Proceeding on State Route 107, there is an overpass that arches above a set of railroad tracks. It becomes apparent that railroads are a major part of Montpelier’s history. In fact, the local high school team’s name is the “Montpelier Locomotives.”

After crossing over the archway above the railroad tracks, I observe to the left side of the road, a small town version of an urban strip mall. Here there is a line of businesses that includes a hardware store, drug store, grocery store, video retailer, and small fast food submarine shop. A little further down the strip is located an automotive body repair shop, car wash, and small discount dollar store. These stores provide assurances that if I am ever stranded in Montpelier during a bad storm there are enough businesses available to meet my basic needs.
As I pass by older homes that seemed to be kept up as well as possible despite their age, I see the Williams County Fairgrounds located on the right side of the road. While Bryan, Ohio, the county seat (south of Montpelier, or about a twenty minute drive down nearby State Route 15) acquired the courthouse, it is rumored that Montpelier built the fairgrounds to solidify its identity within Williams County, Ohio. Montpelier lost its bid to become the county seat in 1850, despite its logical plea that this town is more centrally located within the county for transportation purposes (Cooley 1995, 68).

Continuing into the main section of town, there are rows of businesses on both sides of the street, usually with two stories, indicating that people live in rooms above the businesses. Montpelier is a small community like many other small towns in rural Midwest Ohio. It has a Chamber of Commerce office, fire and police station, town hall, furniture store, local carry out store, several insurance companies, a computer store, some pizza restaurants, other small businesses, and a second drug store, besides several gas stations.

Driving off the main street into the neighborhoods, I am confronted with the reality that Montpelier has seen better days. Older houses are located on streets with pavement that is apparently patched up frequently. This seems to be ever present on this south side of town. Actually, Central Avenue divides that which was once called “South Montpelier” (where the railroad industry once thrived), and Montpelier itself. One historical nickname was, “The town which was once two villages” (Cooley 1995, 67). The transient railroad workers once occupied the older homes during a more prosperous era of the Wabash railroad (later known as Norfolk & Southern), when it had a thriving passenger and commercial route from Detroit, Michigan, to nearby Butler, Indiana, and
went further to St. Louis, Missouri. This railroad provided convenient shipping access for local agricultural products, as well as manufactured commodities. From the 1880s until the 1971, Montpelier was a growing, thriving community with numerous newspapers, manufacturing facilities, and retail businesses. The Wabash Railroad was the dominant force in the lifeblood of this town’s economic prosperity for many years. However, the saying was, “As goes the Wabash, so goes Montpelier.” With the popularity of trucks and automobiles, twentieth century transportation took on other expanded highway systems, and this lead to the decline of the railroad industry in towns such as Montpelier. The town has been striving to diversify its economy with smaller industrial and high technology businesses to the present day (Cooley 1995, 70).

Driving throughout the neighborhood surrounding St. John’s Lutheran Church, a person is immediately impacted by the contrast of a beautiful, well-maintained, light red brick building, versus the rustic neighborhood surrounding it. I notice newer vans, trucks, and cars in the parking lot of St. John’s in contrast to the older, rusted vehicles (some on blocks) parked along the streets and in the driveways of the deteriorating houses surrounding the church building. This might imply that those who attend St. John’s are not the local neighborhood residents of this section of Montpelier. However, I later notice on the north side of town, and the extreme south side of town beyond another set of railroad tracks and overpass, nicer homes which are in fact, very well maintained. Also, there are newer houses located along the outskirts of Montpelier, beyond the corporate limits of town.

St. John’s is definitely one of the nicer buildings in Montpelier. It is a favorite choice for weddings for the person who drives by church buildings throughout the town.
Historically, it was known as the "German Lutheran Church" built in town around 1880 for $1,700 (Goodspeed 1882, 381). It has occupied this corner of Washington and Broad since its inception. In conversation with local historian Alan Benjamin (see Field Notes, Entry 15, September 22, 2000), I was informed that "quite frankly" St. John's has not been a major participant in community affairs in Montpelier. While some members make individual efforts to get involved with town concerns, St. John's is mostly known for the sausage sandwiches the men's group sells during the annual summer "Bean Days" events in town. St. John's is sort of a group unto itself, which is not known for any major outreach or community involvement in town affairs. Some members of St. John's affirm this observation, while others use this as an occasion to attack the historian's credibility (see Field Notes, Entry 15, September 22, 2000). This suggests some tension in terms of where St. John's fits into the larger picture of this community.

If I assume that the mission of every Christian church is to make known the gospel message of Jesus Christ to all peoples, then it prompts some troubling questions as to what is the exact mission of St. John's. In what specific direction is the church headed in its future? Does St. John's desire to be a part of the broader community that seeks to survive and prosper in ever changing times? How is St John's involved with the residents who live on both sides of the social economic spectrum? What is the future of St. John's within the community of Montpelier?

The focus of this project is to provide a prescription that would enable St. John's to follow a purposeful, focused direction as a community of faith, while maintaining its integrity as a traditionally confessional Lutheran church. Providing direction was a major request made of the pastor during the pastoral search committee's call process interview.
The development of a mission statement would be one modest, incremental step in providing direction for St. John's in Montpelier, Ohio.

Statement of Problem

In the absence of a mission statement, St. John's Lutheran Church lacks direction in planning for the long-term future of the church's ministry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide direction in planning for the future of St. John's Lutheran Church ministry by formulating a mission statement that guides the council in its goals and activities. This project will be to (1) develop a sermon series addressing the mission of St. John's Lutheran Church, (2) draft a mission statement, (3) suggest that church committees establish mission based annual goals that result in one new outcome per year. The hope and expectation is that members, lay leaders, and I, the researcher, will discover God's specific mission for St. John's Lutheran Church.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this project will be of a qualitative nature, specifically utilizing the approach of ethnography. Data will be gathered by interviewing parishioners, obtaining mission statements from other churches and organizations, and investigating the history of St. John's as it related to the intended ministry of its early leaders. Also, a personal diary that records observations made by the researcher will serve as a practical resource. The hope is to help "re-create the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts and folk knowledge of [this] group of people" (quoted in Merriam 1994, 14).
Researcher’s Relationship to St. John’s Lutheran Church

My relationship to St. John’s is that of the called minister of the Word and sacrament. Within the polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America denomination, the minister of the Word and sacrament is an ordained person with a bachelor’s level of college education as well as a master of divinity degree from a denominationally approved seminary. I perform the pastoral duties of St. John’s. These ministries include preaching and leading worship on Sundays as well as midweek Lenten season services. Teaching adult Sunday school class, adult inquirer’s class, and junior high catechism class are the main teaching ministries of the pastor. Other ministries include visitation and administering of home communions for members while in the hospital, in crisis, or homebound circumstances. There are also administrative, planning, committee, and community tasks that I actively participate in as the pastor of St. John’s.

As pastor, I also view myself as the church’s “practical theologian” (Ammerman 1998, 29-38). I observe assorted individual practices and patterns of behavior, listen to personal and congregational stories, as well as seek to identify narratives that have served to shape the various parishioners and ministries within the congregation. Practical theologians seek out how explicit theologies based on time honored Lutheran tradition are practiced within the life of the congregation. Equally important are those implicit theologies that the congregation may or may not be aware of in terms of their presence. Ammerman writes in this regard:

Implicit theologies are theologies or fragments of theologies that inform the congregation’s life but are not necessarily acknowledged or overtly expressed. They may be only half-formed and only present in certain sectors of a congregation. They may be present in a variety of places and activities in the congregation: in the stories of the congregation tells about itself, in styles of
leadership, and in the many ways it chooses to arrange its life. Implicit theologies sometimes manifest themselves in how the budget is allocated and who has power in the congregation. They almost certainly vary among the different groups, social and spiritual, that form under the auspices of the congregation. (Ammerman 1998, 31)

I am using my “Field Notes” as a means to observe the “explicit and implicit theologies” of St. John’s for the purposes of this project. Also, other research methodologies will be utilized as explained later in Chapter Four.

Research Questions

1. What is the current and future direction of St. John’s Lutheran Church?
2. What should be the content of the mission statement?
3. Who will carry out the direction of the mission statement?
4. What conditions will prompt St. John’s Lutheran Church to revisit its mission statement?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will attract the interest of church leaders who are serving medium-sized congregations currently experiencing stagnation, possibly a lack of direction. Those in similar situations could take the model used in this project and apply it to his or her ministry to discern God’s mission.

This study will be useful to leaders of congregations who find themselves on a plateau that is difficult to leave. Many smaller, financially strapped churches often have one primary objective—to survive. This drives their direction and quite often their mission. On the other side of the spectrum are program-based congregations with multiple staff-led ministries that provide a wide range of services for its members and
broader community. Multiple programs typically serve to challenge as well as drive the direction of these larger churches.

However, this project will focus on a congregation that is stuck in the middle. Certain church members do not relish returning to those days of financial struggle, as they attempted every year to meet the budget, pay the pastor, and recover from financial crisis while keeping the church operational. Yet, some members sometimes envy the larger church that displays outward appearances of vitality in numerical growth in both worship attendance and financial giving. The church this project addresses is one that has been comfortable with the status quo for a number of decades. On one hand, there is a desire to grow due to certain restlessness about the lack of numerical gain. This leads to anxiety about the future. Another related question is how much longer will older members be in a position to give as generously as they have doing in the past. On the other hand, there is resistance to change. There is a certain comfort with the status quo. Currently there still remains some sense of financial stability.

Another component of this study is that such churches often understandably refuse to jettison the past for an uncertain future. They cherish tradition, yet can be open to new and creative ways to maintain tradition while facing uncertainty of the future.

This project will help to inform leaders of those congregations which find themselves on a somewhat comfortable plateau that is secure for now, but they have people who worry as to what the future will bring. Typically, this is a result of lack of direction and planning for the future. Such congregations could be in small towns, suburbs, urban communities, and even mission congregations that have arrived and remain stuck in a comfortable stage in their history.
This study is significant because all churches and nonprofit organizations may one day find themselves in a comfortable stage in their history when they are reluctant to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zones due to past history and uncertainty regarding the future. They strive to keep their integrity and cherished tradition intact. St. John’s is one church that could benefit from this project.

This project is significant for St. John’s because it will suggest a direction in which the congregation might grow in anticipation of having a healthy, long-term future. St. John’s will be better equipped to take a modest step forward into the future of where God is leading this community of faith.

Assumptions and Limitations

1. It is assumed that the people of St. John’s Lutheran Church actually want to move beyond stagnation and survival.

2. It is assumed that ministry takes place not only within the church but also in the local community.

3. It is assumed that ministry is not only the work of the pastor but also the whole congregation.

4. The project may be limited in that the mission statement may not translate into concrete action for the future. The council leadership and congregational body may not adopt the mission statement as their own. This project is prescriptive in nature.

5. Evangelism, outreach, and witnessing are relatively new concepts for St. John’s Lutheran Church, with a long history of an ethnic German tradition. It may take a number of years before St. John’s Lutheran Church accepts newer ideas regarding outreach and evangelism.
Definition of Terms

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the national church denomination that St. John's holds membership in since a church merger in 1987.

Medium-Sized Church is a congregation that has an average weekly worship attendance of one hundred and fifty to over two hundred worshipers. Beyond this number of average weekly worshipers, another staff member is needed (Schaller 102, 1985).

Lutheran Confessions are the statements from the Lutheran Book of Concord.

St. John's Lutheran Church, or “St. John’s” is the congregation that I will focus upon to conduct this research study.

Organization of the Study

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF DATA

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Joyce L. Thornton and Constance M. Cherry have written a resource that will inform the “Biblical and Theological Foundations” portion of this project. Thornton developed a research model that she calls the “Formative Reflection Method” (Thornton 1996, 23-6). The first step in this method entails “Describing” the issue or situation that is to be addressed in the project. Second, the researcher “Discovers” the ways in which this reality is or is not “reflective of the image of Christ” (Thornton 1996, 26). A major portion of the “Discover” section is in utilizing the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” for doing theological reflection of the problem. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral includes the following sources: Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. The purpose of using this method is for the researcher to accept the “is” of his or her problem (Thornton 1996, 54). The other two sections of the “Formative Reflection Method” entails the third step of “Deliberating” on the problem identified, or making connections between various insights obtained, as well as drawing conclusions as it relates to the problem. The fourth step is “Determining” ways to make changes or commitments as a result of the “Deliberative” process (Thornton 1996, 26).

Chapter Two will utilize steps one and two of the “Formative Reflection Method.” A brief portion of this chapter will “Describe” the problem. The “Discover” portion will entail more detail so as to identify the “Biblical and Theological Foundation.” The “Deliberate” portion of the “Formative Reflection Method” will be
equivalent to "Chapter Five: Analysis of Data" in this project. The "Determine" portion of the "Formative Reflection Method" will be equivalent to "Chapter Six: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations."

"Describing" the problem entails a very brief summarization of the "Context" of the problem as stated in "Chapter One."

*Describing the Problem*

On the surface, St. John's is a very stable community of faith located near the downtown business district in Montpelier, Ohio. The church is one of the flagship architectural structures in the community. The church council places daily operations as a very high priority. All year, the council does an impeccable job on maintenance and improvements on this highly visible pleasant looking church building.

A second sign of stability is seen in the well-oiled administrative machinery of the church council. The council president acts as a chief executive officer of St. John's. Each committee faithfully carries out its assigned task. The pastor operates in an advisory and consultant capacity. St. John's essentially operates an efficient administrative body to maintain the status quo while the pastor provides spiritual nurture for the congregation.

The annual cycle of ministry is another sign of stability at St. John's. Following the liturgical lectionary cycle, St. John's has its annual Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter events. Worship and Sunday school for all ages operates year round. Vacation Bible School occurs in some capacity. There are three choirs plus a Christmas cantata choir at St. John's. The women's groups are very well organized. There are two men's
groups. A summer softball team is quickly organized to play in the local church league. Despite all of the above signs of stability, signs of stagnation are also present.

Worship attendance has been slowly in decline at St. John’s. During the past three years, the average Sunday worship attendance as reported to the denomination has slipped from the one hundred and eighties area down to the one hundred and sixties.

A second sign of stagnation is the fact that the St. John’s church building is located in an older neighborhood with older rental housing. Many members of St. John’s do not live in the immediate neighborhood of the church building, due to declining property values.

Third, as indicated in cottage meetings that were organized by the council president and attended by the new pastor (the researcher), there is a feeling of being stuck on a plateau. During the cottage meetings that met in various members’ homes, there was a reoccurring concern that the congregation as a whole seems to be comfortable. The congregation is so comfortable that it remains in a rut. There has been no recent major crisis to move it into action. The previous pastoral vacancy lasted about ten months. While many members wish to maintain the status quo, there is also a desire for growth. St. John’s does not plan for a long-term future. With the stability of the church also lays a latent anxiety about its future. There is a feeling by some people of being “stuck” in the current comfort zone. On one hand, many of the people of St. John’s wish to pursue new ideas and experiment with new ministries. There is a desire by some people to see change and growth. That is they wish to “move on” after the twenty-three years of tenure of the previous pastor. There are also some signs that certain members wish to see St. John’s move in a direction that will result in growth in some manner, as well as a vision for the
future. On the other hand, not too many people wish to make any further time commitments to ministry than in times past. They cherish the stability of an established mainline Lutheran church. Inquiries regarding the direction of St. John’s only result in blank facial stares as people shrug their shoulders. This suggests another sign of lack of direction. Many people have grown accustomed to the status quo for over twenty-three years. While there are signs of stability at St. John’s, there are other signs of stagnation that pose a potential threat to the long-term future ministry of this congregation.

*Discovering Biblical and Theological Foundations Related to the Problem*

The theological method used in this section will be an application of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as outlined in Thornton (1996, 50-68). The quadrilateral is divided as follows: Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. Next, there will be a section on personal theological reflection.

**Scripture**

“Luther’s Small Catechism” (Tappert 1959, 348) makes reference to Matthew 28:19. This text is located in the broader pericope of the *Revised Common Lectionary* of Matthew 28:16-20. (Note: The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible will be used unless otherwise stated.) The text read as follows:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:16-20)
This text is widely used within the Lutheran church tradition as a supporting text related to the doctrines on baptism and the Holy Trinity (Tappert 1959, 348, 437, 489). It is a core scriptural passage that has been taught in many Lutheran church confirmation classes. Baptism begins life as a Lutheran Christian. Therefore, it is an appropriate passage for a Lutheran congregation to explore. It examines the mission and life of the church.

The method of biblical study used in this portion will be that of narrative criticism as described in the book by Mark Allen Powell (Powell 1990, 1-10). The study will be divided into the following categories:

1. Events in the Text.
2. Characters in the Text.
4. Overall Interpretation of the Text.

*Events in the Text*

This text is Jesus’ concluding words to his disciples. It occurs after his resurrection, which is recorded earlier in Matthew 28:1-10. Matthew records a sequence of events of the Roman guards who witnessed the occurrences surrounding the resurrection. They were bribed by the chief priests to remain silent. After rising from the grave, Jesus instructs the women Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” to “go tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt. 28:1,10).

Upon arrival to the unnamed mountain, the eleven remaining disciples (minus, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, Matt. 27:56) meet Jesus for the
first time since his arrest. During his arrest, all of the disciples deserted him (Matt. 26:56). While it is uncertain as to whether there were other disciples present besides the eleven, Lenski believes it is reasonable to assume that at least five hundred other followers were also present at this event (Lenski 1943, 1167). Smith and Hill believe that Jesus' audience was the entire church or community of faith at that time (Smith 1989, 336; Hill 1972, 360). These authors cite Matthew 5:1-2, Jesus teaching his disciples as well as to the crowds who also listened to him.

In his Gospel, Matthew reports that "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted" (Matt. 28:17). Specifically, those who worshiped him, prostrated themselves in his presence. This affirms Jesus' deity (Lenski 1943, 1168). While the text indicates that "some doubted," it is unclear whether this was one of the eleven, or the larger groups of followers who doubted Jesus' resurrection. Regarding the doubters, Lenski believes that they were later ashamed and repented (Lenski 1943, 1169). Other commentators believe that these doubters are part of that group of disciples who have "little faith." But this amount of faith is still sufficient to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in Matthew's Gospel. Those who have "little faith" are also mentioned in Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31 and 16:8 (Kingsbury 1986, 135-45; Powell 1998, 82; Schweizer 1975, 529; Smith 1989, 336).

Jesus later affirms his authority as being given by God over "in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). In Matthew 28:19 Jesus uses imperative verbs of "Go (poruenthentes), making disciples (mathetes) of all nations (ethnoi), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is done by teaching the nations all that Jesus has commanded his followers to do. Jesus says, "And remember I
am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). It is reasonable to conclude that there is a connection of this affirmation of Christ’s presence with that of the birth of the Messiah in Matthew 1:18, 23 with reference to Jesus being the “Emmanuel” or “God with us,” as spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 7:14). This fulfills a promise that God will never leave his people. Jesus’ pledge to be with his disciples until “the end of the age,” fulfills the promise made by God in the Old Testament biblical era of Isaiah (Lenski 1943, 52-3; Schweizer 1975, 536; Smith 1989, 34). This is significant because the call of the disciples becomes the call of the entire church (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Kingsbury 1986, 130).

The text then ends with no mention of “ascension” in Matthew’s Gospel. Smith (1989, 340-1) and Hill (1972, 362) do suggest that the risen Jesus resides as a mysterious presence with his church until the final enthronement “to the end of the age,” (Matt. 28:20). Lenski (1943, 1181) and Schweizer (1975, 536) both believe that Jesus is enthroned in Heaven, and imparts his “Holy Spirit” upon his church. Further discussion in this area points to deeper theological issues related to doctrine of the Holy Trinity that is beyond the scope of this writing.

Characters in the Text

Jesus is a central character in this text, as well as the entire book of Matthew. His genealogy is reported in Matthew 1. Among other ancestors, he is related to King David of Israel (1 Samuel 17). For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah who succeeds King David of Israel (Kingsbury 1986, 45-9). He is the Messiah (Matt. 2:18) who was foretold by the prophet Isaiah as the “Emmanuel, which means God with us.” (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). He
is the beloved Son of God whom the Spirit descended upon while being baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13). Jesus is the primary antagonist in Matthew’s Gospel who repudiates Israel’s religious leaders, and proceeds to teach, preach, and heal (Kingsbury 1986, 59-62). In Matthew, Jesus delivers the correct interpretation of the Old Testament that he believed had been misinterpreted by Pharisees and Jewish leaders of the days (Kingsbury 1989, 63). He is the great teacher who delivered five great sermons similar to those of Moses in the Old Testament in Matthew 5-7; 10; 13; 18:24-5 (Powell 1998, 62, 66). He often uses parables to make his point (Matt. 13:24; 18:10-4, 23-35; 20:1-16).

As a result of escalated conflict that resulted in irreconcilable differences, Jesus was arrested, suffered a death by crucifixion, but later was resurrected as recorded in Matthew 26:47-28:20 (Kingsbury 1989, 77-103). Jesus is the “Messiah” (or Christ) whom his disciple Peter identified as being the “Son of the Living God” (Matt.16:16). He would have to undergo suffering, be killed at the hands of the elders and chief priests of the temple, and on the third day later be raised (Matt. 6:13-23). Jesus would say that, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). He is the unique Son of God in whom God forms a new community of faith designated as “my church” (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Kingsbury 1989, 130). Essentially, Jesus is the central character in the New Testament book of Matthew. It is important to observe that the disciples and the church are both called to follow the example of this Jesus (Matt. 10:24-6).
The Disciples

As mentioned earlier, there is some disagreement as to whether Jesus is addressing exclusively now the remaining eleven disciples, or a greater quantity of followers from five hundred followers up to possibly thousands of people who comprise the entire church. This section will focus on the eleven whom Jesus called. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus calls his disciples in dyads. They are called to leave behind their former lifestyle and follow Jesus by giving him their total allegiance. This group is designated as “disciples” before Jesus’ death and resurrection, but afterwards identified as “the church.” Elsewhere in the New Testament, they are also referred to as “the Way” (Acts 9:2), “Christians” (Acts 11:26), “believers” (Acts 5:14), and “the body of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Specifically, the twelve disciples include: “Simon (called Peter), Andrew his brother, as well as John and James, sons of Zebedee; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot the one who betrayed him” (Matt. 10:2-4). They are given authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness (Matt. 10:1). They are called to be “fishers of people” (Matt. 4:19). They are to initially go to the lost house of Israel (before the resurrection) and proclaim the good news that “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 10:7). They are to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8). Those who follow Jesus are to be “the salt of the earth,” (Matt. 5:13), “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14), overcome the “Gates of Hades” (Matt. 16:18), and practice a lifestyle that entails a higher
level of righteousness than the general population of the unbelieving people of the time (Matt. 5:19-20; Powell 1989, 83).

In Matthew’s gospel, despite the instruction received and special powers given to them, they remain people of “little faith” (Matt. 6:36; 8:26; 14:21; 16:8; 17:20). This is in contrast to the centurion and Canaanite woman who both have great faith, but prior to the death and resurrection event are not called to be part of the inner circle of disciples. So Jesus does work with those people who have “little faith” (Powell 1998, 81). It is these disciples of little faith who abandoned Jesus at his arrest who are called to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The essence of being a disciple still entails a form of discipleship, which means serving and suffering. The disciples resist this definition of discipleship. This made them more akin to Satan than God. But despite this little faith, Christ calls them to carry on the mission of the church, and live an ethic of greater righteousness (Kingsbury 1986, 140, 145).

This is significant because Jesus calls Christians to carry out the mission of God’s church, despite the “little faith” they may have after receiving instruction and empowerment from Jesus as the “unique Son of God” (Powell, 1989, 83).

Setting in the Text

The events of this text occur on “the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.” in Galilee (Matt. 28:16). Those scholars consulted agree that the exact name of the mountain is uncertain. Though Smith believes that it is not unreasonable to consider it the
same mountain where the “Sermon on the Mount” was delivered in Matthew 5-7 (Smith 1989, 336).

*Overall Interpretation of the Text*

Jesus commanded his followers to make other disciples of all nations through baptizing and teaching as he had modeled for them throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew’s view of discipleship finds its roots in the Old Testament Hebrew word *lamud*, which is the process of learning that reveals the will of God as one obeys the words found in the Torah (sacred Scriptures) of Israel (Colin Brown 1975, 483). For Matthew, discipleship is not merely a voluntary association, but a decisive lifetime calling of unconditional sacrifice under a new covenant, where one never completes the training to be called “Master” or “Rabbi” (Matt. 5:18; 10:37; 13:8). A disciple is called to service related to the coming of Christ’s kingdom, which may entail danger, suffering, and possibly death and an uncertain future (Matt. 10:24; 16:15). This call to service is part of following behind Jesus (Matt. 8:20). The disciple cannot expect any better treatment than the master. This means the disciples might even be accused of being in league with Beelzebub (Matt. 10:24).

Jesus’ disciples often misunderstood this idea until the post resurrection account surrounding this text. The *mathetes* in Matthew are simply not the learners or *hoi dodeka*, but the entire people of God (Brown 1975, 489). All Christians are called to respond to their salvation in Jesus as the Christ through a lifetime of service to extend God’s kingdom (Brown 1975, 487-9). Christians should not be surprised that this will entail risks, uncertainty, discomfort, and possible suffering, as Jesus also experienced in his
lifetime example for his church. This suggests that Christians must also venture beyond the safe, familiar confines of the church building to further the kingdom of Jesus the Christ.

Tradition

There is very little history within the Lutheran Book of Concord to support the idea of mission outreach as it relates to developing a mission statement. The earlier cited Matthew 28:16-20 verses are less than helpful. The authors of the (Lutheran) Book of Concord used this text to support their views on baptismal regeneration, or baptism as a means of salvation. Also, this text is used to support the Lutheran doctrinal views on infant baptism (Tappert 1959, 436-46).

“The Formula of Concord” provides incremental assistance as it relates to the mission of the church. In the subsection entitled “The Solid Declaration” it states:

All who would be saved must hear this preaching, of the preaching and the hearing of God’s Word are the Holy Spirit’s instrument in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and achieve...Through this means (namely, the preaching and the hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts and draws man, so that through the preaching of the law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel the gracious forgiveness of sin in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this is introduced into the heart. (Tappert 1959, 531)

This portion of the tradition affirms the necessity of hearing the Word being preached for purposes of conversion. However, it is also used to repudiate the followers of Ulrich Zwingli with regards to human free will. The Formula of Concord argues as a position of a single predestination (Tappert 1959, 20-1). As the Word is preached, it is
totally the work of the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of people. Nevertheless, the message still needs to be preached to the unconverted people. This portion of tradition does establish the need to preach the Word to the unchurched.

Loren Mead provides useful information as it relates to all mainline churches (Lutheran included) as they attempt to carry out a mission in the present time era. Mead argues that modern mainline churches have inherited what he calls a "Christendom Paradigm." The assumption is that being a good national citizen is identical to being a good Christian. The church and empire (or nation) are one and the same. The mission frontier is in a distant foreign country. The geographic boundaries of the church are easily defined, publically recognized, secure, and honored by all civic-minded people. All good Christians act as secular civic-minded citizens, but within the walls of the church. They place money into the offering, possibly help out in the church with their surplus time, and allow the clergy to control the majority of the ministry. Clergy serve as "chaplains" who provide pastoral care to all who belong to the local congregation.

The implied if not stated mission of the local congregation is to maintain a sense of closeness and unity among one another as a common witness to the larger community. Again, "mission" is carried on in a far off place in "pagan lands." Christians are called to be patriotic, law abiding citizens who come together to worship every Sunday in unity and harmony. This era of "Christendom" began around 313 A.D., and has rapidly deteriorated since the early 1960s in America (Mead 1991, 13-27).

On numerous occasions one can hear the laments of the loss of this time era in the older adult Sunday school class at St. John's. Some members recall that time era when they could hardly build a bigger church building fast enough to accommodate the
increasing amount of worshipers attending church. A purposeful outreach strategy was unnecessary. The mission field was in another country. Mead points out that the new mission frontier is now located immediately outside the walls of the mainline church buildings. Coming to grips with this mission reality is one area that many people at St. John’s continue to struggle with, both individually and corporately. This points to one reason for the purpose of this project.

Experience

Kennon Callahan is correct when he says, “The day of the churched culture is over. The day of the mission field has come” (Callahan 1990, 13). Callahan proceeds to argue that the church still operates as if the broader American society is a “churched” culture. However, the church must view itself as a “mission outpost” if it is to reach the unchurched in the current time era (Callahan 1990, 28-34). One only needs to gaze outside of the windows of St. John’s to observe that the immediate neighborhood surrounding the church building itself contains many unchurched, broken and needy families. Within the broader culture, local church or “Christendom” values no longer occupy the once prominent place they once did in the 1940s and 50s.

This researcher’s experience confirms Callahan’s observation that most mainline church members view themselves as “friendly.” But the fact is that those who say this are the ones who remain in a given church. Those who experience the church as “unfriendly” no longer attend, hence are unavailable to voice their opinions. Older mainline church members and their leaders are so ingrained with familiar patterns of church organization and leadership styles that it is very difficult to change. While the rewards for such
behavior patterns are diminishing with time, Christians naturally gravitate toward the
"familiar and habitual." This often leads to church members reflecting back to the early
years of the "churched" culture. They recall these as times of peaceful existence and
security. The focal point of ministry concentrates much of its energy and efforts on
matters related to inside the church building itself. Christians fantasize about possibly
returning to these days of yesteryear (Callahan 1990, 13-21).

Callahan counsels Christians to "be at peace." The loss of numbers is an example
of God's intervention. God is pointing many mainline churches to the reality that the
mission field is located immediately outside the doors of the church building. The church
must now see itself as a "mission outpost" rather than a "parish" with recognizably secure
territory or "turf."

Callahan suggests in times past the place to do mission was within the church
building. But in these days, as the church views itself as a "mission outpost," the place to
do ministry is out in the world, which is outside of the church building. He invites
mainline Christian church leaders of local congregations to view themselves as God's
missionaries to an unchurched culture, rather than a "caste system" of professional clergy
and laity (Callahan 1990, 34). In my personal experience, Callahan's insights are
accurate. Developing a mission statement is one incremental step toward becoming the
"mission post" type of a congregation that Callahan envisions for mainline churches in
the future.

While I remain ambivalent about the modern church growth movement, one of its
pioneers has a valid point, which I believe Callahan and other more traditional authors
could hold in common agreement. In the “Preface” of Donald McGavran’s,

*Understanding Church Growth*, C. Peter Wagner writes:

The theological issue suggests that the central purpose of missions was to be seen as God’s will that lost men and women be found, reconciled to himself, and brought into responsible membership in Christian churches. Evangelism was seen not just as proclaiming the gospel whether or not something happened, but as making disciples for the Master. (McGavran 1970, ix)

The suggestion is made that simply getting people into the building may not be enough in an environment when the church views itself as a mission outpost according to Callahan (1990, 3-11). Discipleship is a component of the Christian journey. However, I would to hasten say that salvation is a free gift as demonstrated in our baptism. Discipleship is the journey we take as Christians while we desire to grow or move onto the next step of our journey of faith.

Reason

In his book entitled, *Welcoming the Stranger*, Patrick Keifert cites Genesis 18 as an example of faithful godly persons (Abraham and Sarah) extending hospitality. They welcomed three men who were strangers. Abraham and Sarah immediately made these strange men feel as if they were intimately a part of their family through the preparation and serving of a meal with the family. The reader learns that in fact these strangers are messengers from God who announced that this older couple would give birth to a son (Gen. 18:10). Keifert’s point is that as we welcome the stranger to our sacred places, we are also welcoming God (1992, 63).

This is significant for Lutherans because our history has proven repeatedly that whenever we welcome strangers to our places of worship (and communion table), we
have often placed restrictive, conditional demands upon newcomers before they can participate within our family events (Keifert 1992, 36). Many Lutheran church worship and community practices are based on centuries of northern European tradition, which may not be familiar to those who would seek out some level of ministry from local Lutheran churches. According to Keifert, this history of placing such demands on strangers is not true to the biblical witness in passages such as Genesis 18. Therefore, Keifert believes that churches need to be more purposeful in developing hospitality and outreach ministries to those who are unfamiliar with our traditions (Keifert 1992, 109-16). As time marches on, there are more strangers in local civic communities than traditional Lutherans.

Traditionally, when major social change occurs, Lutheran liturgical renewal movements have sought to reproduce previous times in church history, when the atmosphere seemed more stable. For instance, in the 1840s while America was facing uncertainty in terms of its future destiny and the popular religion was an (emotional) American Revivalism, the “Red Book” liturgical renewal era emerged. Based on the Oxford and Cambridge movements in Europe, the assumption was that the European Middle Ages was an idyllic time of true Christianity. This era included gothic architecture in church buildings, establishment of church hierarchical structures, the recovery of clergy vestments, ecclesiastical arts (e.g. stained glass windows), and “red” worship books where the worshipers meticulously followed the rubrics. This also established the idea of “holy space” within American churches that was restricted to clergy and worship leaders. Many mainline churches still maintain their gothic architectural structural buildings. This is seen in the current use of altars, lecterns,
chancel areas, communion rails, higher level pulpits, and the pipe organ as the primary musical instrument. Worship entailed a strong sense of individual piety in one’s private space.

The “Green Book” era was another period of liturgical renewal. This was in response to the Industrial Revolution and the First World War. Identifying the fourth century of early Christianity as the idyllic time, this movement viewed Christians as a permanent minority. They sought to draw distinctions between the church community and the public at large. The image of the church was the close tight-knit community of God. Church was to be a place where strangers were no longer welcomed without close examination. While laity took a more active role in church leadership, the self-consciousness of one’s baptism and confirmation were underscored more than ever. The congregation was viewed as one’s corporate personality. Strangers were not welcomed unless they conformed to the local church’s image of a community member.

The “Yellow Book” era was short-lived era of the 1960s. This movement basically sought to restore the experiences one had while in summer camp, college campus ministries, or retreat settings. There was the use of guitars as musical instruments, paperback songbooks, and non-traditional songs to replace cherished church hymns. The movement died rapidly as it was based on the nostalgia of the 1960s (Keifert 1992, 41-50).

Keifert believes that these liturgical renewal movements were attempts to infuse traditions from previous centuries in response to a crisis related to change within the church and the culture that surrounded it. This suggests a pattern where Lutherans have responded to change by attempting to recover older traditions, rather than being open to
what God would have for us in the future. Therefore, many Lutheran churches do not know how to address change in any other manner than to revisit our past and attempt to reproduce what we view as more idyllic times (Keifert 1992, 50-3).

At St. John’s, it could be observed that many people look back to the 1940s through early 1960s as the idyllic times, which many people yearn to restore. This was a time of church growth, cultural acceptance of Christianity, and large families who maintained membership loyalty. Rather than making attempts to “welcome the strangers” as Keifert describes, there is the temptation to merely send the pastor out to bring back the inactive members. There is no attempt to do outreach ministry beyond this idyllic dream from the past. This is another reason for St. John’s Church to develop a mission statement in order to have a future as a community of Christ. The methodology for developing this mission statement will be the subject of chapter four. The next chapter will be a literature review of areas related to church mission and vision statements.

*Personal Theological Reflection*

Jurgen Moltmann locates one core value, which informs my own theology since my earlier seminary years (1975, 65-77). Moltmann argues that one must maintain a tension between the glorious resurrection event of Jesus and the crucifixion event. Moltmann’s fear is that the church seeks much self glorification than what is deserved by placing too much emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, while neglecting the very real presence of the crucifixion or the “cross.” This translates into the church measuring its ministry numerically, rather than faithfulness and solidarity with those who are
suffering and facing crises, which leads to death in many forms. To see God’s work through suffering, decline, and death is a “theology of the cross.”

In Matthew 27:23-44, Jesus is crucified after being betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who was one of his disciples (Matt. 26:14-6; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:17-24). When Jesus cried out on the cross, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46), I believe God really did forsake Jesus. This was not a rhetorical phrase to suggest that Jesus merely felt abandoned. I believe God really did abandon Jesus on that cross. God turned his back on Jesus, and he had to die before he could be raised to new life.

This idea of a “theology of the cross” finds its roots in Martin Luther’s “Heidelberg Disputation” in 1518 (other biblical passages include: Ps. 22; Isa. 42:1-4; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Humans cannot know God through wisdom, knowledge, or seeking God. Humans are fallen creatures similar to a bad fruit tree. To attempt to use human wisdom to seek out God is like attempting to pick more bad fruit from the same bad fruit tree (Forde 1997, 23-49). Another metaphor is that humans are seriously addicted to sin. Like alcoholics, we are powerless over sin. We are dead like corpses to sin, as Luther puts it (Forde 1997, 55). To try to overcome sin is like an alcoholic doing so on good intentions. This will at best make us into a “dry drunk.” Nothing short of a radical intervention will stop our addiction to sin. Thus, we have the intervention of the cross of Jesus the Christ. This is the first instance of God’s attack on human sin (Forde 1997, 1). “The one who deserves to be called theologian is one who sees God only through the suffering and the cross” (Althaus 1966, 25). Althaus goes onto to say:
Luther's theology of the cross means that the cross conceals God and thus marks the end of all speculation about God on the part of self-confident reason. The cross is the symbol of judgment over man [and woman] and thus marks the end of all achieving of fellowship with God on the part of the self-confident moralistic man. The cross makes itself available only to experience; more accurately: only to the suffering of God prepared by him for us through and with Christ. (Althaus 1997, 28)

Where do we know God? We know God in the cross. Where is God amidst human suffering and pain? God is there within the suffering and pain in a mysterious way through the Christ of the cross. God is not only identifying with human suffering (Forde, 1997, 86), but God is in fact revealing himself through the death and pain, so genuine new life can emerge (through the resurrection). Hence, the resurrection is not the old life revived, but a genuinely new life after death.

Again, Forde illustrates this point by suggesting that an alcoholic needs intervention from the outside, and must die to his or her old alcoholic lifestyle in order to have new life in the world of serenity (Forde 1997, 17). The experience of the cross is an example of humans “bottoming out” before they realize that their pious work of preparation only gets them deeper into sin. Again, God is known in the death, pain, and destruction of that which is fallen on this earth. Out of this emerges new life. To try to avoid or skim rapidly through this reality is what Luther called a “theology of glory.” (Forde 1997, 60-102)

North American theologian Douglas John Hall has cited the implications of this for the modern mainline church for a number of decades. I have been an avid reader of Hall, and much of what he writes informs my views of the kingdom of God. Hall believes that as mainline churches see signs of decay, they should see this as God's hand at work in process. Rather than avoiding the darkness, they need to embrace it, and see God’s
light in this darkness. Rather than only seeing negative results in terms of declining numbers, financial giving, and less influence in the society, Hall believes that God is behind the disestablishment of the mainline churches for purposes of preparing us for new life. This is light in this time of darkness (Hall 1976, 149-52).

Hall believes attempts by the modern conservative church movements to define Christianity by numerical growth in terms of church attendance and financial giving are futile efforts to revive what he calls the “Constantinian era.” This was a time around the fourth century A.D., when the Roman emperor Constantine established Christianity as the official state religion (Hall 1989, 200-7, 332-3). Hall presents such efforts as bordering on being even demonic at times, as he identifies past imperial military attempts to impose Christianity on other nations, which resulted in bloodshed. At best, the Constantinian church always seeks to justify its own existence by validating the popular culture of the times. In North America, this is what is known as the “American dream” of material prosperity. Again, Hall rejects this as “theology of glory,” and believes it is idolatrous. It will lead to decline. Mainline churches that once championed the American middle class Christians are feeling the painful results of declines in their own numbers (Hall 1989, 336-342; 1996, 150-1).

The implications of this theology for mainline churches such as St. John’s in Montpelier, Ohio is that the older prosperous days of the Wabash Railroad are gone. The abundance and prosperity that accompanied such a time era are fleeting. Furthermore, to expect the church to return to those times when financial and numeric prosperity were the norm of the day (as it was also for in all churches at one time) is futile. Rather than cursing the darkness, Christians should embrace it as God revealing himself in these
times of uncertainty. Furthermore, maybe God is behind the decline of the older order, so a new community of faith can emerge. Hall calls this a “discipleship community” (Hall 1996, 91-2). This type of discipleship community proclaims the Jesus of the New Testament as a countercultural way of life, though Hall does not specify exactly what he means by a countercultural Christian life. I believe that each church must discern its unique expression of discipleship within the local context where it does ministry.

While in the context of the community of St. John’s, I have felt the pressure similar to Jesus during the procession into Jerusalem as reported in Matthew 21:1-11. He is being hailed as the “Son of David” (Matt. 21: 9). This implies that the crowds expect him to restore a previous time era (as reported in 2 Samuel) when Israel was both an economic and politically strong nation. King David produced the numerical results, which made his country great for that time era. The crowds in Matthew 21 expect Jesus to be a similar political leader. Jesus’ idea, on the other hand, is that the Messiah “must undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matt. 16:21). Peter, his disciple did not wish to hear this prophecy. Jesus rebukes Peter’s refusal to be likened to this as Peter being allied with Satan on this point (Matt. 16:23).

As a pastor, I believe that quite often some congregation members are like the crowds hailing Jesus as he rides through the street of Jerusalem. They have high expectations of numerical growth and restoration of former times of glory (and prosperity). Clergy who do not perform on this level are deemed to be less than effective. My vision of the kingdom of God is that God meets Christians in their times of darkness, and quite often is behind such times of despair. Rather than seeing this as evil, one should
see it as good in that God is destroying the old in order to bring forth something new. A plant has its season, and then it dies so a new plant can emerge and give new life. But one must embrace the reality of the darkness first. To cite Hall:

Discipleship of Jesus Christ means following him into the world, farther and farther, deeper and deeper into the heart of its darkness. A discipleship that functions to shield human beings from the reality of their human condition, that makes it possible for them to live on some lane of ‘tranquil self-righteousness’ (Ellul) above pain of history, that cushions every shock of ‘non-being’ (Tillich) and enables people to maintain a splendid equilibrium in the face of all events: such is not discipleship of the crucified one. (Hall 1996, 157-8)

Hall later refers to the Matthew 28:16-20 Great Commission passage to suggest that the church must go into the world to proclaim the message of Jesus (Hall 1996, 158). This may entail some self-sacrifice and facing some very dark times ahead in life. To witness means demonstrating through words and actions that which God has done in the lives of Christians in terms of a saving faith to those people who do not deserve such grace (as we all are undeserving of such grace). This witness does not seek to dominate or obtain more self-control (Hall 1997, 159-60).

I believe the church needs to explore new and creative ways to become a discipleship community for Christ as the Great Commission suggests in Matthew 28. When Jesus commissioned the disciples, he pointed them to a new global community participation that was unlike the nation of Israel in times past. Though many people with different expectations of a Messiah did not like this, Jesus still pressed on with his mission. In this final chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, he commands other Christians also to make disciples of nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Also, they are to teach others to obey all that Jesus has taught us (Matt. 28:16-20). For St. John’s, this suggests that one can still embrace and bear witness to the
traditional Trinitarian theology, which is confessed in the creeds. Teaching converts God’s Word, which is contained in Scripture, is another key component to this passage. This also is a cherished part of the Lutheran tradition as well as the ministries at St. John’s.

The kingdom of God looks like a discipleship community that strives to proclaim Christ’s saving love in both word and action. This entails living a countercultural lifestyle in the world (and often a church) that seeks to measure the worth of humans in terms of numerical criterion. It suggests that possibly, a qualitative growth in terms of personal Christian faith may be a direction for the future St. John’s rather than an exclusive measurement in terms of quantitative growth. How one determines the exact nature of the qualities of this discipleship can be determined in the development of a mission statement. A mission statement is the desired outcome of this project.

Notes

1 Lutherans believe that baptism is a sacrament, or means of grace. Any person who is baptized becomes a Christian. This does include baptism as an infant. This teaching is described in more detail in the “Large Catechism” portion of the Lutheran confessions (Tappert 1959, 436-46).
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

Introduction

Churches, like profit-oriented corporations in America, are struggling with the issues surrounding the development of mission statements. A mission statement is a compass that guides an organization in planning for its future. In order for the Christian church to engage in the enterprise of challenging itself toward discovering a proactive direction, it must pursue a mission for the purposes of having a promising future. I believe if the church intends to make its presence known to the public at large, it can learn from other organizations that are developing mission statements. This literature review is an effort to highlight the mission statements of secular corporations, church growth authors, the ELCA, and other ELCA congregations that point to a hopeful future.

This literature review is divided into nine sections. First, the new trend in corporate life is that companies must now exist for more reasons than merely making money. Second, simply having a corporate logo or advertising slogan is not enough to convey the fundamental identity of the company to the public at large. Third, there is a difference between a corporate vision and mission statement. Fourth, corporate mission statements must contain the core values and beliefs of the company. Fifth, there are both advantages and disadvantages in having a mission statement. Sixth, there are selected citations and comments from modern church growth literature regarding mission statements. Seventh, materials related to mission statements from the ELCA website are
cited. Eighth, there are observations about mission statements from other ELCA churches. Finally, there is a section that identifies various themes in selected mission statements from ELCA congregations.

*More Than Just Making Money*

Twenty-five years ago, railroad magnate William Vanderbilt said the mission of American corporations is to make money for its stockholders. Much has changed since then. While a company's basic purpose is making a profit, it is expected to respond to a variety of other demands. "A company is now responsible to its stakeholders rather than just its shareholders. And increasingly, its competitiveness depends upon its ability to be part of the solution to societal needs" (Miller 1995). Essentially, the public expects companies to behave ethically. Public citizens, employees, and consumers are stakeholders in a given corporation. A mission statement is a tool that is used to remind a company of this current reality (Miller 1995).

This reality of an ethical responsibility became apparent in the 1970s. It was during this time period that the government agencies responded to public outcry related to irresponsible corporate behavior in areas such as pollution and unsafe working conditions. Newly formed agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Consumer Product Safety Commission, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration created new laws that reached into every facet of corporate life. These regulations often cost much money, time, and resources to insure public safety and societal concerns (Miller 1995). It was in this time period that many companies earned poor reputations for producing shoddy goods while damaging the environment (Miller
1995; Smith 1996). This forced some companies to divert many of their precious assets to react to the local public outcry and policy.

Therefore, companies had to adopt a posture of “corporate citizenship” for the purpose of developing proactive programs as a means of being part of the solution, rather than the suspected cause of societal problems. “Doing societal good is not mutually exclusive to making a profit” (Smith 1995). This is the posture that many modern corporations are encouraged to adopt if they wish to obtain a broad local governmental and consumer support. Such corporate behavior is easily monitored with the use of the global economy and galloping Internet communications (Cullen 1999).

“Mission statements have become staples of American corporate culture” (Cullen 1995). They reveal what a company does and how it does it. Mission statements reveal that core values drive the company. Corporations must be prepared to answer to environmental legal policies that are linked to them or their predecessors. Again, a mission statement provides a tool by which companies can be proactive in their efforts to convince the public, consumers, and stockholders of their concern for both societal needs and profit. Many business schools, such as the University of Kansas, are now offering ethics classes to students. One aspect of these classes includes the development of corporate missions statements (Cullen 1999).

If modern corporate America perceives a need to serve those societal concerns beyond their own self-interests, how much more concerned should the church be with regard to transforming those within the community around them for the purposes of advancing Jesus Christ’s kingdom? Possibly there are insights that churches can learn from modern corporations as related to addressing the societal good through the
development of mission statements. St. John’s Church in Montpelier, Ohio is one such organization that could benefit from such information as described in current periodical literature.

More Than a Logo or Slogan

Mission statements can become easily confused with corporate logos and advertising slogans (Graham 1999; Allen 2000). A logo is part of a broader communications strategy that reveals only one aspect of the organizational identity. A slogan is also part of the wider campaign that contains easy-to-remember phrases. Such phrases are usually very general slogans such as: “To solve unresolved problems,” “Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen,” “We are a diverse entertainment enterprise” or “To make people happy” (Graham 1999).

A mission statement is a brief explanation of what an organization does. It answers the questions: Who are we?, Why do we exist?, and What do we do? The intent is to explain the company’s reason for being. Quite often mission statements define whom they serve (patients, customers, clients, students). They identify the products that the organization produces. Sometimes they describe a geographic locality of the given company operation. An example of such a mission statement for a secondary military school reads, “...to provide Cadets, from throughout the nation, with the opportunity to grow spiritually, morally, intellectually and physically in a structured environment” (Graham 1999; Garrett 2000). Meanwhile, logos and slogans are parts of communications strategies designed to create an image and attract attention from the outside world in hopes of their patronage. A mission statement describes what an organization values and why it exists. The two must not be confused (Graham 1999; Garrett 2000).
Churches such as St. John’s have quite often existed on a logo (such as Martin Luther’s coat of arms symbol), and slogans of various types. Such slogans could include, “...to worship God,” “...to preach Jesus” or “...serving Christ and community for over 100 years.” While such slogans are good communications strategies, they do not reveal the core values of why the church exists. Just as corporate America has made this discovery, it is also a wake-up call for churches such St. John’s if they desire to have an effective future into the twenty-first century.

There is a Difference Between Vision and Mission Statements

There has been some confusion distinguishing the difference between a vision and mission statement. Some articles categorize them both under a broad category of “that vision thing” (Celaschi 1995). So what are the differences, as well as exact relationships, between a vision and mission statement?

A vision statement is a detailed projection of where the organization wants to be in the distant future, in possibly ten to twenty years. It is a linear view of the future (Cox 1996). A vision statement is a highly lucid story of the organization's preferred future. It is a descriptive story of the desired future in action. A vision is a story that people can readily picture or imagine in their minds. A vision statement takes the company's philosophies, ideologies, and founder’s dreams, and puts them into a narrative that describes a future that is more attractive than the present. For instance, a telecommunication company might have a vision statement that pictures itself as being the world's premier provider of full-service communications for people at work, at home or on the road. It wishes to be the leading competitor in its industry and set the standards for value and quality that other companies must meet in order to be effective (Sunoo
Effective vision statements describe a world in which the organization wants to be part of in the future. A vision statement "casts the company forward" into a future that is different for the present (Pritchett 1999). A vision statement is to be distinguished from a mission statement.

A mission statement describes who the company is and what it does. Effective mission statements define what business the organization is in, its beliefs, and how daily operations should be conducted (Levin 2000). Mission statements articulate what a company does operationally to reach its goals for the future. It is a "map to the high road" (Celaschi 1995). It sorts out the company’s core competencies (Cox 1996). Mission statements should articulate the principles that will guide the organization to grow and advance into the desired future (Sunoo 1996). The mission statement describes what an organization does regardless of how the future changes (Levin 2000). Typically corporate mission statements answer questions such as: What are our customers needs?, What are our products or service? and How do we provide these products and service? Yet, it must be stated simply enough so that anyone within the organization can repeat the statement (Cox 1996). Mission statements can serve to help an organization to focus on what is being done to arrive toward its future as described in its vision.

Here are some examples of mission statements. A software company began its mission statement with, "Caring and daring when it comes to improving customer communications, we’re not afraid to break the rules." An executive of a business called "Household International” says its mission statement begins with, “We add value, not just numbers.” Chicago’s Fourth Presbyterian Church starts its mission statement with, “We are a light in the city, reflecting the inclusive love of God.” All of the above are examples
of organizations describing what they do in order to arrive at the desired future they envision for all of the stakeholders whom they serve (Cox 1996). A vision is narrative of the desired future of the organization. A mission statement describes what the organization does all of the time, regardless of what happens in the future.

If organizations such as St. John’s wish to have an effective future into the twenty-first century, current literature for corporate America provides a road map. This process entails considering what visions or narratives a church might have in mind for its future, and why they plan to get there. The latter is the mission statement and will be the focus for the research in this project.

Concerning Core Values and Beliefs

Core values and beliefs are the foundation for both mission and vision. The core values reflected in a mission statement serve to integrate how people think within the organization, as well as what they do in daily practice. Without such core values, there is no way to link the organization’s focus to personal energy. Core values and beliefs serve as an anchor in the company’s mission statement. This also serves to define the company as a good “corporate citizen.” This means the organization exists for more reasons than simply making a profit. The organization now has a strong sense of integrity and purpose that can serve the public at large while establishing a positive reputation in their market (Williams 1996; Fanous-Samaan 2000; Kopp 2000). Expression of core values also helps to inform customers and the public at large how a given organization differs from its competitors. If the mission statement is short and concise, then the values expressed within the mission statement are more readily incorporated into daily planning and
activities for all people who are affiliated with the organization (Williams 1996; Kopp 2000).

When a company considers the integration of core values within their mission statement, one writer suggests three steps (Zang 2000). First, as a company identifies its core values and beliefs, they need to be specific as to what certain words really mean. For instance what does the company exactly mean when they want to provide “good service,” or they value “integrity?” Second, how do these values relate to their customers, suppliers and employees? Is this simply a set of values and beliefs held only by upper management, or is everybody within the organization aware of them? This begins with front office and ends at the shipping dock. Third, how do these core values and beliefs distinguish the organization from their competitors and other corporate players within the marketplace? If these types of questions can be dealt with in a precise manner within a mission statement, then it can serve a powerful tool with numerous applications (Zang 2000).

A good mission statement uses key words to express its core values to convey the company’s identity and articulate its purpose and focus of direction. Customers, suppliers, competitors and the public will be aware of this mission. Such core values and beliefs within a mission statement can even serve as a trademark that enhances the company’s name and reputation within the marketplace. Two examples of this are L.L. Bean and Eddie Bauer. L.L. Bean has a personal belief that “duck hunters should have dry feet.” If any boot leaks, not only does the customer get his or her money back, but L.L. Bean will recall the entire product line back. The company believes this is their obligation to the public at large in order to maintain the L.L. Bean name, integrity, and reputation within the marketplace. Eddie Bauer holds the genuine belief that if a customer
is dissatisfied with its clothing for any reason, he or she should not keep it. This includes simply buying the wrong size! Eddie Bauer has taken back ten year old jackets as a way of proving how seriously it values their customers and products (Williams 1996).

Both of the above examples illustrate how core values and beliefs inform a mission statement. These core values drive the entire organization. Hence, the L. L. Bean and Eddie Bauer names set the standards for quality within their market. Application of the ideas stated above can be useful to congregations such as St. John’s as it considers how the congregation wishes to make an impact within its local community through the development of a mission statement. Developing a mission statement is the intended focus and outcome of this project.

Advantages and Disadvantages of a Mission Statement

Pearce and David conducted a current classic work on the topic of mission statements in 1987. Their intent was to find links between the performance of Fortune 500 companies and their missions as stated in the respective mission statements. Their findings presented enough empirical evidence to support the notion that higher performing firms have comparatively more comprehensive mission statements than lower performing companies. Second, corporate philosophy, self-concept, and public image are especially important components to include in a mission statement. Third, mission statements do provide a realistic portrayal as to what occurs within the company (O’ Gorman and Doran 1999). These are advantages of having an organizational mission statement.

Another well-known study of mission statements was done in the area of public agencies, in this case the Michigan Public Schools system. The focus of this study was to
discover linkages between the style of mission statements and subsequent agency performance. The study concluded that merely having a mission statement in and of itself does not improve performance among the staff and students at the given public school. However, if a clear, focused, activist tone is present within a mission statement (such as "We will teach students to think critically. . ."), there are measurable positive performance results as opposed to a more general passive tone. An example of the latter is, “We will encourage self esteem among students” (Weiss 1999).

There was another substantial study performed in the Canadian public hospital system. After much meticulous analysis of wording, styles, and focus of mission statements as compared to agency performance, this led the researchers to two conclusions. First, a mission statement cannot replace the quality and performance of the staff and management of the given agency. If the mission statement is not reflected in the performance of the agency, then the statement is a “pious platitude.” Second, there must be very careful deliberate attention in formulating the organization’s mission statement in terms of clarity, focus, words, and measurable results. Also, without some idea of the organization’s direction as articulated in a mission statement, there is risk of conflict due to conflicting visions existing between leaders, employees, customers, and vendors. These conclusions are recurring themes in much of the current articles regarding mission statements (Bart 1999; Weiss 1999; Lovelace 1998; Haden 2000; Reim and Rich 2000; Urology Times 2000; O’ Gorman and Doran 1999).

It is a generally accepted idea within current literature that mission statements can provide a window into the organization’s purpose and direction (Weiss 1999). They can serve as the “cultural glue” that keeps the company focused on the future. However, the
value of the mission statement has been challenged. Some writers reiterate a concern for effective leadership, and sound formal organizational structure. They argue more urgent priorities should include: sound fiscal management, increase in sales volume, well-planned operations procedures, customer service, and monitoring quality control. They say that time spent in the development of a mission statement subtracts from the time better spent on all of the above (O’ Gorman and Doran 1999). Other concerns include the possibility that mission statements that are too general and have limited use. For instance, one such statement is, “We love our customers, we love our shareholders, we love our employees.” Such general statements have little or no effect in the daily operations of the company because they are disconnected from the true capabilities of the firm. This position argues that without sound leadership, a mission statement cannot replace effective management and fiscal growth. The harshest critique of mission statements is that absent a good internal corporate operations structure, they have minimal effect on the organization’s future direction (O’ Gorman and Doran, 1999).

A summary of the disadvantages of corporate mission statements is threefold. If they are worded poorly, ineffectiveness is a result. Second, placing too much weight on their importance over operations, sales, and profit could subtract from the time efforts better spent on production in various areas of the organization. Third, if they do not reflect the organization’s true beliefs, core values, and efforts, mission statements are reduced to the level of slogans, banners, buzzwords, and wall plaques (O’ Gorman and Doran 1999).

Having a poor mission statement is not beyond repair. Initially, Key Bank began its mission statement with, “. . .to be the best bank in town.” This was ineffective. So it
revised it to, "beat US Bank." As time and the markets changed, Key Bank had to change its mission statement with, "beat Cashmere Valley Bank." It became an actionable, definable statement in which every employee could easily articulate.

Examples of effective mission statements still abound. FedEx delivery service began its enterprise with the statement of, "absolutely, positively overnight." Ford Motor Company began its empire with the statement, "We will democratize the automobile." Wal-Mart's mission statement in the 1990s was, "Become a $125 billion company by 2000." It became a $166 billion company (Hadden 2000)! All of the above are simple, measurable statements which have proven to be successful.

Mission statements will not replace a sound organizational structure. If poorly written they can be an ineffective use of time. However, the process of developing a mission statement is valuable in itself. It is for this reason that a congregation such as St. John's could benefit from the process of developing a mission statement. Like Key Bank, it may have to revise the mission statement in the future. The focus of this project is to challenge St. John's Church to engage in the process of developing a mission statement.

Selected Citations and Comments Related to Modern Church Growth Literature

Church growth authors such as George Barna seem to be in agreement with the popular secular literature reviews cited above regarding the distinction between vision and mission.

The mission statement is a definition of the key ministry objectives of the church. The vision statement is a clarification of the specific direction and activities the church will pursue toward making a true ministry impact. (Barna 1992, 38)

Barna also agrees with the idea that vision is "specific, detailed, distinctive and unique to a given church." The vision essentially provides a long-term direction for the given
church, as well as empowers people for service along with facilitating productivity. The vision statement is strategic in nature, while the mission statement is philosophical in nature. A vision statement “puts feet” on the mission of the church, while also providing details on how the church will influence or impact the world in which it wishes to do ministry. Mission statements, however, describe in a sentence or two what a given congregation does in terms of ongoing ministry. It is a definition of the congregation’s ministry. The mission statement enables a person to feel that the church is ministry minded (Barna 1992, 38).

Popular Church Growth Authors

Popular Christian literature has many church growth authors with assorted theories regarding mission and related topics. I will highlight a select few of such authors.

Donald McGavran

One of the pioneers of the modern church growth movement who strived to make an impact on the world through new and creative mission is Donald McGavran. For McGavran, the mission of the church is to multiply congregations. As a missionary in southern Asia, McGavran believes that the task of the church is to “multiply churches in increasing numbers of receptive peoples of all six continents” (McGavran 1970, 40). He is critical of traditional churches that are comfortable with dogmatic tradition and are content with slow growth processes (McGavran 1970, 43-65, 121). Holding a strong belief in conversion theology, McGavran observed that it was the laity in southern Asia who actually spread the word of Christ to other friends and family members. This resulted in conversions to Christianity (McGavran 1970, 73).
McGavran is better known for what he calls the “homogeneous unit church.” This is a “cluster of congregations of one denomination which is growing in a given homogeneous unit” (McGavran 1970, 71). Essentially, McGavran observed that citizens of India who remain in the same caste would readily come together in communities of worship with members of that same caste (or group). People who hold similar views on life and share the same personal backgrounds and goals will generally gather together to do various activities together. This social dynamic includes worship. In India, one does not mix one caste (or class of people) with another and realize numerical growth in the community.

A more recent application as it applies to St. John’s might be similar to developing communities of persons from Germany who share a similar history and dreams for the future. These German Americans are more likely to multiply into various groups based on their location, rather than developing communities made up of different peoples from diverse backgrounds and perspectives on life. McGavran’s view might be extended to suggesting that one does not try to develop communities of faith compiled of Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, African-Americans, and Italian Americans within the same community of faith. McGavran’s principle would suggest one might organize communities of faith utilizing similar ethnic backgrounds as an organizing principle.

At one time St. John’s was indeed an ethnic German community that served to attract other recent immigrants from Europe. So, McGavran’s “homogenous unit church” is actually older than his own discovery of such a phenomenon in southern Asia in the twentieth century. Multiplying the number of congregations by attracting persons from
similar backgrounds and worldviews into separate worship communities was
McGavran’s program. One might observe that various ethnic religious groups did this
upon their arrival to America since the nation’s inception (a historical case study of St.
John’s Germanic roots will be addressed elsewhere in this project).

Another example of such a pattern of growth might be in observing modern
“megachurches,” growing in number and size in thriving suburban areas outside of major
U.S. cities. To apply McGavran’s principle would be to observe that upwardly mobile,
white, middle class professionals who have moved to suburban areas around major cities
would gather together as a “homogeneous unit church” to worship. Such gatherings
would provide opportunities to be in fellowship with families of similar background and
interest. Similar thriving communities may not be present in low-income urban
neighborhoods with various racial groups or in poorer rural areas that also have transient
populations.

McGavran’s “homogeneous unit principle” has its limitations in application in
communities where ethnic heritage has long disappeared. These towns and
neighborhoods have people of diverse backgrounds who move into the community with
varying degrees of economic resources. If we are to be faithful to the Great Commission
to “Go make disciples of all nations (ethnoi). . .” (Matthew 28:19), then a church’s
mission statement and broader vision must consider the reality that diverse peoples exist
within a given small community. The challenge is to work toward accepting diverse
views, backgrounds, and ideas so the church may move forward with its mission. Hence,
a mission statement could reflect the reality that various views of ministry and discipleship
do exist within the same community of faith. Regardless of ethnic or socio-economic
backgrounds in church, mission statements are still needed to describe what a congregation does in terms of ongoing ministry (Barna 1992, 38-9).

George Barna

I have observed two approaches within the modern church growth movement in styles of developing mission statements. The first style finds its roots and gravitates around the leaders and his or her vision for the church. George Barna is one of many modern church growth leaders who believes the church's vision begins with the leader's sincere, prayerful search for God's direction. Knowing oneself and what God is telling the leader is the basic birth of the vision (Barna 1992, 80-94). Barna believes that mission is incomplete without a strong sense of vision. (Barna 1992, 46). In this case, it is the vision of the leader. Next, the leader is to develop a following within the congregation for the vision that he or she believes God has planted within his or her heart. Barna notes that lethargic congregations usually lack a vision and mission. The leader’s role is to encourage laity to accept the necessary change that the vision will entail. Also, the leader is to assure laity that chaos need not be necessary if the vision is carried out in an organized, collaborative manner. He believes Satan would tempt a congregation to be all things to all people (Barna 1992, 112).

In the chapter on “Vision Killers” (1992, 120-25), Barna cites “tradition” as one major killer of a vision. While he affirms God's use of tradition to create consistency and stability within a given church ministry, he goes onto say:

But God has no use for traditions that block progress. He blesses those traditions that build the church and serve His people, not because they are traditions but because they serve His purpose. Indeed, He tends to reshape traditions by moving them in new directions. He updates them with a more relevant and contemporary expression of those truths that made the tradition valuable initially. But his
primary concern is not with the style or format of the tradition; His interest is in its ability to draw people closer to Him. (Barna 1992, 122)

While I affirm Barna’s above efforts to present traditions hindering the progress of a vision, the views of traditions expressed above may be seen as somewhat reckless from a traditional Lutheran point of view. Tradition is a result of a dialogue between Scripture and history as the community of faith has experienced God for centuries. The traditions have stood the tests of time and many eras of difficulties for some Lutheran Christians. Sometimes certain traditions do not attract people to God or the church. For instance, Martin Luther’s insistence that all of Scripture be interpreted through the passages in Romans 1:16-5:21 (or justification by faith alone), was not a well received tradition within the populist Christian view of his times, as John Tetzel was selling indulgences for the purpose of building St. Peter’s Basilica (Walker 1970, 305-10). While he is sincere in his critique of tradition, I believe that Barna is a bit insensitive, if not reckless in the placement of “tradition” in his section entitled, “Vision Killers,” (Barna 1992, 122). Tradition and Scripture tend to be inseparable within many congregations such as St. John’s.

*John Maxwell*

Another well-known church growth leader who seems to hold the same view of developing vision and mission is John Maxwell. Like Barna, Maxwell seems to believe that it is the leader’s role to begin or initiate the vision by developing a close knit circle of leaders around him or her who will support the vision. Maxwell believes that “the true measure of leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less” (Maxwell 1998, 11-20). Maxwell believes that a strong leaders not only influences those around him, but also
develops leaders in a manner that they believe God is directing the organization (Maxwell 1998, 21-58). For Maxwell, the church leader’s job is to use communicative and influence skills to develop a “dream team” of lay leaders who will help carry out the vision (and mission) of the where the pastor believes God is directing the congregation (Maxwell 1995, 57-60, 63-72, 83-96, 151-60).

Maxwell seems to assume that there is a large pool of potential leaders within any given organization. Second, if these potential leaders do exist, he believes they can be easily influenced by the right leader who can share a vision (and mission) that has some appeal to them, but entails major change. In many congregations, Maxwell’s concept of the laity taking on the major leadership responsibilities in which they have grown accustomed to the pastor performing most of the ministries is a new concept. It may take much time to plant such new ideas within the leadership of many congregations that have followed the same models of leadership for many years, decades, and possibly centuries. Hence, Maxwell’s model has a limitation in that it will not produce the timely results many church growth experts might envision for congregations that experiment with their ideas.

Michael Foss

There are Lutheran church pastors who have developed vision and mission statements in the way that church growth writers such as such as Barna and Maxwell suggest. One such leader is Michael W. Foss of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, Minnesota. Foss cites both Barna and Maxwell in his book entitled, “Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church” (Foss 2000, 70, 96, 184). Foss, an ELCA senior pastor of a large congregation in the suburban area of St. Paul and
Minneapolis, Minnesota, believes that it is the pastor’s role to cast the vision and align the congregation with that vision (Foss 2000, 44-52). It is also the pastor’s role to develop leaders who support the vision and “change management” from those who have helped maintain the older views of church operation toward newer leaders who support the new vision (Foss 2000, 53-4). Foss believes that a congregation should move from what he terms a “membership model” of church toward a “discipleship model” (Foss 2000, 11-21). A membership model congregation is analogous to joining a health club. One pays regular dues and demands a certain amount of services. Instead of the membership model, Foss calls for a high commitment church on behalf of lay participation. Merely attending worship and providing a weekly offering is what Foss terms as the old membership model. A discipleship model demands a higher level of lay participation in the church’s ministry. Foss supports a total restructuring of congregations. He supports the idea of “blowing up the committee structure,” and creating ministry teams for the purposes of task oriented ministries (Foss 2000, 137-50). Foss still believes a church needs to be faithful to its respective church beliefs and doctrines, but must also articulate what these beliefs mean in real life (Foss 2000, 114).

Fundamentally, Foss holds to a similar definition of mission statement as stated earlier:

A good mission statement keeps us thinking about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. Mission statements translate beliefs and values into strategy to engage the world. They are outward looking, and what you see when you look out will depend where you are. That is why ‘one size fits all’ mission statements are not possible. Each congregation has its own social location and context and needs a mission statement that responds to the realities and needs of its own neighborhood. (Foss 2000, 128)

I essentially agree with Foss’ definition and application of congregational mission statements. While Foss acknowledges that a mission statement should reflect the “realities
of its own neighborhood," I would feel more comfortable if Foss would provide the same latitude for how the pastor works with the status quo for any given congregational polity or organizational structure. For me, this would suggest just as there is no one size fits all mission statements, the same could be said of models for discipleship congregations. Foss’ congregation is located in a growing metropolitan (suburban) community. Hence, his model has limited application for congregations such as St. John’s in an older small town and rural community such as Montpelier, Ohio.

Despite the reservations I have regarding Foss’ model of casting the vision, attracting lay leaders to implement change of management, as well as to “blow up the committees,” the operating definition of mission statements is basically sound. St. John’s could possibly use this definition in its current context.

Rick Warren

Rick Warren might view a congregation such as St. John’s as that who is living in the “ease of Zion,” as the prophet Amos addressed. Warren believes that each congregation needs to rediscover its purpose. For Warren, purpose and mission seem to be one in the same. Warren goes onto challenge the church in saying:

Remember, its Christ’s church, not ours. Jesus founded the church, died for the church, sent his Spirit to the church, and will someday return for his church. As the owner of the church, he has already established the purposes, and they’re not negotiable. . .Our duty is to understand the purposes Christ has for the church and to implement them. While the programs must change in every generation, the purposes never change. We may innovate with style of ministry, but we must never alter the substance of it. (Warren 1995, 98)

While in the process of discovering the purpose of a congregation, Warren (1995, 98) suggests four questions that churches might ask: Why does the church exist? What are we to be as the church? What are we to do as the church? How are we to do it?
Similar to other authors, Warren has criteria as to what he thinks a purpose statement should contain. For instance, he believes that it must be biblical, specific, transferable (or memorable), and measurable (Warren 1995, 101).

At this point I can agree with many of Warren’s ideas regarding the ingredients for a purpose statement. I part company with Warren in two areas. First, he seems to tie being baptized into the church with additional requirements of becoming mature in Christ. He is one who holds to the view of making a decision for Christ, then following it up with discipleship duties in some form. Later, he suggests that the purpose statement of the church should produce measurable results as he cites the Saddleback Valley Community Church’s mission statement (Warren 1995, 106-7). As a Lutheran, I view this as a form of works righteousness. We believe that salvation is a free gift as seen (infant and adult) baptism. We did not choose God, but God chose us. Salvation is a gracious gift, regardless of any results the church might produce.

I do agree with Warren that each congregation should have a purpose to exist. The challenge for sacramental theology churches such as St. John’s is to discover its purpose without suggesting that such efforts and results are closely tied to salvation. Warren’s approach seems not to be as leader-centered as other popular church growth authors, but not as restrained as some of the mainline church growth experts.

Mainline Church Growth Authors

I feel comfortable with the various views of these authors. While I may not agree with their entire program, I view their ideas to be quite compatible with St. John’s.
Kennon Callahan

As a means of shifting to another means of developing a mission statement, Kennon Callahan has an alternate model in the development of congregational vision and mission statements. Rather than starting with the leader, Callahan begins with the congregation as a community of faith that strives to be effective in its “missional outreach.” It is the congregation that needs to be committed to a focused “missional outreach” to address some particular “human hurt and hope.” The leaders of the congregation should consider a long-range plan for missional outreach. This may take some amount of time to accomplish. Callahan believes that the congregation must have a clear focus as to what missional outreach it believes God is calling it to address, based on the “specific human hurts and hopes” which are observed in the community in which it serves as a community of faith (1983, 1-9). This also means that an effective congregation must be engaged in more than wishful thinking, and sentiments, which seem noble, worthwhile, and helpful. Callahan agrees with the broader literature with regard to a church’s mission. He describes the impact of mission:

Mission leads us beyond ourselves. Whenever a local congregation is effectively engaged in missional outreach, that congregation is a group of people living beyond their preoccupation with themselves. Precisely because they live beyond themselves, their strengths are commensurately developed, their vision is substantially lifted, and their energies are vitalized to new levels of learning. (Callahan 1983, 3)

Callahan opposes this idea of a homogeneous church, and believes that two or three leaders within a given congregation must develop the art of loving the “black sheep” in their own families, then apply this to the church and broader local community.

Using the term “missional objectives,” Callahan believes that such a plan for what might be termed as a mission statement should emerge from the hurts and hopes observed
in the community as they are discovered by a group within the congregation. Hopefully, this will translate into a longing that could develop into missional objectives, and then an outreach plan could be devised. A useful way for helping people to discover such a longing is to think through what basic hurts and hopes keep them awake at night upon occasions (Callahan 1982, 3-8).

I believe that Callahan’s perspective has much to offer St. John’s. Whatever directions a congregation such as St. John’s pursues will have to be incremental in nature and hopefully be accepted by a fairly broad consensus of the congregation. The problem with this approach is that it takes time. A mission statement is merely a starting point to a long term-process. If an organization were facing an immediate crisis or possible near extinction, then the Barna and Maxwell perspective would commend itself to its plight. However, I would tend to gravitate closer to Callahan’s ideas regarding how a congregation is to begin its journey in becoming a disciple community which moves into the direction it believes God is calling it to pursue at this time. St. John’s is a faith community where change happens slowly, incrementally, and after much deliberation. The models that Barna and Maxwell offer do not lend themselves to being readily effective toward a slower growth process than possibly a modified Callahan approach to change. St. John’s has just experienced a very long-term pastorate and is a very traditional German ethnic congregation from its inception, so even a modified Callahan approach to change could be quite an undertaking at this time in the life of this congregation. Developing a core group of members to consider the “hopes and hurts” around the community is a very bold initiative for a faith community such as St. John’s.
Tradition, stability, and ritual, along with occasional incremental change, seem to be a pattern that I have observed regarding how ministry at St. John’s develops with time.

_Nancy Ammerman_

Nancy Ammerman and a team of mainline church consultants support a similar view as Callahan. Ammerman believes that congregations should begin with a “needs assessment” process for purposes of identifying the “needs and priorities for both individuals and groups within the congregation.” This also includes people who live in the community outside the church building itself. Ammerman acknowledges there exists a more aggressive approach toward mission and ministry as she points to Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Church model of aggressive “seeker” ministry as suggested by the Barna and Maxwell views. Ammerman mirrors Callahan’s approach that focus groups within the congregation are a preferred starting point to develop a church mission statement (1998, 175-8).

Ammerman is convinced that each group within a given congregation sees life through differing “frames.” These frames act as windows or lenses to the world, which the congregational members use to filter out some ideas, while allowing others to enter into their consciousness. For Ammerman these frames, or lenses, help people order their life experiences for purposes of deciding what appropriate action or inaction is to be taken both as individuals as well as the congregation (1998, 178).

One such frame or lens Ammerman identifies is that of the “ecology frame,” or seeing the congregation in its context in terms of demographic setting and historical presence within a given community. Also included are cultural changes that exist within and outside the congregation itself. This is significant for St. John’s because it was a
small, mill town community in which early German missionaries initially settled as a congregation. Later, it changed into a railroad town and now into its recent time era as a small, factory town.

Another frame or lens Ammerman identifies is that of “culture and identity.” This includes the language, history, local myths, worldviews, and sacred symbols image or object, which are held in high regard. For St. John’s, this would be the beautiful church building itself. Ammerman includes what she terms the “explicit” or official creedal theologies of the church, as well as “implicit” or unspoken theologies of the church within this frame. I have been keeping a set of field notes to observe the latter patterns of explicit and implicit theologies.

Again, for St. John’s, this is very relevant because the German language heritage, which existed at its inception, has now become an English language speaking church. American culture, history, and popular mythology have been affected by time, and has thus affected worldviews and the meaning of symbols such as the building at St. John’s. Merely constructing a church building does not necessarily attract members. Many church buildings were erected based on this assumption.

After making an assessment of the congregation based on various frames for potential ministry, Ammerman concurs with what has been said above regarding the definition of “vision and mission statements.” A vision is what God is calling the congregation to do in the future at a particular place within the next year, three years, or some other time period. It is a long-term statement about the desired future of the congregation. A mission statement is “what we exist to do.” It is a purpose. An example of a mission statement might include: “We worship God and bear witness to God’s
purposes for humankind.” Whereas a vision statement might include, “What is God
calling us to do in the immediate future in this particular place?” (Ammerman 1998, 179-80).

What I find particularly useful in Ammerman’s work is the possibility there may
be multiple visions and views of mission within the same congregation. “Very often
members differ in what they really care about in a congregation’s life. Some members see
the church’s ministry primarily in terms of meaningful corporate worship, yet others want
to emphasize community ministries.” Ammerman suggests that a mission statement
might contain multiple and brief diverse statements that express what a congregation

Ammerman illustrates this with selections I have chosen from the mission
statement of a “Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.” While Good Shepherd is a “diverse
congregation” that encounters Christ in each person, and therefore treats “one another
with love, trust, and care,” there are four other dimensions of this statement to reflect the
diversity of this congregation. This congregation called “Good Shepherd” has a mission
statement with multiple components. It includes that the congregation “responds to the
gospel through dynamic corporate worship.” It “ministers with the poor by sharing with
them, learning from them, and empowering them.” Good Shepherd “nurtures spiritual
growth” among its members. Finally, members at Good Shepherd “express their gratitude
to God by committing themselves to a high level of worship attendance, financial
support, and talent sharing” (Ammerman 1998, 182). I believe that Ammerman’s
observations are helpful in the event there may be multiple visions within St. John’s that
could be reflected within a mission statement.
William Easum

William Easum agrees with the Callahan and Ammerman approach while creating a mission statement. For Easum, the mere process of creating a mission statement helps the entire congregation clarify how God is working in the congregation and the broader community in changing times (Easum 1997). He illustrates his point by recalling the original purpose of church stained glass windows.

Initially, stained glass windows were intended to be a tool to tell the gospel narrative in churches as worshipers gazed out the windows. However, as time marched on, the windows themselves became the object of veneration rather than the story they shared. According to Easum, this is what has happened to the values and vision with many modern congregations. Therefore, he believes that a purposeful time of collaborative reflection is necessary so the church may reassess its “mission, vision and values.” One end product of such deliberation may be a mission statement (Easum 1997). One core assumption this project is that a mission statement could help St. John’s.

One caveat we must consider as we read Easum and other church growth authors is that they have their own working definitions “mission and vision.” For the purpose of this project, a vision is the future direction of the church that can be told in narrative form of which direction the organization wishes to be in possibly three, four, or more years. An example might be that “We wish to be the most visible witness for social justice ministry within our community.” A mission statement is what the organization does regardless of the vision. For instance, “We preach the gospel and make disciples,” could be one mission statement.
Easum presents the concept of not allowing the form of the message to replace the gospel message or content of the message of the ministry. The gospel message is very important in many Lutheran churches such as St. John’s. Bultmann describes this foundational value as the kerygma (Bultmann 1961, 3, 187-9). Easum, like many authors, has many steps for developing a mission statement. I will not pursue developing a mission statement at this point in the project, because I believe a modified model will be helpful. The methodology of developing a mission statement will be addressed later.

Christian Magazine Authors

I have discovered other miscellaneous church periodical articles that suggest developing a mission statement is not to be the final end unto itself for any religious organization. In his reflections in midlife, Bill Hybels, the pastor of Willow Creek Church, believes while mission statements are common today in churches, a constant reexamination of infrastructure is required. Are the current mission strategies still effective? Has the pool of spiritual gifts within the congregation changed? Has the growth of the leaders effected the direction of the church? Hybels himself admits that he has grown from “personal performance-based theology toward a grace-based theology.” Hybels admits that Postmodernism has altered some of the assumptions of the church since the inception of Willow Creek Church. Postmodernism highlights a reality that suggests that no single life narrative exists the same within a given community. People from all over the world now bring their life experiences into the community of faith. He believes that various small group seeker ministries must come to the realization that global concerns do impact congregations such as Willow Creek Church. This may affect the mission and mission statement of the church in the future (Acker 1999).
Other authors, in concert with Hybels’ idea of a constant reexamination of infrastructure include Acker, who suggests that the church originally had to “break a few eggs” in order to make an omelet. This may have to be done again if the church is to remain healthy. If certain members disagree with such changes, Acker suggests “sometimes losing members is God’s way to church health and church growth.” So “acceptable losses” are part of the reality of revisiting the church’s mission if those who are comfortable with the status quo remain entrenched. These members may have to move onto another church, or “graduate” in terms of their spiritual heritage if they no longer find themselves in agreement with the church. Again, despite the development of a mission statement, this too can change as the mission of the church changes (Acker 1998).

With the above said, mission statements must be made public if they are become effective. This includes the development of new websites as an effective outreach tool to communicate the church’s mission (Veenker 2001).

Psychologist Larry Crabb believes that mission statements should include a component of shepherding or doing active lay ministry to those within the community of faith. Again, merely having a mission statement alone is not an end unto itself, unless the congregation is actually practicing what it professes in its mission statement. Crabb believes that the intentional equipping of people to carry out the local church’s mission is an ongoing process if the mission statement is to have any effective impact on the community and its outreach (Crabb 1997).

Finally Glen McDonald, a pastor of a growing Presbyterian church, suggests that a mission statement is not merely about attracting new members to church. He had to
rethink his "target audience" after five years of growth. It was discovered merely having
seekers within the church is insufficient in terms of long-term commitment to the local
church's ministry. It should promote a Christian lifestyle of life long learning and
purposeful discipleship. Those who attend his church are encouraged to take the
confessions of the church seriously (without crossing their fingers during the confession
of the creed), and be purposeful in growing as disciples, even if it takes the form of active
prayer ministry. Without a purposeful discipleship ministry, the mission statement is
nothing more than a tool for congregational direction. McDonald uses the word
"commitment" to describe what his congregation desires as a result of use of mission and
mission statements for direction growth (McDonald 1999).

Essentially I agree with McDonald. Mission statements that are used for the
purpose of congregational direction and outreach ideally should result in a lifetime
commitment to discipleship as members of the church. Specifically, this means a spiritual
journey of growth. It means not apologizing for openly confessing that one is a Lutheran,
Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist. Christians should be challenged to use their spiritual
gifts. A caveat one must recognize is that McDonald readily admits he is organizing a
suburban congregation.

Being located in a small rural community, St. John's does not have the luxury of
"breaking a few eggs in order to make an omelet." The members who sit in the pews at
St. John's are cherished pillars of their congregation and community. Their families have
built this congregation and will remain here even in the most difficult of times. Hence,
any movement toward mission here remains a modest effort and must be approached
cautiously, carefully, and with much thought and deliberation. This is one reason that this
project is confined to the identification of a mission and mission statement, rather than a more ambitious goal of a mission and vision statement.

The ELCA View on Mission Statements

Since St. John's is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I also explored what view the ELCA holds toward developing a mission statement. To pursue this, I consulted the website of the ELCA on in the Churchwide Unit of the Division of Congregational Ministries. The following ideas are obtained from this material.

The ELCA states there should be a two-part process in developing a mission statement. First, there is identification as to why a congregation needs to develop one. Second, there is a suggested preparation process toward developing a mission statement. I will highlight some key points from the second section of this ELCA document.

So why would a congregation within the ELCA develop a mission statement? First, to help identify the people who gather as "Lutheran Christians," or a people of God. Second, the mission statement clarifies the understanding of how God's mission works through the congregation, and hopefully renews the commitment to that mission. Third, the mission statement provides a basis for setting goals, making decisions, and planning actions that also reflect congregational rather than individual priorities. Fourth, a mission statement can provide the basis for evaluating the congregation's progress in ministry. Fifth, new members can get better acquainted with the congregation and learn what it is about through reading and understanding the mission statement. Sixth, a mission statement can give direction as the congregation's plans for the future (ELCA 1998).
For St. John’s, the final reason suggests a major purpose of this project. For a congregation that is comfortable, but fears its future due to possible signs of stagnation, developing a mission statement is one incremental step toward planning for the future of St. John’s.

The preparation process toward developing a mission statement involves a three part suggested plan according the ELCA. First, there is developing a congregational identity, or “who we are.” Second, there is developing a congregational mission, or “what are we about.” The third step is moving from mission to action, or moving toward using the mission statement in actual planning (ELCA 1998).

In developing congregational identity, the ELCA has a similar point of departure as the earlier section of Chapter 2 in this project (p.14). There is a strong affirmation that the congregation’s identity for mission should be based on Scripture. While these selections are not exhaustive, several selected passages from the ELCA documents are noted here, as the Apostle Paul says, “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-4).

For Lutherans, the teaching of justification by faith through grace is a core belief. All ELCA Christians and congregations are called into God’s kingdom purely by God’s grace and they did nothing to deserve such a gift. Lutherans accept this by faith. There is a strong insistence that no acts of works righteousness are necessary to obtain entrance into Christ’s kingdom. For instance, the teaching of infant baptism, or baptismal regeneration, finds its roots in the following Pauline passage, “For by grace you have
been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is a gift of God”
(Ephesians 2:8).

A child does nothing for his or her salvation, as one might give the child a ball as a gift. The church will later teach and equip the child in the lifestyle of the Christian faith. This would be similar to the parent being responsible for the child learning how to become proficient in the use of the ball that has been given to him or her. But the child does not choose God, rather God chooses the child. A mission statement for a Lutheran church must reflect what it means to be a people who live purely by God’s grace.

Another selected Scripture passage from the ELCA document describes the mission posture of the church. It says:

He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the son of living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For my flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’(Matthew 16:15-8)

This passage supports the premise of this project because as Jesus builds his church on the confession of Peter, the church is to be an aggressor against the “gates of Hades." Gates do not attack. The church is not a passive fortress that waits to be attacked by evil forces, but rather launches the attacks against the forces of evil. This suggests a “missional objective” as Callahan might put it. The church exists as a living witness to the Messiah whom Simon Peter identified as Jesus. A mission statement could help any congregation become a more active witness for this Messiah.

Another basis for developing a congregational identity as cited in the ELCA document is that of a confessional basis. Again, I rely on the Book of Concord in Chapter
2 of this project (pp. 22-4). Three articles are cited from the "Augsburg Confession" from the Book of Concord. First, Article V states:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments was instituted. Through these, as through the means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, where and when he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this ... Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel. (Tappert 1959, 31)

This article affirms the importance of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments as central part of Lutheran identity. Next, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession proclaims:

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all the believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4-5, 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' (Tappert 1959, 32)

This particular article suggests that Lutheran Christians are willing to be flexible in terms of "human tradition, or rites and ceremonies" as long as the "Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." Ministry of the Word and sacrament are central to Lutheran self-understanding. Other areas can be a basis of dialogue with other churches as Christians. Finally, Article XIV says, "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (Tappert 1959, 36). This affirms a high value of public ministry being carried out by ordained ministers of the Word and
sacrament. The value of the ordained clergy is lifted up in this portion of the Lutheran confessions. This suggests that the pastor has a key role to play in the direction and vision of the church.

Finally, the idea of establishing a congregational identity seems to agree with the current secular literature on the topic of organizational mission statements. Every congregation must look closely as to how it is a part of its immediate community. It should ask questions related to what part it plays in the life and activities of the community where it is located. Some suggested questions include: How are we perceived? How do we contribute? How should we be functioning in this community?

To probe deeper into the above questions, areas such as congregational history, ethnic roots, and backgrounds need to be explored. This would support the case study section of this project.

Those within the congregation who are responsible for developing a draft of the mission statement are encouraged to deliberate and discuss what ministries the given congregation consistently feels God has called it to provide at this time. Based on this input, the ELCA suggests that a first draft might be developed and later refined. The intent is to reach as much of a consensus as possible in developing a mission statement that is based on the questions of, “What are we already about as a congregation?” The amount of time for this deliberation to occur is left open ended by the ELCA, as each congregation has its own level of willing participants. This sort of method is compatible with St. John’s because historically, many people within the congregation have not thought in categories “mission” and “mission statements.”
The next component toward developing a congregational mission statement is to develop a congregational mission, or “what we are about?” After the steps toward developing a congregational identity are complete, the ELCA makes references to other scriptural passages for the purpose of discovering what is said about “our particular mission?” The next set of passages suggests various facets of the early church’s ministry as recorded in the words and acts of Jesus and St. Paul in hope of arriving at an agreement as to what specific acts of ministry seem to be high priorities of this given congregation. The following chart highlights these ministries (from the New Testament):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Scriptural References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servant ministry</td>
<td>Mark 10:35-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing Good News to the poor and disenfranchised</td>
<td>Matthew 25:3-46; Luke 4:18-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present bodies as a living sacrifice</td>
<td>Romans 12:1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worshipping the Lord</td>
<td>Psalm 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing ministries</td>
<td>Matthew 8:1-13; Mark 6:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration of communion</td>
<td>Acts 2:43-7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the Spirit of truth</td>
<td>John 16:12-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving alms (offerings)</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 16:1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing rest for the weary</td>
<td>Matthew 11:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving one another</td>
<td>John 13:34-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipping the body (church)</td>
<td>Ephesians 4:15-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending out to do mission</td>
<td>Luke 10:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers, sharing, and support</td>
<td>Philippians 1:3-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the drafts have been completed and the mission statement is finalized, the ELCA suggests that the congregations move from “mission to action.” At this point the ELCA seems to agree with Callahan in that the congregation’s objective should be to identify the “needs, hurts and problems” which the congregation feels called to address within the community. It is suggested that the congregation identify its resources, set
goals, develop, and execute action plans. Then the congregation is advised to evaluate such actions and revise them accordingly. This is intended to be an ongoing process through the life of the congregation. Selected portions of the ideas presented within this ELCA document can serve as a possible road map for congregations such as St. John’s to plan for the future, as well as get off of the plateau that seems to be present at this time.

*Mission Statements Within the ELCA*

There are congregations in the ELCA that have already begun this process. As a part of the research, I have collected fifty-seven mission statements off the websites of various ELCA congregations. The operating assumption I have is that any congregation that has a website on the Internet is already conscious of its mission and the image it wishes to project about its specific mission. Listed below are five categories of mission statements I have identified from this collection of mission statements. I found eleven mission statements in the first category indicated below.

*General One Line or Phrase Mission Statements*

At this time I wish to subdivide this category of mission statements into three subgroups. First, there is the general phrase or idea. Second, there is the use of a scriptural passage. Third, there is use of key words or ideas. As in other sections of this chapter, I will immediately attempt to offer some general comments or observations about these mission statements and their contents. I identified nine mission statements in this current category.
In this subgroup, these are simple one-line phrases as a mission statement. Examples include: “We are God’s people . . . reaching out,” “We are the healing place,” “We are a ministry to serve the Lord Jesus Christ . . . to bring the peace of God to all people” and “You are always welcome in the name of Jesus Christ” (ELCA Synods and Regions 2000). The practical advantage to such statements is that they are succinct, easily memorized, and very intelligible. They are very specific. They describe one major mission activity such as “to heal” or “to bring peace.” Probably this type of statement could have a total or unanimous ownership of the entire congregation due to the general nature of the phrase. For example, not too many people would disagree that a church should be a “healing place” or “should bring peace.” The simple general mission statement would be one way to avoid conflict in the event there are varying views of the church’s mission and the vision in which the mission statement should serve.

Some concerns of such statements include that they are so general that they could almost apply to any congregation. There is not a sense that this is what makes this specific congregation unique at this time in the life of the community. Also, due to their general nature, such statements leave themselves open for broad interpretation from many perspectives, which would seem to undermine the purpose of developing a mission statement in the first place. For instance, to bring peace is open to many interpretations. Some church members might view bringing about peace as an absence of conflict. Others might view peace in terms of being the local community arbitrator of conflict. Others view peace in the Jewish term of shalom, or a holistic view of integration of mind, soul, and body with God’s purpose for humans. And others who embrace a liberation theology
motif might seek to bring peace in terms of being an aggressive advocate of the poor and underclass within a given community. Because such a generalized mission statement lends itself to multiple interpretations, I would be concerned that the mission statement would serve to create more division rather than unity in terms of congregational direction. Some might even confuse such mission statements as being mere slogan for purposes of a communication strategy.

Scriptural Passage

Typical examples of a scriptural passage being used as a mission statement include simply citing the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” Another statement cites 1 John 4:19, “We love, because he first loved us.” (ELCA Synods and Regions 2000). One practical advantage of this type of mission statement is that those who can recite it are also reciting biblical passages, which has advantages in an era when more a more people are illiterate in scriptural knowledge. This type of statement, like the previous kind, can also have a unifying effect in that not too many Christians will disagree about the truthfulness of a given biblical passage. Usually, most Christians believe the Bible is or contains God’s Word. In fact, some might even have such a high view of biblical inerrancy that they would view such statement as being directly from God.

Some concerns regarding this type of mission statement are similar to those stated in the above section. Any congregation could utilize any specific biblical passage. Any Christian church should be able to affirm most or all of what is contained in the Bible. So utilizing a simple scriptural passage does not serve to define exactly what this congregation is about at this given time. The second concern is that just as that any given
scriptural passage is subject to various interpretations, as the mere presence of many biblical commentaries attest to, so there are also varying interpretations of a given biblical passage. For instance, to love because Christ first loved us is subject to varying views of exactly what does "love" mean here? Is it "tough love" such as the twelve-step groups use to confront people with problems? Is the type of love that is self sacrificing, even at the cost of pain or discomfort? Possibly it is a love that embraces a simply neighborly concern.

I remain partial to using a scriptural passage within a mission statement, with one qualification. The mission statement spells out specifically how the congregation is interpreting this particular biblical passage. For example, "We love, because he first loved us" could be expanded with qualifications. Such a definition might include, "We love others as he did by providing monetary and human resources to those who are in need in our local community" (ELCA Synods and Regions 2000). Also, "We love others as Jesus did by equipping all Christians to be effective witnesses for the gospel in their place of work, school, recreation, or community context." Elaboration in this manner would define specifically what this congregation feels called to do at this time. It utilizes a scriptural passage, which provides a high level of biblical authenticity, as well communicates to others what this community of faith means by citing this passage as their mission statement. The next category of general mission statement implies to me some presence of direction, but still leaves too many unanswered questions.
Key Words and Ideas

This type of mission statement is one general phrase that has key words or ideas that define what the congregation does. For instance, “Our mission is to lift up Jesus to our community in worship, education, and service.” This simple mission statement has the practical advantage of being easy to remember and recite. This statement does provide some direction in terms of desire to “lift Jesus” by specifically the means of worship, education, and service. So, one has an idea regarding the general direction of the congregation. This mission statement has the advantage of showing a unique character for this particular congregation at this given time.

The concern I have with this particular type of mission statement is that it leaves too many unanswered questions regarding the exact nature of what this church does to advance its vision. For example, is the worship service to be an outreach tool, or a place to nurture faithful members? What type of “education” is being referred to in this statement? Is it simply Bible study, or is it empowering Christians to become disciples and witnesses? What kind of service is the congregation committed to carrying out? Is it service to the local area only, or does it have a global dimension to it as well?

I would feel more informed if the above statement had a more specific definition of terms. An example might be, “We lift up Jesus through traditional liturgical worship service for members and those who would wish to become a part of our community.” Maybe another alternative could be, “We lift up Jesus through Christian education in the areas of biblical studies and discipleship education. We lift up Jesus in serving those in need in the local community as well as those within the global community who experience natural disasters.” This type of mission statement would inform those who
visit the church as to the exact nature of how their congregation does ministry as it “lifts up Jesus.” It points to a concrete direction in which the church is called to carry out a vision of where it believes God is calling it to do ministry at this time. The next broader category of mission statements describes this idea in a broader manner.

Gather, Equip, and Send Motifs

In this group of mission statements, I found the largest single group (twenty). Typical themes to such mission statements are, “We gather, we worship, we learn, we care and we serve.” In all of these mission statements, the final action verb is going out and serving. This does indeed reflect the theology of the Matthew 28:16-20 text (ELCA Synods and Regions 2000).

I also believe there is one major or fundamental reason why this particular group of mission statements is the largest single group in this data. These mission statements directly correlate with what the emphasis has been in Lutheran church liturgy since the latter 1970s. Within the Lutheran Book of Worship and the recent publication of With One Voice worship books and liturgies, there is a pattern of worship that is reflected in this group’s mission statements. The community is first called to “gather.” Next, they are to be centered on the “Word” in some capacity. This could be an emphasis on education, belief, encouragement, empowerment, nurture, witness, strength, forgiveness, or any number of biblical themes a particular church feels it emphasizes in its teaching and preaching of God’s Word as contained in Scripture. Next, there is some reference to the sacraments, such as baptism and communion, then the final sending out of the congregation to the “mission field” outside the doors of the church as Callahan and others would suggest. So, the four general themes are, “gathering, the Word, sacraments, and
sending.” This is what Lutheran worship has emphasized for the past couple of decades. For Lutherans, living one’s life should be an extension of the worship service.

This is a productive way of developing a mission statement because it reminds Lutherans that worship is not to be a one day event in church, but is to be lived out all week. All week Lutherans are called to gather in some in capacity with other people. Hopefully, Lutherans will integrate the Scripture or the “Word” into their lives. Next, regardless of what goes on in their week, Lutherans are called to recall what Martin Luther terms the Lord’s “combat ration” in the form of Holy Communion, as well as to remember that they are “baptized.” Lutherans are not defined by their jobs, social status, economic condition, or family, but by their baptism into the community of faith. This is a reality, which should be comforting for sacramental Christians to recall throughout the days of their lives. Finally, Lutherans are called to be sent out and witness what Christ is doing in their lives by means of both word and actions. Martin Luther would term this as being part of the “priesthood of all believers.”

This type of mission statement begins with gathering and ends with sending to be service as witnesses. It is exactly how modern Lutheran liturgy has been structured in recent decades. The final dismissal within the rubrics of Lutheran Liturgy state: “Go in peace to serve the Lord. Thanks are to God.” It is for this reason that I believe this group of mission statements is the largest single group he has gathered in this database.

One concern I have regarding this type of mission statement relates to the sheer volume of congregations in the ELCA that seem to be adopting this model. Possibly, there is a risk that familiarity and even uniformity might result in a attitude where one believes by following the right formula, this will somehow make the congregation look
better simply because this is the way it is done in the liturgy. Then, if all ELCA churches follow this model, does it provide enough diversity to reflect the pluralist nature of ministry that each congregation is called to do within its particular context? I view these concerns as minor. If an ELCA congregation follows this model after some level of reflection and deliberation, this is a step in a positive direction.

Outreach-Oriented Emphasis

This next category of mission statements emphasizes outreach as the major theme. Also, there is a tendency to specify the exact target area of the outreach ministry. I identified four mission statements in this category. Examples include, "... a welcoming and caring people who seek to share the kindness of God so that all of metropolitan Cincinnati may grow in faith, hope, and love of the living Jesus Christ!" In this church people will find "a growing congregation working to reach all of east metropolitan Cincinnati with the love of God" (ELCA Synods and Regions 2000). Another mission statement includes, "Our mission is to reach out to all people with the love of Christ." Later, in their vision statement, they specify what they mean by "all people" as those who are located in southern California, specifically in the Anaheim area. Also included are those who also visit the tourist attractions in that community (ELCA Regions and Synods 2000).

Some observations about this type of mission statement include congregations that have unapologetically committed themselves to make outreach the centerpiece of their ministry. While they have worship, Bible study, love, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit, outreach seems to be the primary objective. Outreach informs both the mission and vision of these congregations. This would also suggest that both financial
and human resources are a high priority directed toward outreach ministry in some
capacity. So, the visitor who might read this type of mission statement could walk away
with the impression that further involvement with the congregation will entail focusing
one's spiritual journey in the direction of outreach. While other forms of Christian
ministry do exist in this congregation, outreach remains the top priority. The mission
statement reflects this core value.

Second, when the addition of a specific geographical area is stated (such as
"metropolitan Cincinnati"), the visitor will also know this congregation is very much
committed to this particular community, as well as having a strong desire to be a witness
to those who are unchurched. A potential member of this congregation knows exactly
what he or she is getting into with his or her participation. The strong advantage of this
type of mission statement is clarity regarding the specific direction of this congregation.
Also, if for some reason the number of unchurched people ceases to be a reality, then the
stated mission of this particular congregation is accomplished. This would be an
opportune time to revisit the church's mission and revise the mission statement.

Third, if one were not oriented towards outreach ministry, would he or she feel
welcomed in this congregation? Somebody still has to serve on committees, councils,
teach Sunday school, and monitor the nursery during worship service. If outreach is
viewed as the key ministry, where do other necessary ministries fit into the larger
picture? Quite frankly, some Christians are not gifted for outreach ministry. Are they
welcomed in this type of congregation? Possibly the next type of congregation would be
a place for them to grow in their faith journey.
Growing as Disciples Priorities

I am very comfortable with this type of mission statement. The emphasis is on growing as a Christian, and seeking maturity in the Christian faith on some level. This may or may not translate into numerical growth as a congregation. As the Matthew 28:16-20 passage demonstrated (Chapter 2), being a disciple is a lifetime growth process that entails risks and service (p. 20-1). This is done while striving to maintain the integrity of the church's confessional beliefs. Regardless of how promising or bleak the future may be for a given congregation, this type of mission statement can be an effective tool in providing direction for the future. I identified six of these mission statements (ELCA Regions and Synods 2000).

Examples of such mission statements include, "... will help individuals identify their spiritual needs and serve as a center for spiritual growth as together we walk on our journeys of faith..." Another example of such a statement is, "We believe that our purpose is to invite all people to become devoted followers of Christ and responsible members of His church." A final example of this type of mission statement is, "That all may know Jesus Christ and become responsible members of His church, we share God's love which is inspired by the Holy Spirit." Each of these mission statements has a common thread of knowing and growing in Christian faith in some manner. None of them has a strong "sending out to do witnessing" motif. These statements tend to define "witness" in terms of personal and community spiritual growth. (ELCA Regions and Synods, 2000).

An observer might critique such mission statements for a lack of vision for outreach. Many of these congregations are not geographically close to growing
population or metropolitan areas in terms of demographics. They are seeking to grow in
terms of a deeper Christian faith, rather than emphasizing numerical growth. This is a
realistic, constructive approach in dealing with current realities while remaining faithful
to the congregation’s beliefs and a sense of integrity.

If there is no intentional effort to do outreach on some level, a congregation may
one day die due to lack of members. Possibly, a congregation may believe that one
cannot predict the future, but can only deal with the present. Rather than lamenting the
fact that it is not in a demographically growing community, a congregation that develops
a mission statement emphasizing a deeper, mature faith can be viewed as following the
will of God right now. Such churches are capable of financial support to newer mission
congregations in other communities as well as globally.

Any given congregation at any given time can find itself in a community or
neighborhood where economic conditions change drastically. Rather than strictly
defining their mission in terms of numerical growth, congregations that have developed
and benefited from these types of mission statements can point the way to other such
congregations which find themselves in similar circumstances. A mission statement
reflects what this congregation is doing right now to pursue a broader vision. These
variables can change. But God still remains with, in and under the church, as we believe
that Christ is mysteriously present among us as he is within the sacramental meal of
which we partake in regularly.

Maintenance and Self Nurture Ministry

While the "Gather, Equip, and Send" motifs were the largest single group of
mission statements that I collected, the second largest group fell into this final category
(twelve). I suspect one major reason is that this is what traditional Lutherans have done well for centuries! These types of mission statements tend to accentuate a mission that has a more localized (parish) focus in its approach to ministry.

Examples of such mission statements include the following, “We, as the people of God, have been baptized into the Body of Christ and are, thereby, called to support one another in loving fellowship . . .” A rural Pennsylvania congregation has a mission statement that reads, “The ‘Family of Believers’ invites you to worship with us.” Another congregation’s statement is “. . . a special place where people can gather to share the Word of God, to grow together in our faith in Christ, to be nurtured in worship and prayer, to find solace in each other, and to our immediate extended family with love and understanding. We strive to be a community centered in Christ, open to positive change, and committed to lifting ourselves beyond who we are, by God’s grace.” A very typical traditional theme that runs through many of these types of mission statements reads, “to participate in the mission of Jesus Christ through proclamation of the gospel, administration of the sacraments and service to all people.” A variation of the previous theme is stated as, “. . . we seek to spread the good news of God’s forgiveness and love through worship, the grace of the sacraments, and the love to fellowship, in Christ Jesus” (ELCA Regions and Synods 2000).

Another theme, which I found in these types of statements, is that of “nurture.” One statement reads, “Our mission at [Grace] Church is to be a loving community of people who spread God’s Word by nurturing faith in Jesus Christ and serving those in need.” Another statement reads, “It is our intention to provide a nurturing environment for growth in faith, fellowship, witness and service.”
In all of these statements there are two major themes. First, there are certain boundaries or limits placed on where ministry takes place. It could be in the immediate community, given location (parish) or the "extended family" of the congregation. Again, many of the churches seem to be located in areas that are not close to a growing metropolitan community. Second, they seem to want to celebrate the fact that they are a traditional, sacramental, and liturgical church, which in their eyes has great value. One such core value is that such congregations seek to be places of "nurture" and taking care of one another. So, if one is to be a part of this type of congregation, one is also part of a close "extended family."

I see advantages and disadvantages of such mission statements and the ministry that they reflect. There are advantages to such ministries. First, it fosters of a strong sense of community identity. As times change, the close, nurturing congregation that has changed little does provide some level of comfort for weary souls who are frustrated due to constant change in the society at large. One may see this in worship. The world and its music may change, but "Old First Lutheran" still has the same liturgy, hymns and church architecture. This church is so predictable that a person can almost set his or her watch by the rubrics of this traditional liturgical worship service. Second, such churches do not push people beyond their comfort zones. They become a haven of rest for those who are tired of being challenged and facing constant paradigm shifts in both their job and the community at large. The world changes, one might argue, but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8). Third, this mission statement reflects a community where "We take care of one another." There is a very strong nurturing aspect to this type community. When a person is ill or in need of an expensive surgical
procedure, the whole community rallies to sponsor a fundraiser. Possibly one of the fraternal order Lutheran insurance companies can provide matching funds for such worthy causes. Most Lutheran churches participate in these insurance company efforts.

Some concerns I would identify with this type of mission include the reality that outsiders who visit and are not part of the “inner circle” of families of the church, can easily perceive such a “close family” as a “closed” community. In this sense the church becomes almost similar to a “club” which demands one obtain access of membership through following proper initiation rituals. One might argue that Judaism still practices this, but it does not seem to be congruent with the Great Commission in Matthew 28, where the church is called to “Go.” Second, such missions could easily lend themselves to a sectarian mindset, where they believe they are exempt from the concerns, pressures, and constructive critique of the “outside” world. One could feel as if he or she has walked into a time warp by entering the doors of these types of churches. Hence, their effectiveness to equip people for the real world in which they live and work may be limited. In fact, it could translate into a privatized religion, where one practices one set of beliefs on Sunday in church, and cherishes a different set of values during the week. Third, there is the ongoing concern that the future of such a church is limited to those who are willing to conform to the rules and traditions. As Loren Mead, Kennon Callahan, and other authors point out, we live in a “Post-Christian” society (Mead 1991, 13-27; Callahan 1990, 13). The future of such churches could be threatened.

If a congregation still desires to maintain such a traditional posture after much prayer and deliberation in terms of what is reflected in its mission statement, then it must be willing to suffer the consequences. There is integrity in this view. If such churches
believe this is where God is calling them to be at this time, it is preferred to trying to be somebody whom they are not. Only God knows what the future holds. This may be their way of living out a "theology of the cross" as Douglas John Hall might suggest. It could be that St. John's might consider this as a possible direction for its future as well, due to the traditional nature of congregation.

Concluding Reflections

As this chapter began, I made an assumption that since secular corporations use mission statements due to changing economic and business conditions, the church can benefit as well from these ideas and tools. This mere assumption suggests a giant leap in thinking for traditional churches such as St. John's. It presupposes that a church should have a mission. That mission should have some level of outreach beyond its own building. Also, the church needs to justify its existence within the broader community, as businesses strive to do for purposes of survival. I could hear an objection that might sound like, "Why do we have to do what businesses do? We are the church. We are accepted unconditionally as Christians by God's grace since our baptism (as adults or infants). Why must we follow the lead of business?" I have heard a similar objection regarding the "church growth" movement and their authors: "Why must we follow the lead of those large megachurches that are usually located in a growing metropolitan suburban community?"

As a pastor and researcher in this project I can empathize with such concerns. I have silently posed them myself as I have proceeded in this research. I have witnessed certain clergy, who are avid readers of John Maxwell and George Barna, come into a small, rural, economically struggling community, and implement the respective church
growth author’s program. They left with limited progress in their churches and then moved into more promising and possibly lucrative settings, usually in a more populated community. Rather than being cynical as a result of these observations, I have chosen to believe that the George Barna and John Maxwell methods do have their place. If a church is located in growing community and it is on a similar plateau as St. John’s, possibly the idea of “breaking a few eggs to make an omelet” may have some merit. Some congregations may indeed seek a pastoral leadership style that attempts to gather like-minded church leaders for the purposes of implementing radical change in direction. This is done in corporate America quite frequently. However, I do not believe that this is appropriate for congregations such as St. John’s in Montpelier, Ohio. We are a rural, small town church that has many connections within various families. Tradition has stood a certain test in time. Tradition and Scripture are almost intertwined.

One ongoing concern I have is the idea of a church being heavily influenced by the trends in corporate America. If the business cycles and trends do shift with time, what happens to the time and investment as related to developing and implementation of a mission statement? Already I observe some subtle concerns that a mission statement must be more than a passing fad. Without good solid in-house substance (and production in the case of business), a mission statement can simply be a plaque on a wall. It will simply be the trend of the day.

It is for this reason I believe that a mission statement needs to be established on a different criteria, one based on a biblical foundation, as described in Chapter 2 (pp. 21-2). So why should a congregation have a mission and mission statement? I would argue because Christ commanded it. I selected Matthew’s Gospel as the foundational text for
two purposes. First, it is used in *Luther's Small Catechism*, so it is familiar to most Lutherans. Second, because Matthew's Gospel has been called the gospel of the "church." Matthew refers to the community of faith as the "church" in Matt. 16:18, 18:17 (Powell 1998, 77). The implied question for all Christian churches might be, "How are we going out to make disciples of all nations, as Christ commands us to do?" For this to occur a congregation should have a mission. A mission statement is simply a concrete document that articulates what the church does, why it is here, and what values it cherishes. Rick Warren might suggest the mission statement points to the purpose of the congregation. Regardless of any long-term vision or set of visions that may or may not be present within the congregation, the church should exist to do ministry related to making "disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:16-20). A biblical foundation is indeed a solid basis or reason for the purpose of developing mission statement.

While the tradition surrounding the Matthew 28:16-20 text as contained in the Lutheran *Book of Concord* does not suggest an outreach motif (rather a sacramental one), the documents from the ELCA seems to concur with the idea that the use of selected biblical material to be reinterpreted of such texts for outreach usage in modern times is appropriate. As demonstrated in this chapter, the ELCA itself recommends that Christians search the Scriptures to discover how God's Word challenges us to do some form of outreach ministry. The *Book of Concord* was written in a time that Douglas Hall calls the era of "Christendom" (1989, 11-4). Experience and reason in America, as Callahan and Mead argues, suggest that we are in a different time era beyond that time of Christendom (pp. 24-9). Hence, the mission field is not in some foreign country, as it might have been back in the days of Martin Luther, but is rather just beyond the
immediate four walls of any given congregation in America. As this chapter has demonstrated, the ELCA encourages and attempts to facilitate Lutheran congregations in efforts to create a congregational mission statement. I believe the creation of a mission statement is a small, modest, incremental step toward a congregation discovering the direction that God is calling it to pursue. It forces the community of faith to ask questions related to purpose and reason for existing. As the corporate business community might suggest, the mission statement has to be implemented in order to accomplish its intended purpose. The ELCA document also has this mission component in its program. The hope is to promote a more effective ministry.

Therefore, I believe the development of a mission statement would be one small part of an ongoing process for a congregation such as St. John's. After a mission statement has been developed, possibly a vision could be explored. Then assorted ways of implementing the mission might entail a vision. As times change, the mission and vision of the congregation could be revisited. In this way, St John's could develop some momentum to move incrementally off the plateau it currently resides on. It would allow much time for prayer, Bible study, reflection, and hopefully even more community discussion. It bears repetition to say that a mission statement is not a magic solution to the issues for a plateaued church. It is a part of an ongoing process to discover God's will for this congregation in this age of Christ's reign here on earth.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Qualitative Research

“Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam 1994, 5). Qualitative research attempts to discover how people make sense of, process, and understand the experiences of the social world in which they live. This approach to research utilizes interviews, observations, and document analysis to collect data, and further analyzes the data by presenting recurring categories, patterns, or themes (Merriam 1994, 1-6).

The project was qualitative in nature, drawing upon all of the typical characteristics of such research (Merriam 1994, 5-9). These characteristics and their applications in this project are listed below.

Participants' Perspective

The phenomenon under investigation is studied, not so much from the researcher's point of view, but from the participants' perspective.

Interviews were conducted to obtain participants' perspectives. The researcher and small ministry group selected the purposeful sample, “a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam 1994, 61), of individuals. Ten interviews were conducted with four questions each. The four interview questions emerged and were framed by the Scripture section in Chapter Two. According to Matthew 28:16-20,
discipleship is a cherished value within the church. A particular assumption behind these questions is from Chapter One. "It is assumed that the people of St. John’s actually want to move beyond stagnation and survival" (p. 9). The questions were ordered in the following way:

1. What do you think it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. What do you think Jesus has in mind for you as one of his disciples?
3. Tell me how you see St. John’s growing as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ?
4. Tell me how St. John’s Lutheran Church can better make disciples for Jesus in Montpelier (and Williams County), Ohio.

Researcher as Primary Instrument

The human researcher, as opposed to a formal questionnaire or inventory, becomes the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data.

I viewed myself not only as the resident pastoral theologian but also as a researcher. I identified a problem within the congregation where I serve. I then attempted to address it in a responsible manner. There is both scriptural support and a theological basis to support my efforts. With no mission statement, St. John’s is on a comfortable plateau that may evolve into stagnation. Utilizing interviews, observations, document analysis, ethnographic and historical case study, and sermons, it was my desire to provide a prescription for St. John’s. Hopefully, this will help the church move forward into the future as a community of faith.
Use of Fieldwork

Observation is a characteristic of qualitative research. The researcher spends a substantial amount of time observing behavior in a natural or field setting.

As one observes the operation of St. John’s church, it becomes apparent that there are no shortages of committees. The trustees oversee finances and building concerns. The elders are in charge of assisting in the Sacrament of Holy Communion during worship, follow-up on visitors, and bringing audietape of the worship services to those members who are homebound. The deacons assist with other areas of worship such as the sound system, offering, attendance, the outdoor nativity scene during the holidays, and helping with baptisms. The parish education committee oversees the operation of Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, as well as special programs such as the children’s Christmas programs. Recently formed committees include worship, which plans for future worship services and monitors the concerns of the worship life within the community. The mutual ministry committee’s goals are to maintain communications between the pastor and congregation members, as well as support the pastor in his or her ministry. There is a provision for a stewardship committee, but it is not formed.

Conspicuously absent from this group of committees is an evangelism or outreach committee, and St. John’s has never had one. Yet, there are some concerns that the church is not growing numerically. This observation is to be a point of departure for the case study in the history of outreach of St. John’s as it relates to the various church bodies the congregation has been affiliated with since its formation.
The absence of a mission statement was the identified problem of the project. One way to highlight this problem was through the use of case study. The historical information found in the case study could point to an underlying problem, which suggested a possible reason, why a mission statement (and lack of outreach strategy) is absent at St. John’s (Myers 1993, 3).

**Inductive Orientation**

An emergent and flexible design presents evolving categories, patterns, and themes.

Three primary categories, patterns, or themes emerged from the interviews. They were sharing our faith, caring for others, and preparing people for future challenges. Traditionally, Lutherans have not been comfortable in verbally sharing our personal Christian beliefs. This is a growing edge for us. While the area ministerial association does much care for those in need, there is a sentiment that St. John’s could be more proactive in this area. Finally, there is a consensus that preparing people for the future through Christian education is cherished core value.

Mission statements were collected from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations. Since St. John’s is an ELCA parish, it was helpful to discover categories, patterns, themes, similarities, and differences among the mission statements that have been developed by ELCA congregations that share a similar history tradition with congregations such as St. John’s. Approximately fifty mission statements composed the pool of data. As St. John’s begins the task of exploring its future through the creation of a mission statement, it was helpful to discover how other ELCA congregations have embarked on a similar journey.
Descriptive Study

The phenomenon is described in a comprehensive, holistic, and rich way with narratives, pictures, and words. This description can be accomplished through ethnography and case study.

Ethnography is a style of fieldwork or research developed and employed by anthropologists to study a society or some aspect of a society, culture, or group. This approach depends heavily on observation, integration into the society being studied, gathering data through interviews, conducting documentary analysis, creating diaries or field notes, and examining histories (Merriam 1994, 13-4; Bell 1999, 12-3).

Merriam writes, "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam 1994, 27).

Bell says:

It is much more than a story about or description of an event or state. As in all research, evidence is collected systematically, the relationships between variables are studied and the study is methodically planned... The great strength of the case-study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. (Bell 1999, 10-1).

Case studies can be characterized as to both type and intent.

An ethnographic case study is the type that focuses on the culture of the particular setting or group (Merriam 1994, 34). Another type is the historical case study:

This type of research employs techniques common to historiography—in particular, the use of primary resource material. The handling of historical material is systematic and involves distinguishing between primary and secondary sources. The nature of the account also distinguishes this form of case study. In applied fields such as education, historical case studies have
tended to be descriptions of institutions, programs, and practices as they evolved in time. Historical case studies may involve more than a chronological history of an event, however. To understand an event and apply that knowledge to present practice means knowing the context of the event, the assumptions behind it, and perhaps the event’s impact of the institution or participants. (Merriam 1994, 35)

The intent of a descriptive case study is to chronicle “a sequence of events” (Merriam 1994, 38). Just as the title suggests, description is the basic approach. An interpretative or analytical case study provides a great amount of analysis, and “gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon” (Merriam 1994, 38).

“Evaluative case studies involve description, explanation, and judgment” (Merriam 1994, 39). As is the characteristic of other qualitative research, this type of case study provides rich and thick description. This project will use the evaluative intent of case study. A brief history of St. John’s will be described. However, I will attempt to go beyond description and interpretation, and will try to provide evaluation and judgment how this traditional German Lutheran congregation’s history impacts its current lack of direction.

The project utilized elements of both ethnographic and historical case study (with the intents to describe, interpret, and evaluate) in order to understand the culture and history of St. John’s. Both implicit and explicit ideas, beliefs, and theology at St. John’s (Ammerman 1998, 30-5) are rooted in its tradition and history. Assorted church histories, directories and anniversary accounts served as historical data.

In addition to conducting interviews, engaging in the observations, examining documents, and preparing the an ethnographic/historical case study, I preached a series of four sermons on the following areas: nature of the exegetical work for
disciples, role of mission statements within the church the contents of the case study, and the reforming nature of discipleship. The first sermon dealt with the nature of discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel. All Christians are called to be growing as mature disciples who share our Christian faith with other people. The second sermon highlighted the differences between mission and vision. The former is a short-term purpose of the church’s existence. The latter is a long-term narrative of a potential future. The third sermon addressed the original mission of St. John’s church. It gathered the scattered German Lutherans who immigrated to America. A final sermon spoke of the reforming nature of the church to address changing times, as the early Reformation leaders of the church in Europe.

Conclusion

This qualitative research process took approximately two years to complete. Out of it emerged a deeper understanding as to why St. John’s resides on its current plateau. This method of research pointed to options that St. John’s might wish to pursue in its future. I view this process as being responsible to both the tasks of the qualitative researcher and pastoral theologian.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

St. John's has a church council comprised of many committees that do a thorough job of overseeing the daily operations and ministries of the church. Chapter Two cites the presence of this church council (p. 12). Absent from the basic council committee structure is any form of an outreach or evangelism committee. The first section of this chapter will cite a case study that I collected from available documents. The intent is to help explain why St. John's has historically not had an outreach or evangelism committee. Second, I will report the results of ten interviews I conducted with selected members of St. John's related to the topic of discipleship.

Historical Case Study

During the summer of 1918 Pastor Friedrich Mutschmann (pronounced Freedrick Moishman) cancelled summer church classes at his church in Gifford, Illinois, for the purpose of attending English language classes at the University of Illinois in Urbana. He was among many loyal German Americans who were forced to conduct their respective vocations in the English language rather than their native tongue. For Mutschmann and other German Lutherans like him, this initiative was a tremendous radical shift in their worldview. Mutschmann was the former pastor of the Edgerton, Edon, and Bridgewater (later to be St. John’s in Montpelier) churches in the years 1872-1875. He became the senior pastor upon the death of his predecessor, Pastor Friedrich Grimm, whom he
assisted. These were two clergy of the old Iowa Synod group of churches from where St. John's finds its roots. Germans in Europe helped plant the Iowa Synod mission churches in America (Mutschmann 1939, 13).

The Earliest Vision and Mission

This historical case study will include a brief survey of St. John's early roots with its origins in Europe. It will begin with the early European roots of the congregation and end with the current status quo.

European Roots

The Iowa Synod found its immigrant roots in Germany from the year 1830 into the 1880s. Like immigrants from other European nations, the Germans crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of land, opportunity, and freedom, which they lacked in their homeland. For the German Lutherans who came to America there were several factors that played a role in stimulating migration to America. Much confusion and disillusionment resulted after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. In efforts to bring order out of chaos, the Congress of Vienna shifted many national boundaries in Europe. One new nation, the Netherlands, was created, while some were placed under the sovereignty of other nations. Some nations such as Prussia had their borders extended. Many nations were slowly introducing constitutional government after observing the results of both the American Revolutionary War and French Revolution. However, this would be a tedious process in many nations, and some citizens grew discontented. Those who were disgruntled or disillusioned about the changes in Europe began to look toward America as a land of hope and opportunity. Many Germans were part of those
immigrants who arrived onto the American shore in this era. These German Lutherans were the ancestors of the people of St. John's during this migration after the Napoleonic Wars (Nelson 1975, 147-8).

A second factor that contributed to the mass immigration to America was the changing economic conditions in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Farms suffered many setbacks due to unpredictable weather conditions. Wealthy landlords who owned larger masses of land were replacing small family farms, often making farmers tenants on what was formerly their own land. As many farmers fled to the urban centers, they discovered that they simply exchanged roles from being slaves of the land to being slaves to “iron monsters” of industrial factories. Manufacturing methods, steam powered transportation, and the elimination of the old style guild system left many families with few choices in realizing a better standard of living. The German economy struggled vigorously against the British economy, thereby making Germany a difficult place to live for the average working family. Hence, taking risks to immigrate to America became an attractive option for many people (Nelson 1975, 148-9).

A third factor that led to the immigration to America was a religious one. Successors to the Lutheran Reformers produced doctrinal formulations as polemics against Calvinists and Roman Catholics that presupposed verbal, historical, and scientific inerrancy of Scripture. This was perpetuated in preaching, catechetical instruction, and hymnals. This form of Lutheran orthodoxy believed that all inquiry had been fixed. This particular view of the confessions was to be respected in a dogmatic manner or without question (Nelson 1975, 149). In response to this reality, E. Clifford Nelson writes:

But for many correctness of doctrine was a cold and sterile matter. The long decades of warfare, famine and pestilence of the sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries had produced a yearning for the kind of religion that warmed the heart and set the soul on fire with assurance and certainty. The movement known as pietism met that need. Far more concerned with a faith that could be lived with zeal and certainty than with a doctrinal system, pietism produced in both the Lutheran and Reformed churches an attitude and disposition, which minimized doctrinal differences between the two and stressed instead an underlying unity rooted in personal religious experience. (1975, 149)

Strong laypersons holding roles of leadership, involvement in church, works of evangelism, missions, and mercy, as well as a renewed vigor of Bible study and prayer, characterized this form of German and Scandinavian pietism. The externals of sacramental theology and liturgical worship were integrated with the experience of awakening and conversion. This movement broke the hold of orthodoxy upon the universities, leaving them open to the influence of the Enlightenment and critical-literary approaches to the study of Scripture (Nelson 1975, 149).

By the nineteenth century the rationalism of the Enlightenment dominated many European Protestant pulpits and universities. Traditional Protestant Christian views of such teachings as vicarious atonement and justification by faith were dismissed as untenable. Traditional religious concerns were replaced with homilies on current events, scientific discourses, advice on animal stall-feeding, the evils of alcohol, careless bathing practices, public sanitation, and issues related to planting trees. Many lay people welcomed this change in the pulpits, while others clung to the conservative religious faith that they were taught at childhood (Nelson 1975, 150).

Reaction to rationalism within the German Lutheran church developed along two major groups. The first group was the supra-rationalism or rationalistic supernaturalism leaders. They refused to abandon supernatural revelation. For them, religious truth is to be proved by Scripture, which they held to be superior to reason. Still, reason was a tool
which one could use establish legitimate views from Scripture. This school of thought would later influence Lutherans who were to seek closer ties to other American Protestant churches, out of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The movement that reacted against rationalism in German Lutheran churches came to be known as the “Old Lutheranism” or “confessionalism” (Nelson 1975, 150).

Old Lutherans tended to blend scholastic orthodoxy and the pietism of the individual. Attempts were made to blend orthodoxy and pietism through the Prussian Union of Lutheran and Reformed churches. Fueled by nationalism and the uncertainties after the Napoleonic wars, the Union of Prussia churches were initially pietistic, sporadic, and unorganized in nature. This revival movement stressed Bible study, prayer, an urgent conversion-oriented preaching, and anxiety about the future. Reacting against this pietism movement, the Reformed churches in Europe were critical of the liturgical aspects of this movement. Lutherans observed doctrinal indifference within the Prussian Union churches. They were still influenced by the revivals, thus stirring a spiritual awakening that led to a strong confessional consciousness among Lutherans (Nelson 1975, 150-1).

The confessional revivals that emerged were fostered by publications of Martin Luther as tercentennial celebrations of the Reformation occurred throughout Europe. Also, newer copies of the Augsburg Confession were published. Wilhelm Hengstenberg was the advocate for a theology of repristination, or literal repetition of the works of Luther. He defended the immunity of Scripture from literary criticism and called for a high level of biblical authority similar to the earlier period of the seventeenth century, as well as a very strict, literal view of the Bible, or biblicism (Nelson 1975, 151).
Neo-Lutheranism was a closely related movement to Hengstenberg’s restristination views. William Loewe (pronounced Lay-ah) and August Vilmar represented this confessional movement. These church leaders believed that the Lutheran Church should be based solely on the confessions (or the Book of Concord) while being in close conformity to the New Testament model of the church. They were accused of being crypto-Catholics due their higher liturgical emphasis, exaltation of the Lord’s Supper (or sacrament of communion), belief that Christ works through the ordained ministry in a special way, and an emphasis on the Catholic character of Lutheran confessions (Nelson 1975, 151).

The Earlangen movement was the third confessional movement that emerged from this time period. Unlike other movements in that era, this movement did not regard the confessions as rigid, inflexible interpretations of the Christian faith, but rather expressions of religious experience of the church in its conflict with error and truth. Lacking a desire to repristinate or romanticize the confession, it emphasized a person’s experience of regeneration. Some have termed this as a theology of “organic progress.” German Lutherans who were influenced by all of these movements immigrated to America. St. John’s has its roots in William Loewe’s Neo-Lutheranism movement in Germany. In America, it became known as “Old Lutheranism,” as opposed to that form of Lutheranism that was influenced by the majority of rationalist churches in Germany (Nelson 1975, 151-2, 457).
Missionary Churches of the Iowa Synod in America

On October 18, 1872, Mutshmann and a group of other young men who were trained as missionaries at the school in Neuendettelsau, Germany, came to the American mission field. They arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey, and took a ferry to New York City. After a brief struggle to find the immigrant mission office in New York, they boarded a train for Edgerton, Ohio. Their mission was to gather the scattered German Lutherans who were in need of Lutheran Christian teaching. Since the 1840s, there was concern expressed in urgent letters to German Lutheran churches. The fear was that Lutheran immigrants were in danger of not worshiping the faith of their fathers, but rather that of the sectarians, Roman Catholics, and heathens in America. Mutshmann and his fellow missionaries were sent to America after being trained in Lohe’s mission school for the purposes of gathering the scattered “lost sheep of the House of Israel” (or German Lutherans who immigrated to America) into Lutheran congregations (Mutshmann 1939, 3; Zeilingen 1929, 9-13).

Mutshmann was a graduate of Pfarrer William (or Wilhelm) Lohe’s missionary school in Neuendettelsau (pronounced Noi-en-dettle-sow), Germany. Unimpressed by the then mainstream theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher’s lectures at Berlin in 1828, Lohe was what American historians called an “Old Lutheran,” or the Neo-Lutheran movement in Germany. He rejected much of what he saw in rationalist trends in German Lutheran churches. Due to hard economic times, and his resistance to rationalist views in Germany, it took him six years to obtain his first congregation from seminary. His one and only church was located in the small town outside Nuerenberg, Germany, Neuendettelsau.
Here is where Loehe helped make the history of the Iowa Synod where St. John’s Church finds its early roots (Bickle 1997, 6; Zeilinger 1929, 8).

Mutschmann, like other Neuendettelsau graduates, was educated outside the traditional German university system that trained clergy. Loehe’s school was a three-year missionary school intended to prepare teachers. Upon arrival in America, the missionaries were to complete their training under the care of the area synod at one of the seminaries in Columbus, Ohio, Fort Wayne, Indiana, or Dubuque, Iowa. Mutschmann, who was born on December 9, 1848, and raised in a working middle class family, did not receive the classical university education of his time, but rather was an apprentice mechanic. He went to the city school at Tafelhof, and attended middle school at Obstmarkt. His family moved frequently to accommodate his father’s employment. Mutschmann and his brothers were all orphaned in 1865 when both of their parents died. His parents made sure that he received the finest religious instruction at church that was available at the time for common families. Friedrich did well in religious instruction classes under instructors Cantor and Headmaster Riedner, who served with Pastor Feldkirchner. He was taught the confessional differences between the Lutherans, Reformed, and Roman Catholic churches. Once confirmed, he left Tafelhof. At age sixteen, he trained as a millwright for one year, then found himself at the mission house in Neuendettelsau, founded by Loehe.

Loehe’s missionary school was a response to letters he received from many Lutheran pastors in the America, such as Pastor Wynecken (a co-founder of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), lamenting the concern that immigrant Lutherans were falling prey to sects, Romans Catholics, and heathens. Also, there was the concern that many of
the Lutherans from the Henry Melchior Muhlenburg tradition out of Pennsylvania were pursuing the false ideas of "unionism," or seeking fellowship with non-Lutheran churches, as well as use of historical critical methods of studying Scripture and tolerant views of Masonic lodge membership (Zeilinger 1929, 14-25, 103-11; Nelson 1973, 458).

While traveling to St. Sebald, Iowa, to finish his training at the theological seminary there (later the seminary would be located in Dubuque, Iowa), Mutschmann and his companion Hertel were detained and invited to a meal in the parsonage in Edgerton, Ohio, by Pastor Grimm, who served the Edgerton, Edon, and Bridgewater churches. He served other mission stations as well (Hicksville was such a place) with the meager funds he received from Germany, or the donations of the local parishioners. This was the mission field of that time. Pastor Grimm asked Mutschmann to become his assistant, and bid farewell to Hertel to continue his trip to the seminary in Iowa. The clergy shortage was great in those days. Quite frequently these missionaries with three years of Lutheran teacher education were intercepted while attempting to finish their training as Loewe had envisioned and asked to become full-time clergy. The fear was that the churches in need would never see the candidate again due to the severe need of clergy of that time. Also, it was thought that the three year training under Loewe was more than adequate training for what lay ahead in the dismal, difficult frontier life of being a Lutheran pastor in a mission field. Many clergy died of diseases or were killed in outlaw raids and violent uprisings of American Indians of that time. So the train stop in Edgerton resulted in Mutschmann being asked to stay in Ohio, rather than continuing his theological training due to the severe clergy shortage in the 1870s (Huber-Field Notes 2001, Entry 44).
Pastor Grimm had brought his three-point parish charge into the Iowa Synod of churches, because this is where his clergy credentials resided. Mutschmann, his new assistant, would assist in preaching duties on Sunday. Also, he was to start teaching classes at 7:00 a.m. in Edon, Ohio. Mutschmann would continue as Grimm’s assistant until Grimm’s death later that year. Grimm served that parish for six years. Mutschmann would be the new pastor for two years. (Mutschmann 1939, 4-5; St. John’s Lutheran History 1967, 2)

Before Pastor Grimm, Pastor F. Ritter organized this three church parish as he traveled from Bryan attempting to preach to as many German immigrant Lutherans as possible. This was part of the ministry of the missionary pastors of that time. They were called to gather the scattered German Lutherans. While Pastor Ritter was unaffiliated with any particular Lutheran church body, Pastor Grimm was a member of the Iowa Synod group of churches. There were other clergy of that time who were affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. John’s Lutheran History 1967, 2).

*The Mission of the Iowa Synod*

The Iowa and now Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod trace their roots to the 1840s when “Old Lutheran” pastors such as Wynecken sent letters of desperation to pastors in Germany like Loche. The Lutheran churches, which had already been settled in America, were following what historians called “unionism,” or attempting to seek fellowship with Methodist, Reformed, and Presbyterian Church groups. This was rejected as being unfaithful to the Lutheran confessions. Loche, a Neo-Lutheran in Europe, who rejected the rationalism of the time, was sympathetic to these concerns. So he worked diligently to train young men to serve as missionaries as well as provide financial support for those
pastors who held to the similar views of confessional Lutheranism, as he did. Fear of sectarian religious influence cannot be emphasized enough in this history (besides that of Roman Catholics and what we called the unchurched or what were termed as “heathens” of that time era). Wynecken’s group of pastors settled near Saginaw, Michigan, and what is now Frankenmuth, Michigan. They built a teaching seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Among Wynecken’s pastors was C.F.W. Walther, who is now known as the key founder of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. They also established churches in Missouri. Today Perry County Missouri is one of the most populated Lutheran areas in the United States (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 1; Zeiling 1929, 12-8; Wolf 1999, 209).

There is much speculation as to exactly what occurred, but Loehe, Wynecken, and Grossman (another Missouri-Synod Pastor), had a dispute over the definition of ministry, other groups of Lutheran missionaries working in their area, and views on Holy Communion as a means of grace. Loehe parted company with the two pastors. As a result, other groups of missionaries that were sent by Loehe such as Sigmund Fritschel (a major founder of the Iowa Synod) went to St. Seabald, Iowa, to begin another seminary. They were stranded until they could get more financial support. Another settlement would be established in nearby Dubuque where the Wartburg Lutheran Seminary still stands. This settlement began on August 24, 1854. Once this break with the Missouri Synod churches occurred, Loehe’s support for the Missouri churches ceased (Meuser 1958, 24).

Despite their differences, Iowa and Missouri Synod churches had much in common. Both these churches eventually parted company in Loehe’s views of a strong
clergy-controlled church, and opted for a stronger congregational polity, though Missouri would insist on a stringent agreement in all confessional matters before fellowship with other churches could occur. Iowa always believed that there are varieties of views within Lutheranism, and reserved the right to be in dialogue (but not hold membership) with other Lutheran churches, despite major theological disagreements. Both Iowa and Missouri Synods agreed that the trend of unionism or pursuing fellowship with Methodists, Presbyterians, and other non-Lutheran churches was not being faithful to the confessions. Both supported a German-speaking community of faith, though Iowa was willing to experiment with English church publications. But they essentially agreed that a separate German Lutheran church is to be preferred to attempts at developing fellowship with English-speaking American churches. Opposition to what was called “new measures” championed by Charles Finney was a common passion for both Lutheran churches. What was termed “conversion theology” was viewed as being untrue to the confessions. These were components of the revivalist movement that swept the nation at the time, which Lutherans opposed. Both Iowa and Missouri rejected membership in secret societies or lodges, as well as the populist views of the last days or millennium, and what was known as “chiliasm.” They held a commitment to making each parish a center for educating young German Lutheran people on proper religious views, and later reading, writing, and arithmetic. This would later pave the way for a private or parochial school system in future years (Meuser 1958, 25-8; Zeilinger 1929, 23, 103-11).

St. John’s does have common roots with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in its origins. Pastor Mutschmann’s duties were that of primarily a teacher of the younger people in the churches in Edgerton, Edon, and Bridgewater (later to move to Montpelier
to become St. John's Church). His mission like that of the Iowa Synod was to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants into congregations that taught similar views of the "Old Lutheranism" in Europe in the face of unionism of other Lutheran churches. Also present were the influences of the "rough neck English community" (Mutschmann 1939, 9). Germans always faced the temptation to conform to the less than Lutheran Christian culture of the time. It is recorded that Lutheran missionary pastors viewed their church members as the "lost sheep of Israel" who were scattered and without a shepherd. The mission was to create a "new Zion" of Lutheran congregations that held similar views of the "old Lutheranism" which was the minority view in Europe at that time (Mutschmann 1939, 9). One possible historical reason why St. John's does not have an outreach or evangelism committee is that its historical reason for existing was to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants into congregations. Methods of conversion theology as championed by revivalist leaders such as Charles Finney were rejected. This is where St. John's and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod shared a common heritage. Again, both synods believed that they were called to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants who came to America (Zeilinger 1939, 9-19, 110).

*Ministry in an Iowa Synod Church*

While living above the local furniture store, Mutschmann’s life was quite rugged. Not being skilled in riding horses, trips on foot between Edgerton, Edon, and Bridgewater resulted in exhaustion, so the congregations voted to finance his renting of a horse. Teaching and leading worship and the preparatory work for these ministries is what occupied most of the pastor’s time. Next, he needed a wife. Being uncomfortable in carrying on close fraternization with the local women, he sent a letter of request for a
wife to the Inspector of Missions Bauer in Neuendettelsau, Germany. After many months, he received two letters, one from the inspector and the other from his future wife, along with a photograph of the woman. Mutschmann writes that she was a "cultured daughter of the widow teacher in Nuremberg who herself was a teacher-of noble decent-from Switzerland and the sister of Pastor Carl Hoerig of Jonesboro, Illinois." Her name was Johanna von Zeigler of the house Schaffhausen in Switzerland. This letter arrived in April. So Mutschmann rented a small house, planted a garden, and met her in a train station in July. After a greeting kiss, he took her to the parsonage of Pastor Goebel in Bryan, where she stayed with Pastor Lenz's family until their wedding day. On the day of the wedding, since her mother could not be present, a picture of Johanna's mother hung on the wall in the church right above a note written for the special day (Mutschmann 1939, 6-7). The Mutschmann family had ten children. Two died at an early age. One son, Ernst, became a Lutheran pastor and later translated his father's manuscripts into English. This illustrates the type of family piety of a Lutheran pastor at that time (Mutschmann 1939, 16).

The primary duties of Iowa Synod clergy during this time were that of pastor and teacher. Diseases such as smallpox killed many people. There were one hundred pastors serving the Iowa Synod in the 1870s. Pastors viewed themselves as missionaries who served those places where God had placed them. Late night studies with the use of an oil lamp were common. Twenty-three clergy deserted the ministry in this time period. Replacements came from either Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, or Loehe’s missionary school in Neuendettelsau, Germany (Mutschmann 1939, 17-9; Zeilinger 1929, 47-56).
The Iowa Synod made modest attempts to convert the American Indians to Christianity, but met with minimal success. Mutschmann himself had some contacts with American Indians. Other missions included New Guinea. The national doctrinal concern within the Iowa Synod was that of the crypto-Calvinist controversy that was raging with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The issue at stake was whether God bases divine election of humans unto salvation on foreknowledge, or a given moment of election. This was the predestination controversy. C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod argued the latter view and was accused of holding a position similar to the Calvinist double predestination doctrine. Iowa leaned in the direction of election based on foreknowledge, and was accused of being synergists or semi-Pelagians (like the Methodists). For clergy and laity in mission fields like Ohio, simply gathering the flocks of increasing amount of German immigrants was a very large task that required all of one’s efforts (Huber 1989, 120-121; Zeilinger 1929, 56-62).

In 1876 Mutschmann left his Ohio churches for a call in Charles City, Iowa. As his family grew, this mission site provided a larger salary and parsonage. The work was much harder than in Ohio, but he also reports greater results. A short time later he took a mission church in Boscobel, Wisconsin, where he served for twenty-nine years. Mutschmann left Pastor William G. Wacke as his successor in Ohio. Wacke served the Edon and Bridgewater churches from 1876 to 1900.

A History of the St. John’s Lutheran Church Ministry

Church history records indicate that Pastor Wacke was the fourth pastor of St. John’s. Pastor Ritter from Bryan founded this congregation. It was later organized as a congregation of the Iowa Synod under their second pastor, F. Grimm (1879). His
predecessor, Pastor Mutschmann, served St. John’s Church as its third pastor (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 1967).

The first worship services for this congregation were held in 1867 at the Zeiter’s schoolhouse in Bridgewater, north of Montpelier. There were nine voting members. They were: Leonard Slough, George Geiss, John Schaeffer, Lorenz Bauer, Christian Burkhardt, John Ruff, David Geiss, Louis Winegert, and Henry Bauer (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 1-3; 1967, 1).

For three years Pastor Wacke conducted worship in the Zeiter schoolhouse in Bridgewater. In 1879, after much deliberation, a lot was purchased in the heart of Montpelier, on the corner of Washington and Broad Streets, for $60.00. A frame structure was erected for $1,700.00. Mr. Mart Kimmer supervised the building project, and Mr. Charles Walz assisted him. The building was intended to be the “House of God where weary souls may enter and drink freely from the ‘Well of water springing up into everlasting life and eat the true bread from heaven.’” (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 1-2; 1967, 2)

After the difficult years of rugged ministry under Pastors Grimm and Mutschmann, Pastor Wacke sought to incorporate St. John’s Church as a religious society under the laws of the State of Ohio. The church historical records report:

On January 3, 1882, Reverend Wacke, George Schaefer, Lewis Wingert, John Schaefer, Lorenz Bauer and Daniel Henry appeared before William Drake, a Justice of the Peace in and for Williams County, and drew up articles of incorporation. These were evidently filed in the Common Pleas Court of Bryan, Ohio, April 6, 1881. The Certificate of Incorporation was filed in the office of the Secretary of State, April 11, 1882, and a true copy bears the signature of Charles Townsend, who was Secretary of State that year. Under the articles of incorporation our full name is “The German Evangelical Lutheran Church St. John’s Church.” Seldom do we use our full name. (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 2)
Pastor Wacke was well known for his sound biblical teaching. He was known as a harsh disciplinarian in confirmation instruction. He would use the rod to instill and maintain classroom discipline. His fear was that he might have been too strict at times. During this twenty-four year time period, he and his family often lived on a very meager income for that time. His family was hungry, but the Lord did provide. Again, all local church historians underscore Pastor Wacke’s love for sound biblical preaching and teaching as high priority in his ministry at St. John’s. In 1900, he was called to serve a congregation in Toledo, Ohio. His successor would be Pastor W.P. Dimke. Meanwhile, Pastor Mutschmann was serving his twenty-nine year tenure as pastor in Boscobel, Wisconsin (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 2; 1967, 3; Mutschmann 1939, 9-10).

St. John’s made the transition into worshiping in the English language under Pastor Dimke. There was concern that Mrs. Bauer, a devout member of St. John’s, could barely understand the English language, but the congregation proceeded in that direction anyway. Local historians report that the community still considered St. John’s as the “German church.” Worshiping in English did not change the opinion of many people in the community. It took St. John’s about nine years to make this transition from German to English in worship services (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 3; 1967, 3).

During the World War I time era, Pastor Mutschmann had taken a church in Gifford, Illinois. He describes this time period as “The Awful War.” It was during this time that he reports that many local citizens would have been pleased to hang or shoot all German Lutheran pastors. Teaching German in church schools was forbidden. He had to have his congregation officers accompany him carrying guns, as he walked outdoors, in
order to protect him from the local population. Mutschmann and some of his members still wanted to remain a "German Church" despite the pressure of World War I. An area pastor's wife, who spoke German, was provoked into an argument (Mutschmann 1939, 132-3). She was jailed in Danville, Illinois. It was not until the congregation could raise the $600.00, that she could be released. It was under such pressures of "The Awful War" that Mutschmann finally cancelled summer church school and attended English language classes in Urbana, Illinois (Mutschmann 1939, 132-3). Decisions to switch worshiping from German to the English language had little to do with the arguments or persuasion the English Lutherans who adopted the American tongue for decades now. He was told that eventually there would be no protection for those who did not learn to speak the English language in America during the World War I. He always viewed himself as a "Lutheran German in the American Diaspora" (Mutschmann 1939, 132-3).

At St. John's in 1909, Pastor Albert C. Hueter would succeed Pastor Dimke. St. John's and St. Peter's in Edon was his first pastoral call out of seminary. St. John's had made the complete transition from German to English worship at this time. Pastor Hueter was instrumental in creating the first Sunday school program at St. John's. "Jesus Loves Me" was one of the favorite songs the children enjoyed singing at that time. Sharing Bible stories, learning the "Ten Commandments," and studying biblical passages were the highlights of this ministry (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1967, 4).

That year, the Ladies Aid Society was organized under Pastor Hueter. The organizing meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Dorothy Chapman. Fourteen were present, and were made charter members. In February 1935, the name would be changed to the Women's Missionary Society, later to be divided into circles and become the
Women of the Church (WOTC) in 1960. They became the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988. Historically, this group has contributed money to foreign missions and other Lutheran charitable institutions. They also have an annual fall luncheon that is known throughout Montpelier. They used the money to support foreign missionaries. During this period, one church historian writes:

Congregational matters seemed to proceed in a satisfactory way. Each year we held our annual business meetings, along with other business meetings. For instance take the year 1920... In that year our elected officers were: Harvey Henry, Deacon; Charles Kummick, Trustee; Marion Haines, Financial Secretary; George Schafer, Treasurer; Mrs. Fred Kepler, Organist with Edith Haines as Assistant. Our total receipts for the year were $48.91. Our total disbursements were $43.65 leaving a balance of $5.26. We also consolidated the fund of the congregation and of the Sunday school into one treasury. We raised the Janitor’s fee from $10 to $20 with the stipulation that the Janitor provides the fuel. Our yearly receipts continued until by the year 1923, the year I (Pastor Hueter) left the congregation, they amounted to $766.10 and the congregation had voted to pledge $400.00 toward a new pastor’s salary. (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1967, 5)

This underscores the current observation, that St. John’s has always had a highly organized committee structure in the operation of congregational business matters (Nelson 1975, 492; St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 3; 1967, 4-5).

During this period of time the Iowa Synod began developing and expanding what they termed “Institutions of Mercy” (Zeilinger 1929, 94-5). Besides the area Lutheran Orphans’ Home in Toledo, there was the Martin Luther Home in Sterling, Nebraska. The Orphans’ Home was located in Waverly, Nebraska. Here, Lutheran churches helped to support “the house for the little ones, a home for the aged, a hospital deaconess motherhouse, and home for epileptic and a school for girls” (Zeilinger 1929, 94-5). In Arthur, North Dakota, Pastor A. Hoeger began the “Associated Lutheran Home for Cripples, Epileptics, and Feeble-minded” (Zeilinger 1929, 95). There was The Lutheran
Hospice and Benevolent Association of Minneapolis, Minnesota, as well as St. Andrew’s Hospital in Minneapolis, and the Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouse in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At this time Wartburg Publishing House began, which would later become Augsburg Publishing House, and after the 1988 ELCA merger, Augsburg Fortress. Being what Lutheran historians termed a “Missionary Synod” meant that the Iowa Synod developed institutions of mercy to care for other Lutherans in need. The foreign mission field that they were committed was an ongoing support to New Guinea (Zeilinger 1929, 63-66, 92-102).

Also in that time period there was church-wide controversies over assorted theological issues of the day. Questions of fellowship with non-Lutheran churches were resolved early. Those churches that Iowa had close association with agreed that the Lutheran confessions as contained in the Lutheran Book of Concord were the correct interpretations of the Bible (Elwell 1984, 714; Meuser 1958, 293-5; Zeilinger 1929, 103-11).

Issues related to the interpretation of various of chapters in the book of Revelation, which suggested that the Roman Catholic Pope was the Anti-Christ spoken of in Revelation, raged on for decades to come. A related topic was the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10. This was known as the “chiliasm” controversy. Iowa and other Lutheran churches within its fellowship agreed that Scripture does not specifically resolve all the questions that were being raised at that time. They had a category called “open questions” regarding certain theological matters of that time that were not essential in matters of faith. Where Scripture does not speak, Iowa and other Lutheran churches did not believe they needed to take a hard and rigid position on these issues. They viewed
the various millennial views of the time as "theories." (Elwell 1984, 714; Meuser 1958, 293-5; Zeilinger 1929, 103-11).

Another major issue of the time was related to the inspiration of Scripture. While various theories existed ranging from a literalist or fundamentalist view to a liberal Social Gospel of the Bible, Iowa and other Lutheran churches in its fellowship sought some middle ground. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod had its form of literalist interpretation of Scriptures based on its view of the Lutheran confessions. They demanded total or uniform agreement with their views in order to be in fellowship with any church body. The group of Lutherans who descended from English Lutherans (later to be called the United Lutheran Church in America or ULCA) were open to considering historical-critical views of the Bible at that time, which were seen as being liberal, since they found their origins in the rationalist influenced churches of Europe. Iowa Synod opted to take a view as reported below:

These synods signatory to these Articles of Agreement accept without exception all the canonical books of the Old and the New Testaments as a whole, and all their parts, as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submit to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life. (Meuser 1958, 295)

The last phrase of "in all matters of faith and life" qualified the authority of Scripture in that some churches of that time believed in a higher level of biblical authority in all matters of life. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod took this type of a position with the qualification that interpretation of Scripture is to conform to their interpretation of the Lutheran confessions (Meuser 1958, 293-5; Zeilinger 1929, 103-11).

Another controversy of the time included whether Christians should belong to lodges and secret societies. Both Iowa Synod and its fellowship of churches as well as the
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod believed that Christians should sever connections with such organizations. Many local clergy and laity never got involved with these controversies, as they were usually debated on a national level (Elwell 1984, 714; Meuser 1958, 293-5; Zeilinger 1929, 103-11).

Pastor Hueter left St. John's and St. Peter's Lutheran church to become the superintendent for the Lutheran Orphan's and Old Folks Home in Toledo, Ohio. He would make trips back to St. John's and St. Peter's in Edon by train about twice a month while the two church parishes were vacant for two years (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1942, 3; 1967 4-5).

After extending four unsuccessful calls, Rev. William Feller, another seminary graduate, became the pastor of St. John's and St. Peter's Lutheran Churches in 1925. St. John's undertook a building-remodeling program in this time period. The west 60 feet of the church property was sold for $1,450.00. A new piano was secured as well as a new roof. Electric lighting was installed. The old stove, which occupied much of the floor space, was taken out, allowing room for more pews to be placed within the worship area. The pulpit, which was in the southwest corner of the church, was removed and a new one was placed at the center of the sanctuary. The total cost for these improvements was $1,546.07. In 1930 Pastor Feller decided to resume more studies at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1942, 3; 1967, 5-6).

Rev. Raymond E. Springer would be the next pastor at St. John's and St. Peter's Churches. St. John's was now a member of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), a newly formed denomination. Despite what was known as the "national depression" as related to economic conditions in America, St. John's grew numerically. The theological
seminaries were graduating more pastors than there were parishes available. So the Michigan District of the ALC encouraged multiple point congregations to separate in order to have their own pastor (Huber 1989, 199-200; St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 4; 1967, 6).

At the annual birthday social sponsored by the Women’s Missionary Society on September 29, 1933, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Scott, Rev. Springer suggested that St. John’s call a full-time pastor. This was a shock. There was great concern that this would be financially impossible and the congregation would be ruined. After much prayer and seeking divine guidance, the congregation decided to call Rev. Kenneth DeWalt, a seminary graduate. This occurred in November 1934. He would be paid $600.00 per year, plus Edon would contribute $100.00 for two years. He would also Assist Rev. Springer in pastoral duties during this time of transition (Huber 1989, 199-200; St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 4; 1967, 6).

In January 1934, Pastor Kenneth DeWalt arrived in Montpelier. His first home was with Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Blue. He then rented a house that was arranged for him until the congregation purchased a parsonage, which was located six blocks away from the church for $1,965.00. Within three years the congregation was debt free. There was a desire to have the parsonage closer to the church. One historical account reports the following:

Time brings opportunities. In the summer of 1940 steps were taken to secure the semi-bungalow west of the church on the lot once owned by the congregation. On November 17, 1940, the congregation voted to purchase the property for $3,800.00. It was the eighth of January 1941, when the minister’s family occupied the home. The old parsonage was sold for $2,400.00. (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1942, 7)
Other building decisions of that time included improvements to the church building itself. During the fourteen-year ministry of Pastor DeWalt, growth in the congregation made it necessary to improve the church building. One local account reports:

In 1942, in preparation for the seventy-fifth anniversary, the interior of the church was remodeled to form a chancel, baptistry, sacristy and choir loft. New pews were added, art glass windows were installed, and the walls were plastered and new furnace installed. (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1992, 14)

This reflects a strong core value of maintaining and upgrading the church building by the members of the church. These building projects were not completely finished until 1947, and dedicated in 1948 to the honor of the members who served in the military.

During this period of time, St. John's was proud of the fact that twenty-five of their sons served our nation in World War II. Pastor DeWalt resigned his position in 1948. Rev. Donald Hesterman would answer the call to become the next pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church.

Pastor DeWalt led St. John's through some very trying times for the country as well as for the ALC. Clergy of the older Iowa Synod were retired or had passed away as did Mutschmann in this time period. The ALC was now an English-speaking church. It was conversant with the issues and controversies, which faced other church denominations. One ongoing debate was one that had its origins in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies, related to the authority of Scripture. It concerned the implications of the Enlightenment along with subsequent philosophical developments of Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudianism. This tended to challenge many cherished traditional beliefs for all Christians in America.

Within Lutheranism there was the ULCA, which believed that the Bible's authority does not reside in its view of inerrancy, but in its religious message. The Word
of God is God's self-disclosure in history, the people of history, and ultimately in Jesus Christ. The Word of God is a canon within a canon. This came to be known as "new theology" of the time (Nelson 1975, 463-4).

On the other side of the theological spectrum were the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod views. Franz Pieper was the chief architect of this theological position. Pieper viewed the confessions through the eyes of the seventeenth century dogmaticians who reprimanded the "Old Lutheranism" from Europe which opposed the Schleiermacher theology of that time. For Pieper and the Missouri Synod, Scripture's authority is secured by asserting the inerrancy of a verbally-inspired Bible and dogmatic use of the confessions from the seventeenth century perspective. While the ULCA's position was called "new theology," Missouri's view was labeled "reprivitation theology" (Nelson 1875, 457-64).

The ALC, or the denomination St. John's held membership in, was suspicious of the "ULCA theology." However, it attempted to sit on the sidelines of this controversy for as long as possible andtaught the old Lutheranism in its seminaries such as in Columbus, Ohio, from where St. John's received many of its pastors. The ULCA seminary in Springfield, Ohio, was willing to explore the use of the modern historical-critical methods used elsewhere in the ULCA (Nelson 1975, 463-4; Huber 1989, 171-3). Yet, the ALC reserved its right to work with the ULCA through the National Lutheran Church Council. Together they carried on common ministry efforts through schools, and universities and to Lutheran armed forces personnel. They were partners in various efforts of international crisis relief. The Missouri Synod was always reluctant to participate in such ventures for fear of comprising its views of the Lutheran confessions.
Still, the Missouri Synod saw the ALC as "orthodox." The ongoing issue remained, "Does confessional unity require theological uniformity?" The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod beliefs affirmed this strongly, whereas the ULCA argued only in the doctrine the gospel and administration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession, Article VII) is such agreement necessary. The ALC sympathized with Missouri, but insisted on maintaining dialogue and ongoing mission work with the ULCA (Nelson 1975, 458, 465-71).

Lutherans in smaller communities were less concerned with national church issues, but rather focused on its local economy. In Montpelier, Ohio, the Wabash Railroad was the dominant economic force in the community. An office building was built next to the depot in 1936. The town’s prosperity was summarized with the phrase, "As the Wabash goes, so goes Montpelier." The high schools teams became known as the "Montpelier Locomotives" (Cooley 1995, 70).

Rev. Hesterman began his duties in August 1948. This began a time of great blessings for both Pastor Hesterman and the congregation of St. John’s. The dedication of the Parish Hall occurred in October. This was a house that was purchased for the purpose of doing church ministry. Sunday school and other church activities took place in this building. A service circle was organized, as was a brotherhood. In the spring of 1949, the first Vacation Bible School ministry was organized. The Parish Hall made all of these ministries possible. The burning of the mortgage for the Parish Hall occurred on August 6, 1950, and fueled this time of excitement and optimism further. After the congregation decided to contribute $1,000.00 to the Williams County General Hospital, it grew confident that it could begin a new building program. In October 1950, a planning committee was elected. After many meetings, prayer, and hard work, the day of
groundbreaking occurred on October 26, 1952. After five years the church was debt free. The oldest member of the congregation at that time was Sarah Haines, who was baptized on September 20, 1896. The people of St. John’s Church saw this as the Lord’s blessings upon the church. Physical growth of the congregation seemed to come. Such physical growth of the congregation’s membership and expansion of ministries was viewed as synonymous with “spiritual growth” in this time period (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1967, 8-9; 1992, 16-7).

All Christian churches were experiencing a post war boom in the 1950s. This was also true for all Lutheran churches, regardless of their theological views. The secular culture seemed to be supportive of Christian values at that time. This was a time termed by historians as “Mass Christendom.” Mission societies, church colleges and national social mission organizations were expanding and at their peak during this time era. St. John’s was also blessed to be a beneficiary of this religious climate in America under Pastor Hesterman (Nelson 1975, 481-6).

Pastor Hesterman accepted a call to Parma, Ohio, in January 1954. His successor would be Pastor Glenn DeVantier, who recently graduated from Capital Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Historical records seem to indicate that building improvements continued to be a high priority during this era. The belief was that the church building needed “finishing touches.” So exterior seeding and landscaping occurred. A bulletin board and stair railings were installed. A communion veil donated by Pastor DeVantier’s home congregation was donated to St. John’s. New hymnals were purchased. Finishing the installation of partitions in the church basement occurred during this time. A lot west
of the building property was purchased. Robes for the junior choir were also purchased (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1967, 9).

Other events during this time period included the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ALC in 1955. The retirement of the debt was celebrated during this time. Paul Kuder, a missionary for New Guinea, was present for this event. There was a "5-D" evangelistic program, during which fireside meetings were held in homes of members. This was a very exciting time for the congregation at St. John's. In 1959, Pastor DeVantier took a call to serve as a chaplain for the Lutheran Charities of the greater Detroit, Michigan, area (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1964, 9-10; 1992, 18-9).

In 1959, Rev. Richard Graves became the Pastor of St. John's. The new ALC was formed, so the congregation's constitution had to be changed. One such change was in the renaming of the women's group to the "Women of the Church." They were organized into circle groups with various names based on women in the Bible (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1964, 10-1; 1992, 20-1).

A shepherding ministry program began with the use of what is recorded as "Bethel Bible Study Groups." This group ministry met weekly for two years during the winter months. It was during this time that St. John's made special efforts to decorate the building interior and exterior for the Advent and Christmas seasons. The intent was to "express the joy, hope and peace that our Savior's birth brings" (St. John's Lutheran Church History 1964, 10-1; 1992, 20-1).

St. John's was experiencing growing pains at this time. A small portion of property located to the west of the church, and owned by Mrs. Dwyer, was purchased for $3,500.00. Air conditioning was installed in the church in the summer of 1960 for
$3,000.00. There was also the feeling that the church building facilities were inadequate. After consulting with architects, and much planning, the decision was made to enter into a new building program on September 22, 1963. There would be an addition to the sanctuary and a new wing for Christian education. The intent of building the addition was to teach and reach more people with the Word of God (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1967, 11).

Pastor Graves took a mission church in Coon Rapids, Iowa. Rev. Paul Adams of Bluffton, Ohio, was the Interim Pastor, until Pastor Robert Leppien could complete his seminary education in Columbus, Ohio, “and take charge” in July 1964. A local historical account reports:

During this time, building plans were flourishing and decisions had to be made. The parsonage and the house on the Dwyer property were sold and moved. The contracts were awarded totaling $153,000.00. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on May 18, 1964. (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1964, 12)

In this time era, there was a new ecumenical spirit within all Lutheran churches. The new ALC was in dialogue with the former ULCA, now Lutheran Church in America (LCA). They also were seeking some level of fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Meanwhile, the ALC seminary in Columbus, Ohio, hired new faculty, who introduced the historical-critical methods of biblical studies that they learned in Europe. Those faculty members who taught the old Lutheranism were also present. Students were faced with two contrasting methods of biblical study (Nelson 1975, 527-35; Huber 1989, 238-9).

During the pastorate of Rev. Leppien, there was much building construction under way. Quite often worship services were interrupted, and took place at the high school. On March 7, 1966, the new facilities and the new wing were dedicated. In June 1966, there
was a record in church attendance of 501 present. Twenty-nine catechism students affirmed their faith, as the centennial celebration was planned. A new directory was being developed. Over one hundred and forty families had their pictures taken for this pictorial booklet. At this point in St. John’s history, a local historian notes: “Surely God was good to St. John’s the past hundred years and the blessings received spelled out our purpose and mission for the years to come” (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1992, 23).

Pastor Leppien was called to serve a church in Petersburg, Michigan, in March 1971. Pastor John Ferne and his family would arrive in the summer of 1971 from his former two-point parish in Rogers City, Michigan, for a salary of $6,696.00 plus car allowance.

Pastor Ferne enhanced the spiritual life of St. John’s Church by introducing many mission and evangelism programs. Three of them included the “LIFE program for World Mission,” “Key 73,” and “Project 50,000” (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1992, 22-3). Pastor Ferne left St. John’s in December 1974 to serve at the Williston Home of Mercy in Williston, Ohio (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1992, 22-3).

As change was present in pastors and ministries at St. John’s, the same was true for the town of Montpelier. In 1971, the Wabash rail passenger service through Montpelier was discontinued. New forms of transportation were replacing the railroad industry. The Wabash Railroad division offices were moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana. The town of Montpelier had to seek creative ways to diversify its economic base (Cooley 1995, 70).

The ALC, as well as other Lutheran denominations in America, found themselves responding to many of the changes that occurred in the 1960s. There was one major
theological error that was present within many Lutheran churches. E. Clifford Nelson, a
church historian, reports that there was a semi-Pelagian trend toward confusing “Gospel”
with “Law.” This historian goes on to say that rather than being justified through faith by
grace at one’s baptism, there was the temptation to evaluate Christian faith through the
obedience of the “Ten Commandments” or the “Golden Rule.” Temptations existed to
suggest that humans cooperate with God in obtaining their salvation. Lutheran publishing
houses responded by producing many Christian education materials in this time to correct
these errors (Nelson 1975, 537).

Another issue of this time was that of confessional integrity. Questions of that
time include: Why does the Lutheran church exist? Are Lutherans to preserve a separate
Lutheran denomination by making Lutherans of all nations, or to preach the gospel to all
persons while in dialogue and cooperative ministry with other churches? This was a time
which one historian called the “Identity Crisis” in contemporary Lutheranism, as James
Scherer describes this era. Unfortunately, most Lutherans facilitated their identity through
what was traditionally known by a church historian as “adiaphora,” that being hymnals,
model constitutions, and education materials. Some of these Lutheran identity issues
remain open-ended up to the present time (Nelson 1975, 538).

Finally, there was concern about the church and its purpose. One view held that
the church’s purpose is to be a witnessing presence in the world through the worshiping
of a sacramental community of Christ. Another position asserted that the church’s
purpose in the world is to call humans to repentance, preach the law and gospel for the
purpose of transforming the world into conformity to Christ’s kingdom, which will one
day come in its fullness (Nelson 1975, 539).
One of the guiding principles that led the ALC, AELC and LCA into merger and continual ecumenical cooperation is that of the Augsburg Confession's Article VII. It reads, "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the gospel."

(Nelson 1975, 537)

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod might argue that any church it has fellowship with must hold a uniform agreement with their views on the entire Book of Concord. The now merged ELCA has followed the above stated principle in the Augsburg Article VII. This has led to ecumenical agreements with the Moravian, Presbyterian and Reformed, as well as the Episcopal Church bodies in America (Nelson 1975, 537-9).

From 1975 to 1996 Joseph Allen carried on a strong pastoral care ministry at St. John's. His strengths were in community interaction, and visiting those who were hospitalized and homebound. He was noted for his children's sermons and musical abilities. While Pastor Allen served at St. John's, a new "A" ceiling replaced the flat one within the sanctuary and education wing. New walls were put into the sanctuary. Glass doors were installed, as well as padded pews, and a new sound system. The mortgage was paid off in 1978. An elevator was installed in 1986. Pastor Allen carried on a faithful ministry of ongoing pastoral care during times of change and identity crisis within the Lutheran church. He was present during the merger of the ELCA. He had one of the longest tenures in St. John’s history. Many people hold fond memories of his ministry (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1992, 26-7).
After Pastor Allen left Montpelier, I was called to be the pastor. The town’s economic base has successfully adapted to a small shop, predominantly non-union factory town, with diverse industries. Lower utility rates, a flexible municipality structure that works closely with business needs, and a willing workforce has served to attract and retain smaller businesses. There are some medium-sized businesses. Larger businesses and unionized shops that are owned either out of state or by foreign interests have had their share of difficulties in Montpelier. The community retains a close-knit atmosphere with a certain amount of local pride in its schools, the Williams County Fairgrounds, park, businesses, churches, and civic groups. As economic times fluctuate, Montpelier seems to be a community that takes pride in surviving and taking care of its own local interests (Field Notes 2002, Entry 32).

Concluding Reflections

Based on this historical case study, it appears that two issues emerge for St. John’s in regard to outreach or evangelism. First, the initial mission of the old Iowa Synod Lutherans was to gather the scattered German immigrants from Europe. The idea of attempting to do this outreach beyond those who were raised in the Lutheran church was unheard of, except in the case of an unsuccessful mission effort to American Indians and the ongoing support of foreign missions such as in New Guinea. Second, once the congregation started to experience growth concerns beginning in the 1930s, the operating assumption seemed to be with a large enough church building, people will come to worship at St. John’s. Pastoral terms began to be defined by the building projects that occurred during their ministry, and the congregation itself took major time, effort and
pride in its building projects. To this day, the congregation’s trustees take meticulous care of the church facilities.

In the early 1900s when Germans like Mutschmann in Illinois and Mrs. Bauer in Montpelier were confronted with the reality of having to learn the English language, this ended a major era in the history of St. John’s and other German Lutheran churches. No longer would they be immigrant churches that gathered the scattered Lutherans who were arriving by boats from Europe. They were American Christians who experienced the same blessings and challenges that all churches have had to face in a nation that maintains separation of church and state rather than a state run church. St. John’s Church was a small-sized church, which shared a pastor with St. Peter’s in Edon, until they took a leap of faith and decided to call their own pastor, Kenneth DeWalt in 1933. Like many small churches, after Pastor DeWalt, St. John’s called a series of seminary graduates who served relatively short tenures as shepherds of the congregation. Within many Lutheran geographical areas, these were viewed as first call parishes for recent seminary graduates, quite often for economic reasons.

In June 1966, St. John’s crossed another threshold in its history. It had grown both in building space and congregation numbers from being a small to a medium-sized church. The railroad industry was still strongly visible in the Montpelier community. All Christian churches were experiencing numerical growth throughout the American continent. For a small church, a simple vision and mission might be simply survival for another year, but a medium-sized church is an awkward institution. It recalls the times of simplicity of the small-sized church, but it desires the benefits of growth. Lyle Schaller suggests that it is too big to be the small church, which merely survives, but not large
enough to be the program-based congregation. This is where I believe St. John’s remains.

In response to this, I find helpful wisdom from Schaller when he writes:

In summary, if the awkward-sized church is going to fulfill its role, it probably will need a more complex organizational structure, leaders who accept the responsibility of leading, a large frame of planning, a heavier emphasis on outreach, and a greater reliance on large group organizing principles in music, youth ministries, the women’s organization, the adult education program, and other program area. (Schaller 1985, 129)

Later Schaller adds, “Frequently this means the minister must challenge the members with a vision of a new tomorrow” (Schaller 1989, 132).

An effort to suggest a mission statement is one component of challenging members with such a vision for the future for a new tomorrow. The interview portion of this project is the next step in this direction.

Analysis of Interviews

Based on ten interviews of people who are members of St. John’s Lutheran Church, I will highlight some common themes that emerged as they related to discipleship. The persons interviewed were chosen from names provided by my small ministry group, who are also members of St. John’s. This small ministry group has been working with me on this project. All of the persons interviewed requested anonymity, so no specific names will be used. The three emerging themes I identified as a result of the interviews are: sharing, caring, and preparing. Hence, this section will be subdivided into categories that include these themes (See Table 2).
Sharing Our Faith with Others Beyond Our Church Walls

One persistent idea about discipleship shared by all the persons interviewed is that all Christians at St. John’s should be more proactive in articulating our personal beliefs in Jesus Christ. Each Christian should be willing to share his or her faith in Jesus for the purpose of witnessing who Jesus Christ is in our lives. There is a frank admission that this has not been a strength for most Lutherans, due mostly to our ethnic German roots.

One insight into this worldview is through the term “parish ministry.” The assumption is that each community of worshipers and Christians cares for its own group of families. This parish group of families is sacred. In rural areas many churches might have been built around a town or a township geographical area. Each denomination had its own grouping of families and respected the boundaries of others. This was in an era of Christendom. Out of pure loyalty, Methodists attended the local Methodist church regardless of where they lived, as did Roman Catholics and Lutherans. In this worldview, everybody assumed that they were baptized or raised in a certain church. These allegiances translated into families faithfully attending the local church of their given faith tradition. While the revivalist churches existed, they were viewed as marginal sectarians in nature. Lutherans respected other churches as they respected us. We each had our own constituents or parish. The thought of visiting other Christians, who were either attending another church or were inactive, was unheard of, unless the pastor called on members who were experiencing a personal crisis. In this world, we each had our own parish or loyal members who were raised Lutheran and would die Lutheran. We believed we are all Christians. We simply learned to honor each other’s parish boundaries. One is baptized into the church and remains there, unless he or she marries somebody from
another church denomination. Evangelism and outreach only occur in foreign lands according to this worldview. The idea of the church being a mission post to reach the unchurched is a new idea.

We do observe other groups, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and area independent churches, who aggressively knock on doors in an effort to share their faith. This can be annoying to us. However, we as Lutherans should have our own form of sharing what it means to be a Christian disciple beyond the walls of our church building. So my interviews reveal a consistent theme suggesting that while it is new and difficult for Lutherans to do, we ought to have some sort ministry in our church related to sharing our faith. This should be done beyond our church walls. This is not easy. One person confessed that talking about one’s religion is difficult to do in this town. But still, this is what being a disciple of Jesus Christ is all about these days.

My observation has been that many Lutherans believe that their actions as Christians speak louder than words. As church members take care of one another in times of need, this is the witness that we are proud to send out into the community. One can talk about religion, without action. But such words are empty. On the other hand, as the culture itself is less Christian, it cannot be assumed that those who do works of kindness are necessarily Christians. The local Rotary and Lions clubs are examples of groups that do community service, but not necessarily for reasons of faith conviction. Lutherans, as well as all Christians, are challenged to find creative ways to articulate the faith motives behind our personal and community efforts to help others in times of need.
Caring for Others Who Approach Us in Need

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is that of caring for other people inside and outside of St. John’s who are in need. Currently the Montpelier Area Ministerial Association, made of the local clergy, directs and disburses money and resources contributed by areas churches to those who request such assistance. While those interviewed acknowledged that this is a good effort, St. John’s as a church needs to be more purposeful in coming together to care for those in need who are not necessarily members of the congregation.

This relates to the theme in the above subsection that the congregation needs to be more purposeful in getting out into the community to address the needs of those in the neighborhood and towns. There is the candid admission that extended family structures are no longer as strong and supportive of one another as they once were, such as the period before the 1960s time era. Neighbors and friends no longer support one another as they once did. St. John’s can model discipleship by developing a more visible community presence in some manner of social outreach to those who feel alone and abandoned within the community. This is viewed as another valid way of sharing our faith in Jesus Christ.

One member acknowledges that it is difficult to get volunteers to do such ministries, when quite often the ones we currently have feel overworked and under appreciated. How does one get more volunteers? Through much prayer, meditation, and much help from God. “It is difficult to change men’s hearts and minds, that’s for sure.” (Interviewee #3, 2001). But still those interviewed who are committed to this view believe that if St. John’s is to grow both qualitatively and quantitatively as a discipleship
community, then the congregation should come together to do some form of social outreach by caring for others who approach us.

As Table 2 (p. 193) indicates, there is a core value within the congregation that believes that opening our church doors to groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, helping local families who are in need, and sponsoring various mission efforts, is one way to care for others. This is one form of discipleship. It is even suggested that St. John’s might be a place that is similar to a social service agency or ministry due to location as well and needs within the community. While the local ministerial association does some of this type of ministry, there are people at St. John’s who believe that “every one in our church need to be involved outside the church through community activities, places they work, through their kids and just to get the Word out to the whole county” (Interviewee #1, 2001). These emerging themes might be viewed as not only long-term visions that some people within the congregation might hope for in the future, but also values that already exist within the congregation. They could be articulated in a mission statement such as the one in this project.

Preparing People for Future Challenges

A final theme that emerged from the interviews is the importance of preparing people to be Jesus’ disciples through the traditional methods of educating people about Jesus and what it means to be his follower. One of the more solid ministries at St. John’s that receives strong support is that of the Christian education program. This includes biblical as well as doctrinal instruction in Luther’s Small Catechism. There seems to be a consensus suggesting that we do teach people what it means to be a follower of Jesus. One person whom I interviewed indicated that he did not believe that he had a strong
knowledge of the Bible. Yet, he still knew the major sections of the catechism that he was taught in his early years as a boy. This speaks well of the Christian education ministry at St. John’s. This is one ministry that can serve as a foundation to build other ministries upon.

Having an active prayer life, studying the Bible, and developing models of instruction that conform to the way Jesus would have us live, are core values that I saw reflected in these interviews. There is a candid admission that being a disciple of Jesus is not easy as it might have been in times past. Therefore, some elements of tradition are still necessary. Preparing for future challenges through Christian education ministry is an emerging theme that also happens to be a core value that I also observed to be a high priority at St. John’s.

**Conclusion**

The original purpose of St. John’s was similar to that of its Iowa Synod roots. It was called to gather the scattered German Lutherans who migrated to America. As time progressed, St. John’s, like many other churches, strived to integrate itself with the American culture. Building concerns became a priority to accommodate a growing membership. The symbols of pride that St. John’s still celebrates as a church include a new Christian education wing, as well as modern innovations in the sanctuary and basement fellowship hall. The once immigrant church began to define itself and the tenure of its clergy by the building projects that were completed. So the church’s physical presence is well established in the community.

This physical presence is not enough for the congregation to grow as a discipleship community. The interviews revealed that the congregation as a whole needs
to be more proactive in sharing the Christian faith it confesses in a verbal manner to those in the community. Also, the congregation could become a more effective witness and growing discipleship community if it engaged in some form of social service ministry. This specifically entails identifying a set of physical or family needs that are present in the area of Montpelier, Ohio. Next, a deliberate effort could be made in developing a ministry to address the stated needs. Preparing people to face future life challenges is a strength that St. John’s has in its Christian education ministry. This could serve as foundation on which to build other ministries upon. There is a beautiful building facility and a strong, solid, biblical, and doctrinal tradition to build upon. This is one area of the ministry that continues to serve St. John’s well in the present, and may possibly do so in the future.

With the days of the immigrant church now in the distant past, St. John’s has the physical facilities to press on into the future. This has been a result of much risk, hard work, prayer, and planning. The challenge St. John’s faces in the future is how to best use its rich biblical faith heritage and physical facilities to make disciples of all peoples beyond the location of the church property. Some themes of the interviews suggested this may be done in three ways. First, by sharing our faith with others beyond the walls of the church building. Second, we can care for those who approach us in need. Third, we can continue to prepare all people for future challenges in life, as it becomes more challenging be a disciple of Jesus Christ in a changing world. The Good News is that Jesus Christ’s last words to the church in the Great Commission suggested that he will be with us at all times, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Some of the basic core
values to carry out this Great Commission already exist within the congregation of St. Johns', as Table 2 (p. 193) illustrates.

Notes

1 While I planned to conduct nine interviews, I thought it prudent to add another one for the sake of a round number as well as the obvious benefit of additional information.
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I believe that all theology is a prescription for the church. This is what the church should be doing if it desires to have a healthy future while remaining faithful to its beliefs. It is in this spirit that I present my summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary

I began with the assumption that a mission statement is a compass that guides an organization in planning for its future (p. 36). This summary section is divided into the three parts. First, there will be an overview of the collection of mission statements. Second, concluding observations related to the historical case study will be made. Third, there will be a summary of the interviews conducted among the members of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Montpelier, Ohio.

The Collection of Mission Statements

This subsection will summarize the data gathered related to mission statements. There were five major types of mission statements that were identified. The first type of mission statement is divided into three groups. This is the simple “General One Line or Phrase” (p. 73). The second type was the “Gather, Equip and Send” motif (p. 77). An “Outreach-Oriented” emphasis was the next category of mission statements (p. 79). “Growing as Disciples” was the fourth category (p. 81).
Finally, there was the “Maintenance and Self Nurture” group of mission statements (p. 82).

*General Phrase*

This is probably the least aggressive or more modest type of mission statement. Using a safe, familiar phrase, scriptural passage, key word, or idea are the usual forms of this type of mission statement. For instance, who would object to a mission statement that says, “We bring the peace of Christ to all people?” Most Christians would agree that this is a worthy mission for any congregation. Citing a biblical passage is a fairly familiar approach to creating a mission statement. It is rather simple and clear to have a mission statement that quotes 1 John 4:19 by saying, “We love, because he first loved us.” Then, there are key words or ideas that most Christians hold in agreement that can be the key idea to a mission statement. Almost any congregation might feel safe in stating, “Our mission is to lift up Jesus to our community in worship, education and service.”

The advantage of the simplicity and universal acceptance of such ideas also serves to cripple the purpose of the mission statement. First, such statements might diminish the uniqueness of those churches that use them. That is, how does this given mission statement articulate the purpose of this specific congregation? Second, many words are subject to differing interpretations. One example is the definition of the word “peace.” Is it merely a lack of violence, or does it carry a more holistic meaning such the word *shalom*? Third, there is also a problem with the use of scriptural passages. Many biblical passages have been open to various subjective interpretations for centuries. Without specific clarification as to how a specific congregation
understands a given scriptural passage in its mission statement, confusion could result as to what direction the church is headed. Finally, key words that might seem clear at first glance may also be subject to varied interpretations. The word “education” within a church could mean imparting biblical and doctrinal information to learners in one congregation. However, another congregation could define education in a community of faith in a broader manner such as parenting classes or various self-help learning groups. So the word “education” effectively becomes an empty vessel subject to different interpretations.

I am still partial to scriptural passages in this category. Most Christians view the Bible as having some level of authority. I think a biblical passage would tend to elevate the content of the mission statement, thereby suggesting more authority from God.

Gather, Equip, and Send Motifs

My research indicated that this was the largest single group of mission statements collected. It has been the liturgical emphasis in the ELCA since the latter 1970s in the Lutheran Book of Worship. This type of mission statement specifically describes what the community of faith does both during the formal worship service and daily as a people of faith. This eliminates the possibility of a personal or privatized religion. Second, it equips one another through the Word or message contained in the Bible, and the administration of the sacraments of infant and adult baptism, and holy communion. Next, the members of the community of faith are sent outside the doors of the church to practice their faith in the same manner they have done during worship. They gather together and equip one another through the Word.
They live in response to the grace they received during their baptism and communion meal, and encourage others to go elsewhere and do the same. Therefore, the worship model becomes a model for daily Christian living and a form of witness.

To state that, “We gather, we worship, we learn, we care and we serve” commends itself because it states a very concrete direction for the church to pursue. It is based on Matthew 28:16-20. It reminds Lutherans that living the Christian life is an extension of worship. It suggests a witness theme of being sent beyond the walls of the church. There is an implied if not stated mission. One concern I have with this form of mission statement is that if used frequently among many churches, it could seem like a formula that a congregation is following in mechanical manner, thereby diminishing the unique character of many communities of faith.

*Outreach-Oriented Emphasis*

This type of mission statement usually has a stated purpose to do some form of outreach to a stated geographical community. An observer immediately realizes that this congregation sees its mission to “...share the kindness of God so all of metropolitan Cincinnati may grow in faith, hope and love of the living Jesus Christ!” This shows a commitment to ministry outside of the walls of the church building. It suggests a passion to remain in that community and make a difference in the name of Christ. This type of mission statement is usually very clear, and has a specific measurable outcome.

One concern I have about this mission statement is that it could alienate Christians who may not be gifted or see their ministry in the area of outreach. Also, most churches and organizations do need somebody to do the organizational and
maintenance type tasks that keep the congregation solvent. An outreach-oriented mission statement risks excluding those who do not perform outreach ministries. Possibly they may feel more comfortable in congregations that emphasize "Growing as Disciples."

_Growing as Disciples Priorities_

To define witness in terms of inner personal and community growth is the emphasis of this category of mission statements. One example of such a statement is, "We believe that our purpose is to invite all people to become devoted followers of Christ and responsible members of his church." This type of mission statement maintains the integrity of the given confessional stance of the church. It is not measured by numerical growth. Regardless of how promising or bleak a particular community's demographic economic forecast happens to be, this type of statement is applicable.

One critique of such a mission statement might be that it does lack vision to do ministry outside the walls of the church. Though, this does not necessarily have to be the case because one can grow as a mature Christian. One can still practice outreach in some area of his or her life. I believe that being a disciple community could be about emphasizing a focus on developing deeper faith, with less emphasis on numerical growth. There is integrity to this, yet it has its consequences.

_Maintenance and Self Nurture Ministry_

Finally, I identified a group of mission statements that emphasize a maintenance and self-nurture type of ministry. An example of such a mission
statement is, “. . . we seek to spread the Good News of God’s forgiveness and love through worship, the grace of sacraments and the love to fellowship in Christ Jesus.” Ministry happens mostly within the worship service. Nurture is another characteristic of this type of church mission, as the statement reads, “It is our intention to provide a nurturing environment for growth, fellowship, witness, and service.” To be part of such a congregation is to be in an extended family. It practices traditional liturgical worship services. Members view themselves as a close community that is known in the local town. They believe their presence is sufficient as a stated mission.

These types of churches do take care of one another in times of trouble. When a crisis occurs, the whole church rallies to support the family. They are very stable in that change occurs very incrementally. This is a church that could be a haven of rest for those who face constant change in their daily lives.

Some concerns about this type of church and its mission is that the term “close” easily lends itself to being “closed” to those who are outsiders or not the major families who have attended the church for many years. This can alienate visitors. Also, they can develop a sectarian mindset. This may result in both limited outreach ability and the risk of having unspoken rules and traditions that visitors might find intimidating. If a congregation has done much deliberation and wishes to continue into the maintenance and self-nurturing mode, there is some integrity to this position as long as it realizes that its future could be threatened.

Observations Regarding Mission Statements

The last category of “Maintenance and Self Nurture” mission statements is the second largest single group of mission statements collected. The “Gather, Equip, and
Send” motifs were the largest group of mission statements. The “Outreach Oriented Emphasis” had the least amount of mission statements in my research. This seems to indicate a trend that a great many Lutheran churches are either purposeful about doing some sort of outreach based on worship, or they are content to remain maintenance and self-nurturing congregations.

The Historical Case Study

The purpose of the “Historical Case Study” was to explore the reason that St. John’s Church does not have an outreach or evangelism committee, while it has many other committees. After a lengthy historical survey of the congregation, predecessor church bodies, and some of the events that might have informed its direction, I arrived at two conclusions. First, St. John’s, as many other congregations of the “Old Iowa Synod,” was a mission church whose purpose was to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants who came to America in search of a better life. The idea of doing outreach and evangelism to people who do not have German Lutheran roots is fairly new, experimental, if not a foreign idea to its early founders. As St. John’s became more assimilated into the American context, especially after World War I, when it began to worship in the English language, it ceased to be a missionary congregation from Germany.

It was in the years that it was part of the old ALC, that St. John’s focused much of its time, resources, and efforts in the building and succeeding renovations of the facility and later new church structure. Pastoral tenure was identified with what major building project was initiated or accomplished during the pastor’s ministry. Meticulous attention was committed to such physical church projects. The current
committee structure is organized around the building and those ministries that occupy it.

It appears that the reason St. John’s does not have an outreach or evangelism committee is that its early mission was to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants who came to America. Later in its history, building projects seem to be its top priority. Pastoral tenure was defined by progress on a given building project. While in this process, St. John’s crossed the threshold from being a missionary church from Germany, to a small-sized congregation, and later to a medium-sized church.

Further Reflections

Once St. John’s Church completed its building project in 1966 to accommodate a growing number of worshipers, it became a medium-sized church. Previously, it was either a missionary congregation or a small-sized church for seminary graduates to begin their ministries, and then move to other callings. One of the reasons St. John’s is at a plateau is because it is a medium-sized church. It is neither growing or declining drastically in terms of worship attendance and financial giving. I will address more on this topic in the “Conclusion” section of this chapter.

The Interviews on Discipleship

Three key themes emerged as recurring patterns during the ten congregational interviews. Then I will make some suggestions as to how these might influence a proposed mission statement for St. John’s.
Sharing Our Faith

Most, if not all, of those members who were interviewed agreed that the people in our congregation should be more purposeful in articulating the Christian faith that we believe to be true. There is a candid admission that this is not widely practiced within our church’s tradition. We see Christians of other denominations aggressively sharing their beliefs by way of door-to-door evangelism efforts. While those interviewed are uncomfortable with that method, we should make some sort of effort to talk about our Christian faith to other people beyond the walls of our church.

This is not an easy task. This is uncomfortable for Lutherans who were raised in the more traditional ways of the church. One interviewee candidly admitted that it is difficult to talk about one’s religious beliefs in this community. This, coupled with our unfamiliarity with evangelism and outreach, is indeed a formidable task. Still it is a ministry that should performed as faithful, growing disciples, according to Scripture. This should be one component of a mission statement.

Caring for Others

The Montpelier Area Ministerial Association has been the primary avenue for dispersing emergency assistance and financial help for those families who are in need in the community. St. John’s has financially supported this effort. However, the interviews summary suggests that we should be doing more for those in the area who are in need, regardless if they are members or nonmembers of St. John’s.

There is a voice within the congregation that views doing some form of social service ministry to those who seek us out for assistance, as one way of practicing
discipleship. While it is good that the area clergy do their part to address such needs, St. John’s could become more proactive as a disciple community if we would consider going in this direction. One example of this type of ministry is in allowing an Alcoholics Anonymous group to use our building for its meetings. A mission statement might include this theme as well.

*Preparing for Future Challenges*

A core value shared by all people within the congregation is Christian education. The purpose of all the building projects was as a result of a need and demand for space to learn God’s Word contained in Scripture, as well as confirmation ministry. All persons interviewed believe that this value remains true for our congregation. Can one define Christian education beyond the scope of biblical and doctrinal instruction? While this is not within the boundaries of this project, the presence of the Alcoholics Anonymous group suggests that this is a possibility.

All persons interviewed have indicated that they did receive a good biblical and doctrinal church education background, and desire for this to continue. In fact, as the world changes and grows more complex, such preparation is all the more necessary. In this sense, being a growing disciple does mean being taught about Jesus and his will for our lives. At St. John’s this has been accomplished through Christian education ministry. I do not know of one person who would disagree with the idea that we should be about preparing people for future challenges as Christians. This is another example of making disciples. This too might be included in a mission statement.
Medium-Sized Church Conclusions

How does a church such as St. John’s get off its plateau? Gary L. McIntosh writes:

Essentially it appears that to some extent the medium-sized church is in a transitional phase. All large churches were small at one time and grew from small to medium to large. So it’s obvious that a certain percentage of churches make it through this transitional phase. However, after several years of numerical growth, many medium-sized churches face the decision of having to adjust their ministries to continue growing into a larger church. If they don’t make the appropriate adjustments, they will either plateau for a time or decline back to a small church size. Some medium-sized churches will plateau and stay at the medium church size, but the pull downward is stronger than the pull upward. It’s usually just a matter of time before the plateaued church gets smaller. (McIntosh 1999, 33)

What McIntosh says about the state of the medium-sized church applies to the plateau where St. John’s resides. McIntosh cites several areas of church operations that can offer helpful insights to medium-sized churches such as St. John’s. I have highlighted three of them. They are: church orientation, leadership decisions, and growth patterns (McIntosh 1999, 143-4).

Orientation

Since March 7, 1966, when St. John’s dedicated its new facilities based on its growing numbers, it has become a medium-sized church (p.130-1). Schaller observes that any congregation that has a worship attendance of one hundred to two hundred people on Sundays has grown beyond being a small church. It has become a medium-sized church (Schaller 1985, 15). McIntosh would agree to the extent that it varies in differing denominations (McIntosh 1999, 19). One of the practical implications of this reality is that the medium-sized church has grown from being a relational church,
which is essentially one extended family, to a church with multiple families who influence the ministries (McIntosh 1999, 23).

Rather than being defined by intimacy, the ministry is defined by its programs. In a small church the same families are related to one another and define the congregation’s entire ministry in terms of relationships. Everybody feels needed. Everybody must do his or her part to make the congregation operate smoothly. Intimacy, or how one feels about the church, is important. Viewing the worship service as one extended weekly family reunion is the orientation of this church. St. John’s was such a church in its earlier years before the major building project of the new building (Schaller 1982, 35-40; McIntosh 1999, 26-8).

A medium-sized church is defined by its organizing principles. Instead of a family orientation, it is possibly the men’s group, or ladies’ circles, or the Wednesday night ministries that are key ways in which people define their membership. Decisions are made program by program, rather than a family’s view of a given idea. While some family relationships may dominate one given committee within the church, there are also other committees with other voices from other families who also share influence. Each committee has an identity or operates in an autonomous fashion. A key family may or may not be able exercise heavy influence within any given committee. A large church has multiple ministries with multiple staff who send representatives to the governing church boards. An illustration might be that the small church has a Christmas party for the whole congregation, since it is an extended family. The medium-sized church has various parties for various groups within the church such as the children’s ministry pizza party, the women’s group luncheon, and
the men’s breakfast. The larger-sized congregation will have numerous planned a party for anybody to attend as his or her schedule allows. Families might pre-register for the event they wish to attend (McIntosh 1999, 23-35, 42).

Leadership

In a small church, if the pastor has an idea that the church should have a special Labor Day worship event, then he or she might go to Bill who is the patriarch of the Jones family and sell him on that idea. Then the pastor goes to the matriarch in the Cody family and convinces her of the idea. When the church council meets, all of the Jones and Cody family members are sold on the idea of a Labor Day worship event. In the medium-sized church, the pastor has to go through the worship committee, possibly the music committee, then usually the church council in order to see the Labor Day event happen. In a large-sized church, the pastor sells his staff or team on this idea, and they in turn go out into the congregation’s ministry teams and other organizations to sell the idea as a vision of what could possibly happen if the church tried this special Labor Day event.

McIntosh suggests that the way power, influence, and control occur within a given congregation depends on whether it is a small, medium, or large-sized church. In the smaller church, it is a couple of families who exercise the control. In the above illustration, it is the Jones and Cody families who exercise ultimate control and authority. In the medium-sized church, it is the various committees that have such influence. In the large-sized church, it is selected congregational leaders (paid staff or ministry team leaders) who initiate and influence others and get key people on board with the idea. St. John’s tends to be a medium-sized church in the areas of position,
authority, influence, and control. An example is that the parish education committee
decides whether junior high students may take a guest to the annual lock-in event
sponsored by the denomination. This decision was not made by key families nor a
selected group of church leaders (McIntosh 1999, 49-57).

Growth Patterns

Judy was raised in a small town congregation with an average weekly
attendance of 90 people. Everybody was either related or their children attended
school with one another. They have developed close ties in this manner with other
families. When she got married, later relocated due to employment, and gave birth to
two boys, she was looking for church with a Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS)
ministry. The small church experience beckons fond memories of back home, but this
is not where she and her family are in terms of their life journey. She has heard
fabulous stories about the multiple family ministries and talented pastoral staff at the
area mega church. But Judy was seeking a particular ministry for her family.
Theology, pastoral leadership, and a close-knit relational community did not
influence her as much as the need for a MOPS ministry. So she joined Faith Church,
rather than Good Shepherd, the smaller church, or New Life Family Center, the mega
church in the area. The medium-sized church had the ministry that Judy and her
family sought out and needed. If St. John’s and other medium-sized churches are to
grow beyond their plateaus, they must identify a ministry that they are committed to
supporting in terms or more money, time, resources, and risks.

The small church growth patterns occur by current members inviting others to
become part of the extended family of the small church. The attraction is intimacy.
Everybody knows one another. There is a warm, cozy atmosphere in worship and all ministries. This is the method of growth in this size church. The large-sized church is known by word of mouth and reputation. Its members are excited about home Bible studies sponsored by the church and invite others to these studies and later to worship. The pastor is usually a well known public figure who is visible within the larger community. Quite often the church may even have its own television or radio program. This is how it grows as a congregation. But the medium-sized congregation needs to have a key ministry it does well. A medium-sized church may be known in the community for its day care program, after school latchkey ministry, parochial school, or the area senior center. The staffing, budget, and the use of other resources are always major factors in this ministry. Growth occurs as people like Judy identify this congregation as a place that can meet her family’s needs. This is how the medium-sized church grows (McIntosh 1999, 113-24).

Findings

This project began with four research questions (p. 7). What is the current and future direction of St. John’s Lutheran Church? It remains status quo as a solid, administratively well-managed congregation that has annual maintenance as its top priority. The initial purpose of St. John’s was to gather the scattered German Lutheran immigrants who came to America seeking a better life. After the congregation was established as another American church, it began to define itself in terms of building projects. The assumption held that a large enough church building would bring people to worship at St. John’s. This pattern has continued since at least
the turn of the century. Change occurs incrementally in congregations such as this one (p. 134-6).

What should be the content of the mission statement? This project is prescriptive in nature because the process of developing and implementing a mission statement provides the basis for setting goals, making decisions, and planning actions for the future. It serves as a roadmap to guide the direction of the congregation’s ministry. It also helps the congregation clarify its understanding how God could be currently working through the ministry of the church (p. 66). The content of the mission statement should be as follows:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

We do this by:

Sharing our faith with those outside our church walls.
Caring for those who seek us in a time of need.
Preparing others to face life’s future challenges.

This mission statement uses a familiar biblical passage that is widely used in many Lutheran churches to support traditional doctrines such as baptism and the Holy Trinity (p. 15). It is a familiar biblical passage. A pattern was identified among other ELCA congregations that use a scriptural verse in their mission statement because many conservative Christians believe that the Bible is or contains God’s Word (p. 74). The second portion of the above stated mission statement reveals some core values that could serve to guide the organization toward a purposeful future (p. 42-4). These particular values of sharing, caring, and preparing emerged from the interviews that were conducted for this project (p. 137-41). The mission statement has
a basis founded upon a biblical foundation and core values identified within the
congregation.

Who will carry out the direction of the mission statement? All church
members are called to be disciples who carry out the ministry of the church. This will
result in risks of uncertainty, discomfort, and possible suffering as was true of the
original disciples of Jesus Christ (p. 20-2). As difficult and challenging as it is for
traditional Lutherans to go beyond their comfort zones to share their faith and care for
other people outside of the church, this is a core that is cherished by some members
of St. John’s. Discipleship should be more than allowing the local clergy to disburse
funds for local needs. There is a suggestion that individual Christians should come
together to care for those in need who may not hold membership within the
congregation (p.137-41).

What conditions will prompt St. John’s Lutheran Church to revisit its mission
statement? Changes in direction usually occur as a result of crisis either within or
outside the church. During World War I, many Germans were forced to learn and
worship in the English language for fear of being seen as collaborators with the
enemies in Germany at that time (p. 118-20). While it was not viewed as a crisis, it
became a necessity to undergo a major building program due to numerical growth in
the congregation. This resulted in the groundbreaking of a new building project that
occurred on October 26, 1952 (p.128-9).

This project finds that maintenance and renovation of the church building has
been a major priority in the mission of St. John’s Lutheran Church in recent decades.
The proposed mission statement is a modest prescription to help St. John’s Lutheran Church to move beyond this plateau.

Conclusions

Other ELCA congregations have sought to make their presence known beyond the walls of their churches with the development and use of mission statements. Five types of mission statements have been identified. Each type has its merits and concerns. All share a common goal of attempting to make people outside of the congregation’s membership aware its presence and the core values that are cherished at this given time. St. John’s Lutheran Church in Montpelier could also benefit by having its own mission statement as other ELCA congregations have already developed is one conclusion of this project.

Through the Historical Case Study (p. 102), St. John’s can observe that it is a mission congregation from Germany that has had to adapt to the various cultural and religious changes in the American landscape. One such change is the reality of “Post-Christendom” that other American churches have also experienced as Callahan argues (p.24-6). Hence, St. John’s joins other churches in rediscovering what it means to be a mission congregation in a different manner than simply gathering the scattered German Lutheran immigrants as it did in former times. St. John’s history suggests that it has been a mission congregation in the past. This might indicate a direction for the future.

The selected interviews tend to validate the above observations. The three recurring themes that emerged suggested that St. John’s should be a community that shares its faith or views of Christianity beyond the walls of the church building. This
is indeed a challenge for a church that lacks a strong tradition of outreach and evangelism. Second, there is a candid admission that practicing some form of social outreach would be a faithful way of being a discipleship community for Jesus Christ in this community of Montpelier. Third, St. John's has a strong history of Christian education or preparing people for life's challenges through education ministries of the Bible and church catechism courses. Based on the results of these interviews, a mission statement that reflects a desire to do outreach, serve others through some form of social ministry, and build upon the Christian education program is another conclusion.

Recommendations

As a researcher and pastor, I view myself as a pastoral theologian. I have studied a problem that I observed within the congregation where I serve, and then I provided a suggested prescription. I believe that theology is prescription for the church, not always a description of its current practice. I recommend a mission statement based on the findings that I have discovered about other congregational mission statements (p. 72), a Historical Case Study (p. 102) selected interviews from this congregation (Table 2, p. 193), for the plateau concerns in many medium-sized churches (p. 155).

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that St. John's Lutheran Church adopt as its mission statement, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you to the end of the age.” A
specific elaboration of this statement based on the core values identified above is, “We do this by, sharing our faith with those outside our church walls. Caring for those who seek us in time of need. Preparing others to face life’s future challenges.” This project recommends the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19-20, along with the addition of the above statements, as the mission statement for St. John’s Lutheran Church in Montpelier, Ohio, at this time in its history. A copy of the mission statement will be shared in the form of a Sunday church bulletin insert.

Final Summary

St. John’s began as a German mission church, progressed into a small church, and by the 1960s became a medium-sized church. For St. John’s this stage began around March 7, 1966. Its worship attendance has plateaued, and has slowly declined in some years. This could be as a result of a struggling local economy and the exit of the Wabash Railroad. To the community’s credit, it has been successful at attracting smaller nonunion businesses and factories. The town itself is made up of mostly smaller businesses. This might have some correlation to a small church in the language as related to church growth. Everybody knows one another like an extended family. When tough economic times occur, rather than laying people off, companies invite employees to take a long weekend off to be with their families or pursue recreation. This is how an extended family behaves.

St. John’s has not been this type of organization since the 1960s, but McIntosh suggests that it could slowly decline into this size with time if it does not seek new ways to grow (1999, 33).
Developing a mission statement is a modest effort to let the community know that this organization does have a desire to do more than exist on the corner of Broad and Washington Streets in Montpelier. Chapter Three argued that both secular and religious organizations have found it necessary to develop a mission statement which indicates what the organization does, or its purpose for existing within the local community (pp. 39-40). Other ELCA churches and secular organizations have developed mission statements.

The mission statement has two major limitations. First, it is no replacement for sound organizational structure and action. It merely states the core values and beliefs of the organization (p. 42-8). Second, it is not a vision statement by the definition of this project, that being to tell the story of where the church or organization wants to be in its distant future. The next step beyond the scope of this project, is to develop a vision statement detailing where the people of St. John's would like to be in ten to twenty years. As the researcher I have identified some core values within the congregation through my interviews. These values suggested a direction that the congregation might pursue if it wants to be a growing community of disciples for Jesus Christ both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The Possibility of Going Down and Off the Plateau

Although St. John's is now a transitional medium-sized church, it may revert back to a small church if it does not seek new ways to grow. There is nothing wrong with being a small church--there is integrity in that. Schaller describes the difference between the small and larger church. He says:
The small congregation places a higher priority on relationships, on the importance of everyone's being able to call other members by name, on the rights and privileges of each individual, and on making sure all the bills are paid. The large church places a higher priority on the functional aspects of ministry, on a carefully administered organizational structure, on the smooth operation of that large institution, and on a systematic approach to fund-raising and stewardship. (Schaller 1982, 15)

The point I wish to make here is that any congregation may willingly or unwillingly be attracted to the model of the small-sized church. So, another option a medium-sized church might choose to pursue to get off its plateau, is to restructure its organization and staffing to reflect that of the small-sized church model. Executed in a purposeful manner, this too could result in a stable future.

However St. John's must view itself as a mission outpost if it is to grow both quantitatively and qualitatively. This project has suggested that a private sector organization or a church should exist for a broader purpose than self-survival or advancing its own numbers. It should serve the greater community in a way that reflects the core values of that organization. Also, its purpose should be to serve people who may or may not be direct members of the organization or church. The development of a mission statement is one tool toward this end.

One component of this project was to identify other organizations that needed to move onto the next chapter of their history. They did this through the creation of a mission statement. The assumption here is that the process in itself invites a revisiting of its core values. Developing a mission statement forces the church to prioritize its reasons for existence in a manner that it might not otherwise consider. Once the mission statement is displayed, this is its public proclamation of how it serves the larger community while operating for its own progress. The process of developing a
mission statement itself is beneficial toward organizational progress in a changing
cultural environment.

St. John’s has to identify a ministry in which it can take risks and commit
time, money, and resources, as it did in past building projects. I believe that all
theology is a prescription for what the church should do if it desires to have a healthy
future while remaining faithful to its beliefs (p. 144). I sought to identify some core
values that exist within the congregation. Interviewing allowed me, to enter into
another person’s perspective (Merriam 1998, 72). Based on a long list of names
provided by a small ministry group within the congregation, I selected ten people to
interview. Confidentiality was an important component to secure these interviews. I
strived to discover some core values on the topic of being a disciple of Jesus.
Discipleship is a foundational idea I developed in Chapter Two of this project (p. 20-
29).

The interviews indicated that the Great Commission along with sharing,
caring, and preparing (statements of purpose), are offered to provide a positive future
direction for the congregation to pursue. Christian education ministry was a high
priority area that all interviewees identified as crucial for building future disciples.
Sharing one’s faith in a verbal manner was suggested as another ministry that should
be practiced if St. John’s is to have a future in building disciples, but this is uncharted
terrain for this congregation. Exploring some form of social outreach is another theme
that emerged from the interviews. Again, St. John’s has a history of supporting other
groups that do this type of ministry, but has been reluctant to aggressively pursue this
as a fairly new and risky idea. However, the interviews revealed that this is an area of
ministry we should consider if we wish to get off our plateau and have a positive future as disciples within the community. These core values do exist within the congregation.

Recommendation not implementation, is the result of this project’s research. The next step beyond the scope of this project, is to develop a vision statement detailing where the people of St. John’s would like to be in ten to twenty years.

Concluding Thoughts

Other churches and organizations in situations similar to St. John’s could benefit from this study and project. I believe that my method could be duplicated in various settings. However, I would offer two caveats. Locally a congregation called a pastor and leadership team to implement change. They did so too quickly and radically for that congregation. This has resulted in an immense amount of conflict and the resignation of both the pastor and council leadership. Change happens incrementally and slowly in many small rural area congregations. Second, the size or type of church factors into the way change is implemented in any congregation. Complex committee structures pose a much more difficult obstacle while implementing change, than a couple key family leaders with much power and influence.

At a small congregation I once served (Sunday worship attendance of eighty), change occurred with the decision of a small council of six persons who represented the whole congregation. At a larger staff church in which I served as a vicar (student intern), a particular staff person was given the responsibility of developing an idea for change and gathering a team of supporters. The medium-sized church has a complex
committee structure to navigate through if change is to occur. These committees are made up of various individuals who represent different groups within the church, who may or may not share the same vision for the future. McIntosh is right as he observes that the medium-sized church is in a transitional phase in its life. It is vulnerable to being plateaued and possibly declining if it does not purposefully pursue a stated direction based on its mission or purpose. This is where I observe St. John's to be at present (McIntosh 1999, 33-50).

I believe God is with the church as it struggles through transition. Dying to the past so a new future can emerge is a slow and painful process. There are twelve Minor Prophets and three Major Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures that Christians call the Old Testament. They too had a difficult time presenting a vision for change in the future for the people of God. I view my calling both as pastor and researcher of being faithful in proclaiming where I see God leading the church, not always successful at bringing it there.

Being faithful means that the community of faith may not grow numerically due to our context. Yet we are challenged to grow in our quality of discipleship, possibly using the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 as a model. I believe that God has placed us in this context at this time. A mission statement is an opportunity to renew or revisit the covenant God has given this community of faith as it enters into a new chapter of ministry. Being faithful in our calling as Christians in this community now means to use those resources, talents, and skills that God has given us to proclaim the news of the crucified and risen Christ to a community that is in constant need of good news and hope.
A mission statement is an opportunity for this community to discover how God is calling us to be faithful in this chapter of our congregation's history. Amen.
Preface to Sermons and Minutes from Small Group Ministry

The following collection of sermon manuscripts and small group ministry meeting notes does not adhere to the same style and documentation standards (Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*) that have been followed in the previous sections of this doctoral paper.
Introduction

At a commencement of an area community college, the keynote speaker was a business leader in the community. He wanted to give a presentation that would prepare the graduates to be prepared for the work world they are about to enter into through their respective vocations.

As the students anxiously awaited the time of the speech actually ending so they can get their degrees and get on with their lives, the business leader more or less told them, “that this is not the end of your education.” He told them that today’s work world demands life-long learners. He told them that they will always be taking classes, continuing education, and getting re-certifications for the rest of their lives in the current world of constant global competition and new technology.

Many students did not want to hear this! For them, they were products of the state standardized testing process. Now they went to college simply because it would get them the job they wanted that a high school diploma could no longer get for them (as it did many of their parents). These students came to this community college commencement to receive their well earned Associate Degrees with the expectation that this is the end of the line for their formal education... this is it... no more school for the rest of their lives!

As the speaker ended his presentation, some students started to “doze.” Others were whispering and nudging one another, and a few listened with much intensity. That same year, a new product came out onto the market, which would change computers for along time. Microsoft introduced Windows 95, making much of what many were taught in college already obsolete.

Today my intent is talk about what it means to be a disciple in Matthew’s Gospel. That is, Discipleship in Matthew. I will divide my sermon into three points. First, being a disciple is a “Lifetime process.” Second, Christ works with those who have “Little faith.” Third, we can be a disciple and true to our “Lutheran beliefs.”

Lifetime Process

This text is Jesus’ final words to his disciples. If you recall, the last time these disciples saw Jesus was at his time of arrest, or when they all deserted him in Matthew 26:56. In Matthew 26:69-75, Peter has denied Jesus three times. So this appearance has come after the women saw the resurrected Jesus. He told Mary Magdalene and “the other” Mary to, “Go tell to Galilee; they will see me” (Matt. 28:10).
Upon arrival, the now eleven disciples see Jesus for the first time since his execution on the cross for the sins of humanity. He did indeed rise from the grave three days later so those who confess him as Savior and Lord do have eternal life.

It has been commonly debated as to exactly how many of the disciples see the resurrected Jesus in this text. Some have argued it was only the eleven. Others believe it is reasonable that least five hundred witnessed this event. This is based on the idea that Matthew earlier reports Jesus preaching to the disciples and crowd who follow him in the famous “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7.

The text says they worshiped Jesus in verse 17. This could make a case that Jesus is God in Matthew because the ancient Jews took Exodus 20:3 quite seriously about having no other gods. To worship any another object than God would be idolatry. It is reasonable to suggest that Matthew also believes that Jesus is God as the disciples worship him. This makes being a follower of Jesus different than following any rabbi or teacher of the day. To follow Jesus is to follow God. The “stakes” have been raised. It is no longer merely a matter of obtaining helpful knowledge for living from a wise teacher, but it is a matter of being a follower of a way of life beyond the grave unto eternity. This is one way being a disciple is a lifetime process.

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master” (Matt. 10:24). All students were called to follow behind their teachers at that time. In Jewish rabbinic circles one finally arrives at a point of being “master” and has completed formal training. For Matthew, Jesus parts company with this tradition in that as one follows Jesus, God is revealing God’s self in Jesus. This is suggested in the Hebrew word lamud.

The implications of this are that as Jesus has to suffer and die for what he believes, we as Christians must be willing to walk the same path. This means all Christian disciples are called to a life of risks, uncertainty, and discomfort beyond our comfort zones- and yes some suffering. For Matthew, Jesus calls the disciples to follow him in that way after they have already betrayed and abandoned him.

As Christians, are we willing to be the type of disciples who follow Jesus as we take risks and and possibly experience some discomfort? Are we willing to make a lifetime commitment to this type of discipleship?

An illustration might be that a machine repairman was trained and is experienced in fixing industrial machines with American tools. The company he worked at closed down. Another company that has plants all across the world has hired him. But now he must switch to using metric tools and the metric system of measurement. Will he continue learn his trade under the metric system and be able to repair equipment around the world, or will he insist that, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks?” This is an example of discipleship being lifelong process.
Little Faith

Despite the instruction and powers to heal, the disciples still remain people of "little faith." This is to be contrasted to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21 (if you recall, she was happy with the crumbs of Jesus’ healing as even the dogs received such crumbs. Jesus resisted healing her daughter, who was tormented by demons). This is also contrasted to the centurion soldier who received healing for a servant in Matthew 8:10 (if you recall, he did not even want Jesus to even step foot in his home, because Jesus’ words were enough. Jesus declared he has never seen such faith in all of Israel). Both of these outsiders had great faith in Jesus as he performed healing ministry. This is contrasted to the "little faith" of the disciples.

The disciples basically want to learn what they can from Jesus in hopes that this will enhance their status in life as they hoped that he would usher in a new political messianic Kingdom. Like in Mark’s Gospel to some extent they are disciples for the wrong reasons, but they still have "little faith." They never intended to suffer and sacrifice for their faith as they demonstrated when they abandoned Jesus while he was crucified on the cross.

The disciples are the ones who have "little faith." To use Luther's terms, the "law" is that despite our many exposures to God, Christ, the Word, and the church teachings, we are often like the disciples. We simply want to spend our time and doing the right things for the church, but have no intention of taking risks, experiencing inconveniences, or suffering for what we believe to be true. The "good news" or gospel is that Christ works with us anyway. Even when we might have lost hope in our own future and have doubts about the future of the church, Christ has not given up on us. In Matthew, he still works with those disciples who have "little faith." He will work with us regardless of how little or how much faith or trust we have in him.

By this definition, a disciple is one who may not have total faith or complete trust in an uncertain future, but Christ is willing to work with such people anyway! We do not have to be the greatest saints of the church for Christ to do mighty acts through us. This too is good news found in the gospel of Matthew.

When I was a kid, the joke around town was that the local doctors or physicians took Wednesdays off because it was their day to play golf. Now my sister, who works for the Henry Ford Hospital system in Detroit, tells me that Wednesdays are the longest days and nights of the week for the doctors in her system. Between the demands of managed care networks, hospital surgery schedules, and the realization that many patients do not come for an appointment until after they get out of work after 5:00 p.m., being a doctor is just plain hard work! Many Caucasian American men do not enter into the profession as often these days because it is a very demanding schedule, not to mention personnel cutbacks, threats of lawsuits, and patients who “shop” like consumers. Patients will switch doctors if they do not like what the doctor tells them. So my sister says we do have a huge influx of doctors who are from Asian and Central American countries. They are willing to be trained to be skilled surgeons and physicians. They might not know
exactly what they are getting themselves into with American medicine being a constant state of flux, but they still have some faith to give their best effort to the profession, despite the uncertainty.

This is the kind of “little faith” Christ is willing to work with in Matthew’s Gospel. How much uncertainty are we willing to work with to be Christ’s disciples?

**True to Our Lutheran Beliefs**

Whenever I am a panel guest on the Christian call-in television show, “Ask the Pastor,” many clergy from Baptist and Pentecostal traditions will ask me, “When did you get saved, brother?” I reply to them, that I got saved about 2,000 years ago. This might sound like a “smart aleck” answer, but it reflects true Lutheran sacramental theology. Christ died for the church 2000 years ago. At baptism, we become children of this community who Christ created by his death and resurrection.

As a community that witnesses to a Christ who does not embrace the newest fad in culture, we invite people of all types and nations to become part of a community of faith who Jesus Christ died for and rose from the grave three days later. We believe that salvation is a gift. Matthew 28:19, reminds us that we are to “Go make disciples of all nations [or people] by baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This latter phrase is where we get our Trinity doctrine (besides in John’s gospel). It is also an invitation to be a mission people who have a ministry beyond the four walls of our church building. Specifically, Matthew’s Gospel suggests we are to serve others and take risk will do such ministry.

As disciples, we do not have to compromise our views on sacraments, Scripture, the creeds, the doctrine of the Trinity, or any other teachings from our Luther’s Catechism. Matthew’s Gospel simply reminds us that that part of being a disciple is to take risks in making disciples of all peoples. We do this in our witness of service from Matthew’s perspective.

At Baptism God has made a decision for us. We do nothing for our salvation. But our works are a response to our salvation. We are called to be a community of service that invites others to become part of our community of faith. Again, in Matthew’s gospel, this is in response to our salvation, not as a way to get into the Kingdom of God.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always to end of the age.” Matthew 28: 19-20.

We teach this to our students in Catechism. What kind of disciples is Christ calling us to be here at St. John’s Lutheran Church?
Conclusion

“Old Trinity” is a huge downtown church that has seen better days. The neighborhood is changing. This huge beautiful church with gorgeous stained glass windows is a landmark for all whom drive through the city. However, Old Trinity has a low worship attendance. Many of the younger people who used to be members have moved out to the suburbs. The distinguished clergy who used to seek pulpits like Old Trinity now seek churches in the suburbs.

Like many churches which are frustrated, a certain “traditional small group” group tends to run things and seeks scapegoats or to blame everybody from the pastor to the “younger generation.” Old Trinity’s problems are related to being located in an older neighborhood.

With one pastoral change after another and a couple conflicts over membership, certain families at Old Trinity prayed for God’s guidance. What they decided is that they are still called to build the kingdom of God in this older neighborhood they live in. The families who do not want to be on board do not have to be. This is one way this groups of families took seriously the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:16-20. First, one group of families volunteered to help out at the local rescue mission once per month. Second, another group of families volunteered for what was called “Open Church,” at a neighboring downtown church which gives food, gas, and housing vouchers for those families who are stranded and without food, gas, or housing. Third, certain older women started a brownbag lunch program at noon where they made simple lunchmeat sandwiches, chips, and an apple to pass out to those in the area who needed these lunches.

Did Old Trinity’s attendance grow? Not really. It is still seen as a “stuffy” high liturgical type church. Still, there are members who do not really like newcomers and change in their church. The local storefront Pentecostal churches are growing in the area as poorer people have seen God’s love in action. But everybody in the denomination locally gives money to Old Trinity so they can carry out their ministries. People do drive in from the suburbs to lend a helping hand to Old Trinity Church. The city council knows who Old Trinity is. They are glad to have it as part of the neighborhood. The church is well respected throughout the whole city.

Here is an older congregation that has seen better days but also takes discipleship and service quite seriously. Will they ever be great mega church? It probably will never happen. They are still building Christ’s kingdom, though another church might benefit from Old Trinity’s efforts. But they are being faithful to their confessional tradition, while still making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They are trying to be faithful disciples. On this Sunday, what kind of disciples is God calling us to be? Amen.
Introduction

My Father’s vision for our family was for us to have the same type of farm and country upbringing that he himself had. For him this sort of lifestyle built character, instilled a work ethic, and promoted wholesome values. He bailed hay as a boy. He went to a good school system where the teachers took an interest in students. He always ate healthy meals from the garden. He worked hard. He played hard. He studied hard. He led a disciplined lifestyle. He was close to the land. He appreciated nature, wildlife, and despised people throwing garbage on the ground. He was glad he had this type of upbringing and he wanted it for all of his family. He loved the small town country church.

So, when he had to describe a story or a narrative of what he dreamed or desired for his family, he could go into vivid verbal detail as to how he envisioned us all living life in the “country” and away from the what he termed as the “crowded, crime ridden, filthy city full of hoodlums who run the streets.”

In order to make this vision happen, his mission or what he does anyway, regardless of where we live (pause) was to work in the factory and have the kids help around the house with chores to make our place a home. We lived less than one hour from Flint, MI. He needed money to make this vision happen. He knew what he was good at doing. He was a good, hard worker. He worked his forty plus hours every week. He came home and made sure all the chores around the house were done right. This was his mission. He worked hard. This is what he “does.”

Again, Dad’s vision or the long-term future he for us as a family was to live the wholesome country life had the privilege of living out. The mission or his “purpose” was to work hard for the family and make sure everybody else did his or her fair share of the work.

What I have just described here is what I call and some church growth authors might call “The Vision and Mission thing.”

My sermon will be divided into three parts. First, we have Jesus’ vision and mission. Second, there are different types of styles in developing a vision and mission. Third, let us consider our challenge for vision and mission. This is new information.
Jesus’ Vision and Mission

So what was Jesus’ vision? What was Jesus’ mission? I would suggest it the answer depends on which gospel we read. Today, we are in Luke’s Gospel chapter 10. Within the context of our lesson, Jesus suggests one dimension of his vision when he says,

“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:18-20)

In this text, Jesus’ vision of the new kingdom is for names being written in heaven. He sees Satan falling. He gives his disciples power over snakes, scorpions and other forms of powerful enemies of that time. This is the narrative or picture he is painted for the future in Luke.

Jesus’ (and the church’s mission) is stated clearly in Luke 19:10. “For The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.” So Jesus seeks and saves the lost. This is what he “does,” and what his disciples should do too. What is the vision? Our text today suggests it is to usher in the kingdom by seeing Satan falling, and having power over wicked forces and names are written in heaven.

Another illustration of this idea in Scripture can be found in Johns’ Gospel. Jesus’ vision is stated in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and destroy, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” This is Jesus’ vision. His mission of what he does in his “hour” (John 2:4) is summarized in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Jesus’ vision is for people to have life and have it abundantly or with much spiritual depth. What he does is give his life so that humans may have eternal life (John 10:10).

One more quick illustration of a vision is located in Matthew, chapters 5-7. This is the “Sermon on the Mount.” It contains the famous “beatitudes.” It contains the famous teachings on salt and light, anger, adultery, divorce, almsgiving, and the famous “Lord’s Prayer.” The mission that Jesus intends for himself and the church is stated in the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So Jesus’ vision in Luke is to see Satan and the forces of evil fall. His mission is to seek and to save. In John, it is for us to have life and have it abundantly. His mission is to die so that we may have eternal life. The “Sermon on the Mount” is the vision in Matthew. The mission in Matthew, or making disciples of all nations is the means he by which he does this.
A modern example of this is that of the FedEx delivery company. Their vision, or long-term plan, was to be the company that sets the standards as a delivery service. They want to be the one company that raises the bar for other companies in their industry to follow. The way they did this was with their simple, memorable mission statement, “Overnight Delivery” to anywhere in the world.

Styles of Developing Vision and Mission

There is a spectrum or continuum of styles for developing a vision and mission. For example, there is the story of Pastor Rich who was called by a small town church to bring new life to this dying congregation. Rich did not attend the denominational seminary, but was given permission by his district to go to a nondenominational seminary that specializes in training “Church Growth” leaders or “Turn Around Pastors.” Entering the community wearing a cowboy hat and boots while carrying a guitar and laptop computer over both his shoulders, Rich was ready to go. He is a trendsetter! He is one who likes to set the world on fire for Christ!

Immediately Rich worked to radically alter the church constitution from “committees” to “Ministry Teams.” He wanted to “blow-up the committee structure.” Rich found about ten people who saw the same type of vision he believes the Lord is laying on his heart for this congregation. They will be known as the Youth Specialist Church. Rich scheduled contemporary Christian rock ‘n roll artists to come to the church on a monthly basis. He pushed much of the budget into Youth Ministries. He played modern music often in church. He brought in brand new high tech computers into the office. Youth and Sunday school were the major focuses of the ministry.

He heard of disgruntled people who say Pastor Rich changing their church too rapidly. His response was, “You have to break a few eggs to make an omelet . . . if they are unhappy, and they need to go over to a more traditional church. That is not where God is leading us now.” Pastor Rich is a very loud, outspoken, and charismatic man. He goes to all the latest youth events, church growth seminars, and listens to Christian radio all of the time. He solved the weddings problem by renting the church out to any couple that supplied their own pastor, and the church made $500.00 per wedding that way. He never wore a clergy robe. Most or all, services included some sort of high tech media presentation. He eliminated the lectionary, and preached the texts the “Spirit” led him to preach.

Young families were attracted to this style of ministry and he did have the best youth ministry in town. But complaints, and conflict split the church. He brought too much change, too soon, and offended many people. The “rap” on him was he was not sensitive to the older people, and he rarely made hospital or nursing home calls. He was politely asked to take another church before even more conflict erupts. The denomination agreed, and Pastor Rich took another church. Those younger families that liked Pastor Rich also left the church. The church went back to it former “maintenance” status, and is now “spooked” to attempt any major change again. Merely surviving another year is their “mission” for now. They seek out older pastors, even those who are close to retirement.
age, as a preferred choice of ministry style. Pastor Rich did take a call to a new "mission church plant" in a metro area and did quite well there. Pastor Rich is an example of the kind of style that pursues vision and mission in a radical way. If a church needs extreme help and quickly, or else they will die, Pastor Rich's "turn around leadership" style is the way to go. But watch what you ask for with this type of request. You may get it! This is in contrast to another style of leadership.

Pastor Doug was called into a struggling small town and rural church. He took a different approach. He tried to learn what the people of his congregation considered to be their strengths and weaknesses for ministry. He talked to some people. He spoke with people on his committees. He developed a long-range vision task force that met monthly for one year. Together they used a study guidebook to examine the congregation's strengths and weaknesses. They had a two-day retreat to develop a five-year plan to implement change at their church. They decided to focus on two strengths and two weaknesses.

Worship and Christian education were strengths. So they decided to develop a plan to further enhance these ministries. Visitation and youth were two weaknesses. They called in the denominational representative to train laity to do home visitation and outreach, as well as plan for a future youth ministry. This church has new hope and is gradually growing in both numbers and commitment to a future.

In our lesson, Jesus chose seventy followers to go out two by two to do ministry. The twelve disciples were to be the teachers, and eventual leaders of the church. But it was the seventy who were empowered to do ministry. This would support a model of ministry that empowers laity to carry out the ministry of the church.

But in John's Gospel, Jesus does have a plan. If you will, he has an "hour." In John's Gospel, Jesus is control of his destiny. He is very confrontational. Either you with Jesus or you or not . . . those who are not with Jesus in John are with the Devil. Already John 2, Jesus cleanses the temple. The Synoptic Gospels report this occurring when toward the end of his ministry, after his final entry into Jerusalem, before he is crucified, died, and was buried, but rose again so we may have eternal life. So in John, one can make a case for a strong willed Jesus who does take control of the situation. In John, there was a plan which began "In the beginning [when] there was the Word and was with God and Word was God.

My point here is that Scripture can support either a very aggressive, strong rapidly moving approach to vision and mission, as well as one that works through the movement of the "rank and file" members.

What kind of style would we be comfortable with exploring? Do we want an aggressive "turn round leader" type? Do want a style that seeks collaboration, alliance building, and long-term planning? Possibly here is some middle group we might wish to stake out at this time.
Our Challenge for Vision and Mission

I wish to come clean on any biases I come to this discussion of vision and mission with, in terms of being up front with you. First, I believe our direction, as Scripture, particularly Christ’s commands, should guide a congregation. I say this because there are authors who strongly argue that business trends should set the agenda for the church. I believe that we can learn from business trends. I believe that we can see what works and what does not work in business trends. I believe that we have much to benefit by being in dialogue with those in business as we can adapt their practices to the church. But I believe that we need to have vision or story for our future, as well as mission or purpose based on what Christ says in Scripture. Today’s lesson of Jesus sending out the seventy, as well the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28, are both scriptural passages that suggest that the church is make some attempts to be witness outside of the immediate walls of the church building.

Second, I like the idea that we are called to be “disciples.” Let me explain where this idea comes from. When I first arrived here, Bob Gearhart very graciously arranged for several gatherings families or cottage meetings for you, the congregation, to provide input to me, your new pastor, about your vision for the future of this congregation.

Of the various groups of families that I listened to and had actually very good discussion with, there were four themes that seemed to reoccur as I glanced over my notes. First, every group believed that St. John’s Church is in fairly comfortable rut or plateau of sorts. We are not in a terrible crisis per se, yet we do need to move forward into some positive direction into the future. Second, everybody agreed that having young families in our church is where our future is. Whatever it takes to keep younger families here is worth it. Third, Christian education and Sunday school are core values which everybody seems to hold in high esteem at St. John’s. Finally, while some people wish to try new things once in a while in worship, by and large this congregation more or less likes traditional Lutheran worship, sacraments, and theology. Again, there is a concern that we do need to keep experimenting with new ideas. Those whom have the new ideas need to know they are welcomed, or else they will simply keep a low profile.

What I concluded after looking over my notes, and as I’ve been pastor her for close to four years, is that we want to turn out solid Lutheran Christians who are well rounded in their faith, as they have a positive experience as young people in our Christian education ministries. Growing and maturing as a Christian for a life-long journey of a faith in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christ values (as one group told me) is what I see being a major part of “discipleship.”

Luke 10, and the other passages about sending out disciples such as Matthew 28, suggest we do need to make disciples. What is the exact nature of the kinds of disciples our specific congregation, is called to make is different question. How and what we do to make disciples is related to our cherished values, context and priorities.
Let me illustrate. Grace Church is an inner city church in a declining, crime-ridden neighborhood. Its vision is that people who live in that area would experience and feel Christ's love in the midst of all the pain and suffering they see all around them. They want to be the place of refuge for weary souls who deal with the daily problems of the struggle to survive in the inner city. Their mission statement was simply to "preach Jesus in all they say and do." This is translated into Saturday street evangelism while giving out free coffee and donuts. It means home giving out free food coupons from the local grocery store. It means helping people with rent. It means a very well planned active Wednesday evening program of Bible study, soup and sandwich dinner, free nursery care, and contemporary music to begin the evening's activities. The vision was to be a refuge for weary inner city people. The mission is to "preach Jesus in all they say and do." By the way, this church also ended up being a training place for prospective missionaries to foreign countries.

Another illustration is at Bethel Church, which is a middle-sized country church (that worships between 125-200 per Sunday) located out in the middle of a field. Its vision was to be the church for children, Sunday school, summer catechism, and youth ministry. They use the Matthew 28 "Great Commission" as their mission statement, but put the accent on the "and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." This means Sunday school and catechism all year around. It means hiring teachers for summer school. It means that any pastor who takes this call must be highly committed to Christian education, and be willing to get and provide more training in Christian education a needed to keep the church current with effective methods of Christian education.

On this day, as Jesus sent the seventy, he would ask, what is our vision? What is the "story" we would want to tell about the desired future of St. John's church? What is our mission? What do we do anyway in terms of our priorities in ministry?

In Luke—Acts, the church spiritually set the world on fire and changed it forever with the gospel message. What are we doing to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ here in Williams County, Ohio?

The "law" is sometimes we think it the pastor's job, and a core group of church leaders to do the ministry. This hampers the effectiveness of our message. The "good news" is that God gives us second chances.

**Conclusion**

Once there was a small church in a poor southern state that was interviewing recent seminary graduates for their "first call" out of seminary. The search committee told one young future pastor that this church has produced one seminary president, a couple foreign missionaries, and a denominational executive. The pastor being interviewed as, "Where did you find such talent in this small little church?" The response was, "We did not find the talent. We helped to develop these people here at our church." Today what is our vision for the future? What story do we want to tell about where we
wish to see our congregation headed? What is our mission? That is what do we do well
anyway? Today Jesus sent out the seventy. Who are we sending out? Amen.
Gathering the Scattered Pilgrims

Introduction

Frankie was from a family of immigrants who came to America a generation ago. His Dad worked in the coal mines in the Appalachian Mountains. Frankie remembers this as a boy. As the mines shut down, Frankie moved to one of the Midwest states where he got a job in a small family owned shop. In this shop he learned the skills and the tricks of operating certain machines and equipment. It was a small shop, which acted more or less like “family.” The pay was not great, but it was a “cozy” place to work. Being from an immigrant family from out of state, Frankie’s family lived by the credo, “You cannot fault a man for wanting to better himself on the job with pay and providing for his family.” After Frankie got married he moved away to a bigger city and got a job at a bigger factory. Yes, it did pay more money! But it was less personal. There was much company politics to deal with in this larger plant. There was no sense of “family or community” as was in the small shop, and the company itself always struggled with having to deal with larger cooperate competitors who often had offshore plants in other countries. So life in this larger factory was a faster pace and the company itself worked hard just to stay afloat in changing global economy.

Could Frankie spend his whole life in this factory and raise his family here? Should he seek out a larger factory to work at? On some given days, he misses the simplicity and sense of family and community of the small shop he use to work at after he left the mining town back home in the hills. It comes down to what is Frankie’s mission in life…to make as much money as possible wherever this takes him, or to provide a healthy environment for his family to grow up in as he works? As I work out at the Bryan “Y,” I still run into people who are essentially immigrants from other states who came here to work and now must make tough choices in a changing economy. Our congregation’s roots are also found in German immigrants who came to America.

Texts like Psalm 121 is often all they had to read and draw from spiritually.

Today’s sermon will have three points: First, Old Lutherans, second, Scattered Lutherans, and third, Builder Lutherans.

Old Lutherans

Friedrich Mutschmann, like many German immigrants of this era, got off the boat in Hoboken, New Jersey, on October 18, 1872. This was the post-Civil War era in America in which all of the western movies attempt to portray. Lutheran pastors like other people, were dying of diseases such as small pox and scarlet fever. There were outlaw raids that killed many people, as well as Native American Indian uprisings that
resulted in much violence. Some of the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains were viewed as **hostile terrain to civilized humans.** They were territories --not states then.

So who would want to come to such a land? In Europe after the wars with Napoleon, the nations were in chaos, and the Council at Vienna worked in re-establishing national boundaries. Some nations like the Netherlands were winners, and others were losers. Slowly, Europeans tried to move away from monarchy ruled by kings-type of nations toward a constitutional form of government like the United States and France. But it would be slow. The **Industrial Revolution** had reached Europe and many farmers could no longer compete with larger landowners who would buy up family farms and make the farmers **slaves to the land they once owned.** Moving to the city translated into being a slave to dirty, low paying, and dangerous industrial sweatshops. For many common working class people, there was no economic future in the war-ravaged land full of rich landowners and industrial sweatshops. Some have guessed that this is the time era that Charles Dickens wrote the novel *A Christmas Carol,* or the story of Ebenezer Scrooge.

In this time era, the strict literalist or dogmatic views of the **Bible and traditional scholastic theology of the day did not prove to be comforting or helpful** to those who still suffered the pain and poverty of a war torn land. So many universities and churches, whose clergy came out of the universities, started to preach rationalism in the pulpits. The idea of many of the supernatural events of the Bible was seen as realistic in the experience of many peoples in Europe. So sermons became practical talks on planting trees, sanitation practices, the evils of alcohol, and stall-feeding of horses.

On other side, a pietism movement arose. These Christians sought a faith experience where one could be assured in one’s faith, have a warm heart for what one believes, uplifted the role of Scripture, prayer and active lay participation in church. This was to be preferred to lectures about practical matters or rigid doctrine preaching.

Out these movements emerged what was the neo-Lutherans later to be called “Old Lutheranism.” A conservative pastor named William Lohe was receiving frantic letters of plea from Lutheran clergy in America. **Besides the physical dangers of the land---there were other threats.** Many German Lutheran immigrants were losing the faith of their childhood. They were joining one of the sectarian churches as a result of the traveling American Protestant frontier preachers, becoming Roman Catholics, or simple heathens! There were the earlier groups of Lutherans who migrated on the east coast. But they had accepted the teachings of the rationalists in Europe and were “unionist”… that is, they sought to speak English and tried to establish close ties with the Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians and other churches.

William Lohe went outside the traditional university system and started his own three-year mission school in Neuendettelsau, Germany. _He supplied money and clergy candidates to keep alive the old Lutheranism, which was now a minority report in Europe._ The pioneers of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and our own Iowa Synod (before the ALC) received clergy from William Lohe. _His was the only source of clergy_
and money for such missionary effort at that time. Frankenmuth, Michigan, Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Dubuque, Iowa area, and NW Ohio were among some of the earlier settlements.

Germans were fleeing Europe by the thousands for the cheap land and a promise to have better life here in America. Our church’s roots like that of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod was to establish “old Lutheran Churches” like there were in Germany before rationalism, theories of Evolution new critical ways of studying the Bible took hold in Europe. These were the “old Lutherans.”

Psalm 121 is a psalm for pilgrims. That is a people who are on a life journey as the German Lutherans were in the unsettled American lands. They came here simply to have a better life for their families.

I lift my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My Help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Scattered Lutherans

Friedrich Mutschmann was raised in a common working class family. He had a strong local church catechism background and went to schools that common working people went to in Europe. He was not tracked to go to the University where the professionals and state church clergy attended. His parents both died while he was a teenager. He trained to be a mechanic and millwright. Later he found himself a William Lohe’s missionary school. He learned how to be a theology teacher, and what we would call now a “parochial school” teacher there. The plan was to send men like him to Iowa where he would finish up his seminary training.

While on a train to Iowa, he stopped and had dinner with Pastor Grimm, St. John’s and St. Peter’s second pastor after Pastor Ritter from Bryan helped organize this congregation, which met at the Zeiter’s schoolhouse in Bridgewater. Pastor Grimm told Friedrich that he wanted him to be his assistant and eventually become Senior Pastor of the Edgerton, Eden and Bridgewater churches. So Mutschmann began teaching at 7:00 a.m. that next Monday morning at Eden. He and Pastor Grimm would take turns walking from Eden to Edgerton and Bridgewater.

These men were preachers and teachers of God’s Word. Theologically, they and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod were very similar. In fact, the Missouri Synod did not accept many churches nor the English unionist Lutherans, but Iowa Synod (old ALC) was deemed as an “Orthodox Lutheran” church by Missouri Synod standards. There was a conflict between William Lohe in Germany and some of the Missouri clergy in Frankenmuth, Michigan. This caused Iowa and Missouri to sever organizational ties, but they still recognized and worked with one another.
What they saw was German immigrants who were trying to realize the American dream. These German immigrants struggled like anybody did at that time. The mission of the Iowa Synod (which Pastor Grimm got St. John's into) was to “gather the scattered” German Lutherans into the churches and feed their tired weary souls with God's Word and administer the sacraments. Also they taught their children the catechism and kept them conversant in the German language and culture. America was to be to the new Zion.”

In those days, a family Bible was about all there was to read. It was read at night under an oil lamp. Pastors preached and taught all day and studied and prepared sermons and lessons at night. Financially, the German churches did the best they could to support these missionaries in what was termed as that untamed mission frontier. Mutschmann sent his superintendent in German a letter to request a wife. He was matched in marriage with a Swiss school teacher whom Mutschmann met in Toledo and she lived at the parsonage in Bryan until their wedding day. On that day a picture of her mother hung on the wall of the church with a note to give them her blessing for the wedding.

Pastor Grimm died that year. Mutschmann and his wife and later children (he eventually had 10 children and one became a pastor and translated his journal into English) lived above a furniture store first and later a small house. He left St. John’s and St. Peter’s in 1876 for a larger church in Iowa. Then he took a church in Wisconsin. This was his pilgrimage.

These were times when people died at a young age of diseases. It was a time when American Indians resisted Christian teachings. It was a time when life was rugged for all people. So quite often their Christian faith was all they had to hang onto. In such times the Psalms are useful for each of us when we are struggling to maintain what we have or discover God's will for our lives.

What I discovered as I studied the history of our church is that its historical roots were based on being a separate German community of sorts. We did not have English in our church until 1900-1909. This was introduced during World War I, and the fear was that Germans were collaborators viewed as with the enemy. It was in this time our churches started to display American flags in the sanctuary to show we are indeed loyal Americans. This too was part of our pilgrimage.

Like the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, we believed that we should sever all ties with lodge's and secret societies. We did not agree with all the popular theories on the last days. We resisted the methods and appeals to emotionalism and experience that the other American churches, revival preachers and evangelists practiced at that time. We understood the Bible strictly through the lens of a fairly conservative reading of the Lutheran confessions as found in the Book of Concord. We had little fellowship with other church denominations except Lutheran . . . and some of them were “suspect” at that . . . like those who later formed the ULCA and later LCA.
We held strict views on the Bible; a close-knit community was our goal. We were very careful with who received communion in our churches. Again, our goal was not necessarily to convert others to Christianity. We did support Lutheran "institutions of mercy" like Lutheran Old Folks' homes, missionaries in New Guinea, and other causes which Lutherans requested financial assistance as we do today with the Filling Home and other such ministries. . . . Essentially we took care of our own . . . this was the "gather the scattered" legacy of our past. It was a way that we preserved our heritage and who we were as Lutheran Christians.

Builder Lutherans

In the early 1980s, I was doing my field work at downtown "Old Trinity Lutheran Church" in Columbus, Ohio. This is a flagship church of the American Lutheran Church in that city. It held a proud and glorious history. Many "rust belt" industries were laying off people then. Early effects of what was termed as the "Reagan Revolution" left many families homeless and others unemployed. The Savings and Loans of that time were in a financial crisis. So I was alarmed by all of this and I shared my feeling with my supervisor, Pastor William Funk at that time. He puffed on his pipe and told me to, "Relax!" These are the best of times for Lutherans. He said it is during economic depressions and wars that Lutherans usually rally around causes and we see them at their peak in terms of church activity.

For us at St. John's Church, it was during the great depression in America that our church numbers grew. It was in this time that we were challenged to break with St. Peter's in Edon and call Pastor DeWalt out of seminary. Then our congregation became builders! We went from one building project after another. In fact, the terms of many of our pastors were defined in terms of what building project was planned or completed in his time of ministry. In the post World War II era, we prospered like many churches did in that time. We took on more and more building projects. Our desire was to build a church that would accommodate our growing numbers in the pews. We measured God's blessings with the amount of people and those who worked diligently to plan and build this church.

While Israel was on its faith pilgrimage, God had wanted his people to be a blessing to other peoples. God wanted to make Israel a "set apart or holy" people who were his witnesses to all the earth. They were faithful at some times. At other times, they measured themselves not by their mission to be a blessing to others, but in the building of their temples and cities as well as the power of their kings. Through all of these times of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, God stuck with them. They were a people on a faith journey. The church believes that God's ultimate expression of love for Israel and all the earth was when he sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for the sins of humanity. Three days later he would rise from the grave. Those who confess him as Savior and Lord do have eternal life.

Psalm121 is a song for those who are on the faith journey. We are called not only to travel on the journey, but also be witness and a blessing to others. For St. John's
and other churches of their time era, they practiced their mission by gathering the scattered sheep that had left Europe and came to America for a better life. Also, for St. John's and other churches, we have built a fine building to carry out the ministry of proclaiming God's Word. Like Israel, we need to always keep our eyes fixed on the God we worship and bear witness. Our building is one blessing God has given us. We worship God, not the building or temple.

As I have studied our church's history, we have been focused around two mission themes. One was to gather the scattered German Lutheran who came to America. The other was to build a church to preach and teach God's Word. This has been our past. What is our future mission for the 21st Century? The good news is that I do and I believe many other people in this congregation do is that God not done with us yet. God does have a place for us to do ministry here at St. John's in the century. Next Sunday, on Reformation Sunday, I will share some further ideas and thoughts. For now, let us be proud that we do have a very rich, traditional Lutheran Christian legacy to pass onto future generations. The Pilgrim Psalm of Psalm 121 is our Psalm of faith too. (Possibly read Psalm 121: 1-7 again)

Conclusion

In his book entitled, Dancing with Dinosaurs, William Easum tells the story of a winery that at one time made the finest wine around. It had a thriving business of many customers. Then one day the customers stopped coming. Yes, they had a few regulars or loyalists, but the winery wasn't what it once was in a past golden era. So it called in some experts to study the problem. The results were that the winery still produces the finest wine around. But the wine vats were old and not what they should be to keep with the times. The family who owned the winery protested that those vats have always been here. The experts said that some change is needed in the vats not the wine. The wine is of vintage quality. So now the family is at a crossroads. Do they continue to use the old vats, which are influencing the flavor of the wine, or do they CHANGE? Change does not come easy for this traditional family. What will the future look like? The good news is the wine like the gospel that the church preaches is just as powerful and touches people's lives as much as ever. Are there any "vats" in our own personal lives, our church or our community that need changing? This is the question that many church leaders are asking today. Amen.
Covenant for a New Time

Introduction

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Jeremiah 31:31-34.

My sister sent me an article from the Detroit newspapers about some automotive factory workers who thought it was funny to put baby powder into an envelope, send it to friends and foremen, and tell them this was Anthrax. Of course panic occurred! The employees were immediately fired! What is interesting is that the labor union sided with the company on this decision. Maybe a year or so ago, the United Auto Workers Union might have fought tooth and nail for these workers. We all know of stories where a union has fought for its members—even when they were caught red-handed! But we live in different times now after September 11, 2001!

In our Old Testament text, new and different times were coming for the prophet Jeremiah and Israel, for Martin Luther and Europe, as well as I would suggest for us as Americans and Christians here at St. John’s Lutheran Church. My sermon will have three points. First, there is a new world. Second, there is a new hope. Finally, Third there is a new future.

New World

Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet.” His own family forsook him, as Jeremiah 12: 6 reports. He really did not want this calling as a prophet as Jeremiah chapter 1 reports . . . in fact he tried to use his youth as an excuse to get out of the job! Jeremiah was raised in the days of the prophet Hosea.

As an occasional reminder, Hosea was smaller book or minor prophet who married a harlot wife who was often unfaithful to him. The point of the whole book of Hosea is the people of Israel “SAY” they are worship God...then they seek the pleasures of false gods, despite the fact that these gods continually let them down.

Most modern scholars believe that Hosea and the book of Deuteronomy informed Jeremiah’s theological views. Again, as an occasional reminder, Jesus used the book of Deuteronomy to rebuke the Devil’s temptation in the wilderness period of his as Matthew 4:1-11 reports.
So why is Jeremiah so anxious? Because he knows the “golden era” which Israel cherished is over! No longer can small nations like Israel “stake out their portion” of the global economic pie and have their own little respected “Monarchy.” Super power nations like Assyria and Babylon have risen to dominate the world picture. They wish to conquer the world and take back the skilled workers and material wealth from other lands to make their own nation more comfortable.

Assyria and Babylon are fighting for world dominance. Northern Israel, or Southern Israel’s neighbor to the north, played a dangerous game by trying to “play one super power off against the other one.” This cost them their land and nation. As all of them were scattered into exile to four corners of the earth. This is recorded in 2 Kings 17:1-18, also noted in history during the reign of the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-pileser III in 745-727 B.C.

So it was Jeremiah’s job to announce to Israel that it had been repeatedly unfaithful to God. Now they will suffer in exile due to this misconduct. They have had numerous prophetic warnings and have either ignored, mistreated or killed the prophets, now it is a matter of time before they will go into exile and God will use Babylon as his tool of judgment. If you recall my sermon a few weeks ago out of Habakkuk, the prophet was saying that God is using a very mean-spirited people to conquer Israel, who was bad...but not that bad (in Habakkuk’s estimation). So now exile is going to happen. It is not IF but WHEN. This has been the essential message of the book of Jeremiah up to this point. The good old days are over, they are to get ready to go into exile! The days are changing, whether you like it or not. The people of Southern Israel will be in a New World.

For Martin Luther, the world of the predictable medieval gothic church structures of stained glassed windows, lecterns, and pulpits and altars was coming to an end. Not only was his conflict over justification by faith with the Catholic Pope Leo X escalating, but also Europe was in the midst of the bubonic plague, which was killing millions of people. The Moslem Turks were mad at the Holy Roman Empires Crusaders, and now were attempting to invade Europe. And a man named Christopher Columbus was in the process of changing people’s worldview by suggesting that the world is round...and he is willing to prove it if somebody would fund a sea voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. This was a New World for Martin Luther too.

Today, who would guess about one year ago, that books on the Moslem religion would be selling in record quantities in bookstores? For me, I could have never imagined that the area Lutheran clergy conferences would cancel the traditional November Bible study seminars and have us clergy take a one-day intensive course on the Moslem religion. But after September 11, 2001, many have argued we too live in a New World.
New Hope

For Jeremiah this portion of his book is known as the "Book of Consolation." The simple message here is despite all of Israel’s sins and shortcomings, God forgives the people. Once they were in exile, God does have a bright future for them. God is still their God. They are still God’s people. As the text I read says, God will make a new covenant with the people and will write his will and laws upon their hearts. Despite the horrible time of Exile, they are still God’s people. Nobody will ever exterminate them, though many have tried.

The Christian church confesses that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of Israel and all peoples. Three days later he rose from the grave. Those who confess him as Savior and Lord do have eternal life. God has written his law upon our hearts in the form of the Holy Spirit or John’s Gospel calls the Spirit the Counselor or Paraclete. St. Paul in Romans 8:26-27 says the Spirit intervenes for us to God when we have a difficult time praying.

For Martin Luther, his faith journey influenced Europe. He struggled to find a gracious and merciful God. In Romans 5, and Galatians 3:11, Luther discovered that the just should live by faith alone. This was also cited in Habakkuk 2:4. This proclamation would give Lutheran and other Christians new hope for the future. We are not justified by our good works, but by our simple trust in God and Christ’s death and resurrection on the cross.

Luther’s spiritual struggle and newfound hope would eventually lead to a Protestant Reformation in Europe. While Luther never intended to start new church, but merely reform the old one, a new set of churches did emerge! Christianity in this new form of Protestantism influenced and continues to influence people in all lands throughout history. Despite all the turmoil in Europe in Luther’s time, God had a new hope for the church, just as he did Israel after the exile.

For us today, if you recall, last week I went into meticulous detail to suggest that we do not live in the days when we exist simply to gather the scattered Lutherans who came to America on immigrant boats. I suggested also that we no longer live in days what all a church needs to build a building and people will come into it. One has to have vision as to what this church will be about in the future. God gave Jeremiah and Israel a new hope with the covenant or law being written on their hearts. For Luther and those in the Reformation, they could now live by faith rather than guilt and good works.

Our hope is still found in our Bibles. I believe our hope is still found in our Lutheran Confessions. I think most of us here would agree that Christian education and Catechism is a high priority ministry in this congregation called St. John’s Lutheran Church. The world is different, where do we go from here? I believe our hope is still found in the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions as it was for those German immigrants who came to America in the 1800s.
Regarding the Anthrax concerns, us Lutherans are well known for our caution, conservative nature and being quite thorough in all of our affairs. We can step up to the plate and show all peoples what a cautious, careful, conservative lifestyle looks like. We are cautious, conservative, and careful people by our very nature. History has shown this, as I tried to point out last week. The Old Testament shows how the Jews practiced this in their laws in Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers.

New Future

Israel would never be the great super monarchy it once was under Kings Saul, David and Solomon, though they often expected a Messiah to provide this for them. The new nation of Israel would be known as the people of the “Book,” the Hebrew Scriptures, the Torah. Wherever they went in their life’s journey, they carried a scroll of the Hebrew Scriptures! So much so that the New Testament writers like the gospel evangelists and St. Paul would think they are a bit too fanatical or legalistic about their views of the Hebrew Scriptures. But this is who they are, that is a people who live by the Torah! Like or not they have survived many holocausts. They helped to build Hollywood. They have written many good books. They have suffered the brunt of jokes, but they hang in there. They have determination or “Chutzpah!” They still influence financial markets and quite often us Christians have grown fond of them. Meanwhile, in today’s text, Jeremiah has to break the news that they will be in exile, but new hope and new life still exists.

For the Reformation churches, as long we as were in Europe, we remained state churches sort of like the Post Office or Department of Motor Vehicles here in America. After about the 1920s in America, we here at St. John’s decided to become “American Lutherans.” This means America is our land. We have been trying to shed the reputation of the “German Evangelical Lutheran Church.” America’s problems are our problems. When Anthrax kills postal workers out east, we also feel this same threat here! When New York City is attacked, we feel attacked! We are Americans and are proud of it. As American Lutherans we opted not to start a rival school system or “Lutheran Society.” We support our public schools and work to improve them. We are Christians who do not want to see other Christians get hurt by they Roman Catholic, Baptist, Independent or any group, because if they can get hurt so can we.

Let me suggest to you what sort of a future vision I can imagine for us here at St. John’s Church. True to our historic mission, even from the old Iowa Synod days I can see us as a “Preaching and Teaching Mission Outpost.” Our future may not be in gathering Lutherans, but preaching and teaching Christ to all peoples in our communities. St. John’s Church can be known as the place that allows learning and personal growth to take place in this community. That is we make disciples of various sorts of people to better serve the community of Christ and the broader area.
A preaching and teaching outpost could take any number of forms. W can be the place where workshops, seminars and small group events occur. We already have the AA group meeting. Trinity in Bryan has several such groups. We can be the place where people learn about life skills, such as hosting parenting classes. Some Lutheran churches allow Lutheran Social Services to reside in their building. Other churches decide that pre-school or day care center is the way to be an outreach witness.

What has changed since September 11, 2001, is that now we must be a positive witness to all other religions. We must be careful not to look like “Crusaders” who impose our faith, but rather witnesses who do what John 10:10 calls pointing a Christ who wants us to have life have it abundantly.

We have a solid past heritage to draw on. This is one point I wanted to make last week. We are biblical Christians, and make no apology for it. Since we did not go the Missouri Synod or Wisconsin Synod route, we also opted to allow diverse views of the Bible. And yes, one person’s interpretation may disagree with another person’s views. But as long as the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered rightly---we are OK with that. We started down this road back in the early 1930s. This is written in our history.

This type of future is a whole new world for us! We may not have traditional Lutheran types using our building or facilities. Again, the criterion would be “How are disciples being made in this event?” this would mean risks. It would change. It would mean making disciples and maybe other churches would benefit. This is how one thinks in terms of bringing the Kingdom of God!

As the world is in anxious times, our calling is to show Christ’s love. One strength that we at St. John’s Church can offer is our experience in teaching and preaching the gospel that brings us a deep, consistent, tried and tested faith---to others ... so they too may be equipped to face their life’s challenges. We can be as slow, patient and stand tough just as much or more than those who fear the Taliban are in Afghanistan. After all, we have been at this for 1500 Years! What is different here is this may or may not take place under our Church’s Christian Education program. It may take any number of several forms. We are all called to make disciples... not religious consumers, nor people who just want to use the building and leave, but disciples!

When I read one of our church histories, one of the writers indicated that St. John’s was built to “serve as a well of water springing up into the everlasting life and heaven where from weary souls might eat true bread from heaven” (St. John’s Lutheran Church History 1976, 2). While we at that one time intended this to be German Lutheran weary souls, I am suggesting that in this time of a world where we now must see mainstream Moslems as being “God’s children,” “How are we at St. John’s providing the true bread from heaven for the weary souls in our community?”
On Reformation Sunday 2001 the world has changed! It has changed before. We have Gospel contained Scripture and a rich Reformation tradition that has served us well before and it can do so again!

Conclusion

I wish to share a couple short stories to ponder we consider what kind of disciples do we want make here at St. John’s Lutheran Church?

Jimmy Carter writes in his book Living in Faith of a story of an missionary evangelist who came to an Amish village and asked the Amish man, “Brother are you a Christian”? The Amish man paused got a pencil and paper and wrote down a list of names. He then told the evangelist, “Here is a list of people who know me best, please ask them if I am a Christian.” Could we as Christians and as a Church write a list of names of who which we could say to a stranger, Ask these people if I am a Christian?

Second, when Barb and I got married in a big Presbyterian Church in Livonia, they had weddings every week, as did every church in that suburb. So they created a multiple church pre-marriage course that was six Sundays after church. One Sunday, one of the pastors from one of the participating churches spoke on “Spirituality in Marriage.” The next week, a member of one of the churches who was a health care professional spoke on medical issues including medical insurance. Of course the local lawyer talking legal matters. We had a financial planner who was a Pentecostal speak to us one week. Then my favorite was a couple that were married for 20 years who spoke on, “After the Honeymoon...conflicts, fair fighting and issues in married life.” Each couple had to sign an attendance sheet. There was an extra class for parental issues in blended families, by one of the members of the participating churches. Every member of those churches takes ownership in this ministry. Their vision is that those who get married in their churches will be better equipped to handle the good times and bad times in marriage.

On Reformation Sunday 2001, we do live in a new time, but as God told Jeremiah- his word is written on our hearts. On Reformation Sunday I believe God is calling us to unleash that Word of God to a world of anxious, worried people... who need to know that “A Mighty Fortress is our God!” This is indeed our claim to fame as Lutheran Christians! Amen.
February 25, 2001

Minutes from Small Ministry Group

On this day immediately after worship service, the following persons were in attendance: Al Word, Dave Jaessing, Linda Earhart and Dr. Dave Anderson. Steve Yagelski had an unexpected conflict, but did read the first two chapters and forwarded some comments.

In this meeting, a brief summary of the project was presented. Essentially, the group affirmed the idea of the project as well as the plan. Some suggestions they made include the idea of preaching sermons based on the material covered in the project. Specifically, in the area of what exactly are my assumptions and findings regarding “discipleship.” Another suggestion was to possibly gather all of the interviewees together for one focus groups, meeting to discuss discipleship and how it relates to this project.

After the meeting, this researcher talked with John Nissley. John suggested that possibly three to four sermons might be preached, as well as made available to the interviewees on the material related to this project. Also, possibly one focus group might be a good idea after the interviews.

Each group member was to gather about nine names of possible members to be interviewed. The meeting concluded in a positive manner in gratitude that such a study is being conducted with St. John’s and Winebrenner Seminary.
June 3, 2001

Minutes from Small Ministry Group

On this day after worship the committee was given the recent set of drafts # 3 for chapter 1, 2 and 4, and draft # 1 or chapter 3. Present were myself, Dave J., Steve Y., Linda E. and Dr. Dave A. We focused out attention Chapter 3 because of its size and recent production.

The committee was updated on the progress of the project. Then we discussed some of the ideas related to Chapter 3.

First, one member appreciates the editing that has been done on Chapter 1. Second, all members see the same issues raised in this project to be present in their school, job, village and working for the state of Ohio Department of Transportation.

The committee believes I need to “come clean” (as I do) with my biases regarding the fact that I believe that all Christians need to consider the “Disciple” model that Matthew presents, it as my preference for the direction of this congregation’s spiritual growth. One member also points out that being counter-cultural is what we are called to be as Christians. This is a struggle for him. The church should be a place to support him in that struggle. At work, he feels like a “minority report” on his views on life, morals, faith etc.

One member thought I was on target to suggest that many models, which are successful in “white collar” communities, will not work here. This is a “blue-collar” community, and many successful models do not work here as they might elsewhere. He is a town official, and has seen how blue-collar people are not “bent on being empowered” or becoming part of a “power surge” after a hard day’s work of manual labor. The village council sees this all the time. He also points out that the church and the town is on the brink of some level of “intergenerational conflict.” The younger group doesn’t want to initiate it. So they back off and let things remain status quo.

Dave A. pointed out that much of what is called “tradition” developed after World War II. This is when people began to “compartmentalize” their faith. Sacraments as a central theme of worship has been a constant within Lutheranism though (as Dave sees it).

Regarding the format of Chapter 3, a suggestion was made to break up the areas of various views of church growth ideas would be helpful. For example to have one sub-section entitled “Contemporary Church Growth Authors,” and then “Mainline Church Growth Authors.” This would make the paper easier to read.
The topic of “change” was raised. Locally, this needs to be done in “baby steps” or in smaller increments, as the project rightly points out. Also, a commitment for long-term leadership needs to be present (both lay and clergy).

One other interesting idea raised was to suggest the church in the future might want to adopt a local mission project like adopting a nursing home or a place that needs help. Foreign missions becomes too abstract for many people in the church in these small towns.

All in all, the group saw much hard, thoughtful work has gone into this project. They think even the “old guard” who resist change could appreciate what is happening here if given enough time to digest the information presented.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes that Emerged</th>
<th>Interviewee Comments on the Present</th>
<th>Interviewee Visions for the Future</th>
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| Sharing Our Faith   | “To go out and meet people and tell them it is this way and that way. It is to share our faith.”  
“Being a disciple is of course spreading the Word of Christ to all people, not only in the church, but outside the church.”  
“I think for me [Jesus] wants me to spread the Word, and tell things that have happened in my life so people understand that the Lord is real, and that he is here for us.”  
“I try to convince the heathens to be gracious.” | To meet people [in] the community and articulate one’s personal beliefs.  
To spread our views of the Christian Word beyond the wall of the church.  
To help others understand that the Lord is present and is present with us in our daily lives.  
A ministry of God’s grace to an unchurched group of people. |
| Caring for Others    | “I think we should open our church to other organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous. I would kind of like to see us do more in that area. I’d like to see us do more social services work as a church... maybe help other families in need, and do it for Montpelier in general.”  
“I think we can achieve this by having a more visible community presence both locally and globally. That is sponsor missions or a local family through volunteer activities.”  
“I think that everyone in our church needs to be involved outside the church through community activities, places they work, through their kids and just get the Word out throughout the county.” | A social service ministry as a form of outreach seems to be the vision for this interviewee. This entails serving the general population of the town not unlike other social services organizations often strive to accomplish.  
Sponsoring families in need both globally and on a local level is one way to heighten our community presence is the vision of this person.  
Community involvement on all levels is one way to be a disciple, according to this person. |
| Preparing People for Future Challenges | I believe we need to have more [Christian education] plays and programs to bring people into church.”  
“If I had a calling, it would be to introduce small children to Jesus.” | This person believes that the traditional ministries we already have in current programs and productions are ways of being a faithful discipleship community.  
Traditional Sunday school ministry is this person’s vision. |
WORKS CITED

Standard Documentation


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*Electronic Documentation*


