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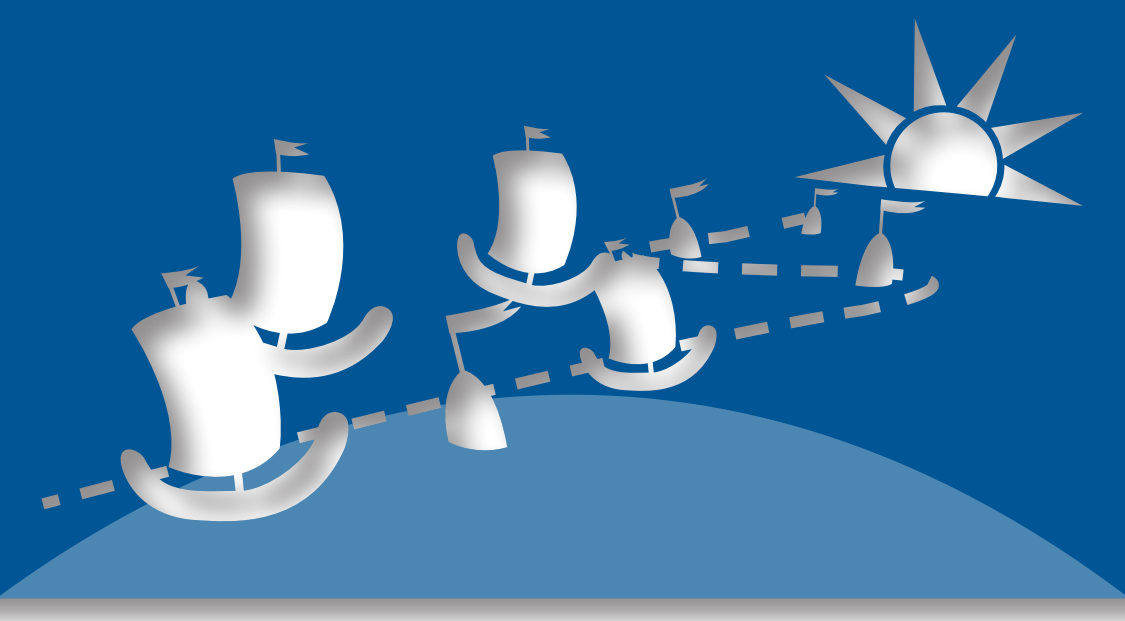
Forming a Missional Church

Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations



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Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations

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GROVE BOOKS LIMITED
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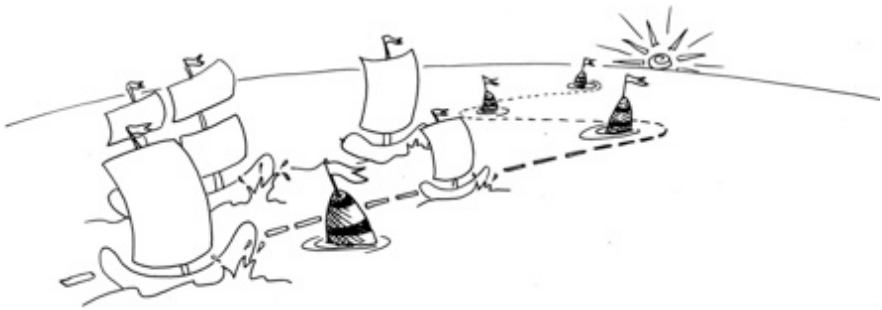
Acknowledgment
We both want to express our heartfelt thanks to Kendra Rosencrans, who with her keen and practical editing skills made this text many times more readable. The cover image and illustration on page 3 are based on a visual concept from Church Innovations.

First Impression September 2014
ISSN 0144-171X
ISBN 978 1 85174 913 3

Preface

Local churches change, grow and decline for many reasons, some of which are grounded in theology. We can also understand change in congregations if we appreciate how all human organizations work and transform over time. Many helpful insights and resources have emerged from business management and human organizational sciences to help us in this respect. This book attempts to combine the best theological insights into congregational change along with organizational theory to address issues of church life, mission, leadership, evangelism and pastoral practice. Pat wrote the bulk of chapters two, four and six and Nigel wrote most of the introduction and conclusion as well as chapters three and five. We hope that this book will spark discussion, curiosity and further inquiry amongst you and with us.



1 Introduction

The guiding metaphor for this excursion into congregational transformation is drawn from the image, on p 3, of a ship at sea, with sails fully engaged and filled with a powerful wind. If you imagine a fresh but bracing wind on your face as you journey forth into somewhat known, but not entirely certain, waters, you have something of the sense we feel as we move into a new era. For around three hundred or so years since the beginning of the Enlightenment we lived in the age of modernity. However, for the last sixty or so years in the Western world that era has been breaking up. While some might resist or lament this lurching social, cultural and institutional uncertainty, we both prefer to envision this as an exciting time for the church, a time when, rather than leaving something behind, the church is launching into a 'new missional era.'[1] God is doing something new, something different, something unexpected, and God's movement amongst us and in the world requires new approaches, which we take up in chapter two. One such approach is the three-year process of congregational change called the *Partnership for Missional Church* (hereafter PMC).[2]

God's movement amongst us and in the world requires new approaches

This book describes a freshness that can bring deep cultural change to congregations so that they may face the opportunities of the new missional era without fear, but with renewed confidence in God and in God's preferred and promised future for the church. However, before we get too far ahead of ourselves, we need to do some further groundwork.

Three aspects of modernity particularly affect our churches today in the West. The first is related to the Enlightenment or 'modern' era (*c*1650–1950), which was organized around a dual sense of life, truth and knowledge that separated facts from values. In this cultural paradigm we have been trained to compartmentalize our faith. God, for many, is a moralistic, therapeutic deity who is far removed from this world, rather than an active, living, moving reality who creates and sustains the universe in every moment. The categorization of faith as private is among the reasons why many Christians do not speak and act *as if* God were living and active in the here and now of our everyday lives. Research by Church Innovations has shown that most Christians, when asked a question like 'What is God up to?' will not answer

with a sentence that begins with God as subject.[3] Chapters three and four look at the missionary nature of God and how clergy can create the emotional and spiritual atmosphere and culture in their congregations such that Christians can begin to speak of God again as a subject and not an object.

The second aspect relates to modernity's division of the public and private realms, which draws sharp distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and value.[4] Again, even the church has itself separated the sacred from the secular, the holy from the profane. When religion is deeply private, churches risk a view that only looks inward and a concept of mission that is based on rescuing unbelievers from a dark world. There is nothing necessarily wrong with such an approach of itself, but at a time when many congregations view themselves privately as a family, what about these newly-rescued believers? Chapter five examines the challenges churches face within themselves. The winds of the Holy Spirit are not just blowing around the church, but through the church as well. With this fresh wind, congregations can learn to be open, rather than closed systems. Chapter five examines the challenges churches face within themselves. The winds of the Holy Spirit are not just blowing around the church but through the church as well. With this fresh wind, congregations can learn to be open, rather than closed systems by their practice of hospitality.

The winds of the Holy Spirit are blowing around and through the church

Finally, modernity seeks technical or mechanistic solutions to the problems posed by human life, characterized, as it is, by decay and death. While technology and progress have made life so much more bearable for many on this planet, millions of others still suffer in desperation. But we now know and can see that living, feeling, learning human organizations and their challenges are not simply machines to be fixed or problems that respond to technical solutions. There are both/and, and now/not yet dimensions to human organizations. Like all living systems, there are life cycles, relationships and surprises that complicate congregations. Modernity teaches us to look at organizations mechanistically, as though problems are like parts that can be fixed or replaced. But people are not parts and often the problems congregations experience are not as simple as fixing or replacing a clergyperson or a council member. These complex, human problems, according to Ron Heifetz, present us with an 'adaptive challenge.'[5]

Adaptive challenges are those challenges or problems or complicated situations for which there is not a ready or known fix. These include changing culture, changing relationships or shifts in social demographics in and around a congregation.

For a congregation to take on its adaptive challenges, therefore, requires experimentation and failure, the ability to be consciously incompetent and to learn from mistakes.[6] Adaptive challenges require change and transformation on the part of those facing them, in contrast to technical problems where there is a known solution and no change is required. Take the example of the welcome a congregation offers. Most local churches see this as a technical problem. So a welcome team is recruited and trained, welcome packs are made available in the pews and perhaps newcomers are asked to introduce themselves at an appropriate point in the worship. All these adjustments may work, but they may also make the situation worse. The adaptive challenge is asking how we change as God's people so that we can become a community that both receives and offers godly hospitality. We will address these questions further in chapter five.

The impetus for us to change is the wind of the Spirit, the fresh unexpected gust or *pneuma*, and the surprising move of the living God. Just as incarnation, death and resurrection are the deepest moments of the Christ event, which creates the church, so we might expect that if we are to change, then God's transformation for us and of us will probably follow the same shape (Phil 2.5–11). Our task is being born into our world, our culture and context, and dying to all that we do not need to be God's church in, but not of, the world—and then living into God's preferred and promised future. Mission, missional life, missional churches…the *missio Dei* is cross-shaped.

And that is exactly what this book is about—how congregations can find within themselves, and in partnership with God and others, the understanding, the energy and the courage to change—in response to, and in living relationship with, our active God, from whom the winds of change are blowing. Just as the crew of a sailboat may have to switch sails and tack sharply to meet an unexpected gust, so congregations might need to adapt and change deeply in their culture, behaviour and action to sail successfully through this storm and onward into God's preferred future.

We are ready, then, to move on to chapter two, where we describe how the adaptive challenge posed to us by our contemporary world requires a purposeful journey of spiritual formation in each congregation.

The Journey of Spiritual Formation 2

Where does the journey into adaptive change begin? As with any journey, the beginning starts with preparation.

We deeply believe that local churches are being called to transform into becoming missional churches. Such a transformation involves deep cultural and spiritual change in their very being. Whereas we have been trained by our modern culture to respond to financial or membership problems by using a strategy or a fix, so much about our world is changing that there are few clear, effective fixes left to us. Instead, therefore, congregations face what we have already referred to as an adaptive challenge (from the sociologist, Ron Heifetz). Adaptive change calls for navigation, not a tool kit.

Adaptive change calls for navigation, not a tool kit

When a congregation recognizes the adaptive challenge ahead, the first and foundational step is to engage in a journey of spiritual formation together. Just as the most courageous of early navigators had to believe, fully, that in the midst of the wind and water to the far horizon they would not sail off the end of the earth, so too congregations in the midst of God's journey are called both to prepare and journey with faith. This is itself complex, for our culture has taught us to privatize our faith. But in essence it is most simple. At the heart of preparing to sail into this adaptive challenge, congregations simply need to attend to their gifts within a spiritual journey formed around one question: 'What is God's preferred and promised future for our local church?'

When a congregation starts with a sense of navigation, rather than a sense of problem-solving, and engages in communal spiritual formation around this one question, they are freed to go on a journey. The trap of modernity is to begin with a vision or mission statement, or a set of pre-drilled holes, and then fit all the pegs or people of the church into those holes. The freedom of a journey allows for adaptation, innovation, creativity and energy to bubble up and infuse the congregation. The unexpected then becomes expected. Here, then, the congregation grows into an understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Trinity, through whom a genuinely new reality emerges, filled with resources, capacities and gifts that innovate and invigorate the congregation.

This includes the gifts of a congregation's business leaders—but an adaptive response guided by the Holy Spirit allows the whole congregation to consider them as one resource, not the whole solution. Strategic and tactical planning processes can, in the right circumstances, be very useful in certain efforts to transform the local church. Congregations, after all, are also of this world, with buildings and staff members and insurance requirements and budgets to tend. For a congregation where there exists high agreement of the vision, mission and the essential question of God's preferred and promised future amongst the community, a management and planning strategy can work well. And yet the sailing metaphor still holds, because rarely do human organizations accomplish their goals by following a straight line.

Our experience and research in local churches and the systems that support them over the last couple of decades has shown that the actual model of change mirrors in most ways a 'diffusion of innovations' model, a model very close to how innovations are most successfully diffused in traditional cultures.[7] Over the last couple of decades we have seen how the research around diffusion of innovations names the various dimensions of the journey of communal spiritual formation. For many in the congregation, even being aware of the questions regarding being a missional church will be new, foreign and perhaps off-putting. It is not unusual for even local church leadership to find the language of missional church faddish and unnecessary. Many local churches are only vaguely aware of their failure to be missional. Awareness of the missional church journey is an essential dimension of getting started on the journey. However, the greater the awareness, the more likely other critical dimensions will be present.

Many local churches are only vaguely aware of their failure to be missional

Often the dimension of understanding follows upon a greater awareness of the journey of spiritual discernment. Understanding follows from awareness and also creates another critical dimension: evaluation. Contrary to many models of change, this model assumes that understanding depends upon evaluation and even a negative evaluation can further the diffusion of innovation. In the journey of spiritual formation the need and capacity of those who discern to evaluate and even find fault with proposed innovations is vital. A 'yes' or a 'no,' or even a 'maybe,' can all further the journey, the formation of a missional church.

The journey in the life of the Trinity means risk, opening locations, spaces and times for experimentation and the ever-present possibility of failure. Such risk-taking characterizes life in the Trinity, a life depending upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The risks are real and, when failure happens, the power of the Christian community to be a reconciling community shows its essential

place in this journey of spiritual formation of missional church. In failure the more we experience hurt, pain, anger, increased anxiety and fear, the more we need to be reconciled with one another in Christ.

We have also learned that surprisingly high percentages of local churches experience significant transformation in such a messy journey. They are able to adopt—a critical dimension of the journey—a shared sense of God's preferred and promised future. They are able to see the relationships God is providing with persons and organizations within the communities that they serve that represent a critical part of the local church's future. They learn to adopt significant change as a shared communal discernment.

3 The Missio Dei

In a research project that I conducted in 2008–9 amongst clergy in Nottinghamshire we discovered that the missiological concept of the *missio Dei* was only just taking hold at the level of theologically trained clergy.[8] A majority of the participants held strongly to other models or paradigms, such as a view that the mission of the church is simply to bring people to individual saving faith in Jesus. More disturbing was the stubborn prevalence of an understanding of mission, particularly as reported by clergy about their congregations, as something that happened overseas that we give money to. Overall the project questioned the receptivity of the *missio Dei* beyond the community of missiologists who have become familiar with it to the point of taking it for granted.

Nevertheless there is a growing understanding, not least because of developments in the fresh expressions movement in the UK following the publication of *Mission-shaped Church* in 2004 that God is mission—'love hitting the cosmic fan,' to quote Anthony Gittins.[9] That is, mission is the overflow of love in the divine Trinity both in creation and redemption. Thus the popular saying has arisen:

> It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of mission who has a church in the world.[10]

Or, to quote the Roman Catholic Church:

> The church is missionary by her very nature.[11]

Following on directly from that idea the church's first task is to 'find out what God is doing and join in.'

Having spent years in academia and in congregations, our interest here is in the implications of the *missio Dei* for the local church.[12] First and foremost, the idea locates God both within and without the congregation. It offers an antidote to what we might call 'ark of salvation' ecclesiology, which sharply distinguishes between church and world and where believers are rescued from the darkness around. It recovers the sense that God is always ahead of us and cannot be domesticated into a group of people, let alone a building. At the same time, God is also available to us in awesome reality in the *here*

and now of the present moment. How can change happen? Not in the past, as that is gone, nor in the future as it is yet to be; only in the present can we discern and decide for or against God and God's mission. The world, then, is rescued from the dualism of modernity and re-enchanted as the place where God may be found in any place or any moment. Christians are once again a kingdom of priests who, in the powerful words of William Countryman, are those 'living on the border of the holy.'[13]

In our current age, the main skill individuals and Christian communities require to lift anchor faithfully and sail into the unknown, adaptive, exciting, challenging journey of the *missio Dei* is discernment. Put simply this involves asking and finding answers to the question, 'What is God up to?'

Such skill is not learnt overnight, since we can never be sure where Christ (or God) is not. The double negative here means that no place or context within or without the church is devoid of the possibility of being inhabited by the living God. Yet, we cannot simply bless every good thing. Discernment is a spiritual practice, or holy habit, which is learnt by trial and error, experiment and failure, reflection and action. It is, in essence, a journey in and of itself.

The *missio Dei* also turns the church inside out as it breaks down the walls or the barriers that are erected between the congregation and the world outside. It helps the church to recover its true apostolicity or 'sent-ness' in line with the commission to the church in Acts 1.8. We are to be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea (where we are now), Samaria (with our near neighbours with whom there is usually no love lost) and to the ends of the earth (beyond our immediate horizons). An analogy might help here. Imagine one of those garden games where a ball is attached to an elastic rope and is hit between two players. The game only works because the ball is held in tension between the centrifugal force that each hit of the ball gives it, and the centripetal force that keeps it attached to the anchor pole set firmly in the ground. Without these two forces in tension the ball would either fly over next door's fence and get lost or fall back in to the centre. Just so with the church—without the centrifugal force sending us out into the world we collapse in on ourselves and the 'game' dies. Without the centripetal balancing our centrifugal apostolicity we lose our connection with the centre—the worship of the triune God of mission.

The missio Dei turns the church inside out

We do not underestimate, however, the enormity of the task for a congregation in the West, inevitably shaped by modernity, to make this paradigm shift in its understanding of its core purpose—creating Christian community with those who are not currently members under the direction of the God of mission. That rather than doing mission by conducting a programme of mission activities

(*Alpha* courses, holiday clubs for children and young people, invitational events etc), none of which are unhelpful *per se,* the church becomes so caught up in the *missio Dei* that its members are naturally 'detectives of divinity.' The church's very being becomes missional so that all it is and does serves the mission of God.

One final point as we conclude this chapter. If God is both within and without the church, this has implications for the way we do theology—in other words, for the way we think and talk about God. We might expect that God will not bless everything that we are and do as church. If change is to occur, theology needs to be undertaken in, to, for, with and against the congregation. And this is why there is, in Partnership for Missional Church, an emphasis in reconnecting the local congregation with the theological academy, after centuries of separation.

4

Spiritual Leadership

Just as the Enlightenment's romance with machines and modernity's love affair with technology have infused our culture with mechanistic approaches to human complexities, they have also shaped contemporary models and norms of leadership.

Those who would lead congregations are caught, then, between modernity's desire to standardize and regularize everything into its simplest isomorphic, bureaucratic structures, and the organic language of our faith, which bears witness to a living, active and transforming God, who works to transform and reconcile us and all creation. How do we navigate the modern dogma, which has led to a profound divide between public and private, especially on matters spiritual, with what we know about the public nature of God?

The challenge for communities of Christ, having been moulded by modern culture, is the huge divide between our Sunday lives and regular weekday lives. This confuses the ministry of the whole people of God, leaving most of them thinking that they are to keep their faith private and hidden in their lives beyond Sunday.

The same divide creates a major identity crisis for the public leaders of the church. By public leaders, we simply mean those who have public responsibility for the care and nurture of the church. Clergy and other key congregational leaders are increasingly expected to be the professionals who are financially supported by the laity to provide the religious services. Modernity sets a trap, because a congregation is at once an organization with a 'professional' leader and, at the same time, it is a living community of faith whose public leaders exercise specific gifts of God for the sake of the whole church's participation in the mission of God. The trap is that the profession of the leader (therapist, community organizer, social worker, spiritual director, CEO etc) can become the primary basis of identity for both the community and the leader, and their essential identity as the public spiritual leader for the sake of the whole church and the mission of God in the world gets confused almost beyond recognition.

We say *almost* beyond recognition because, despite the sad discounting of the spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit, the promise of our Lord to send the Spirit remains true. Spiritual discernment, spiritual leadership and these gifts continue to form local churches and the systems that support them.

Spiritual leadership still emerges over, against and through the distortions and confusion. Learning to attend to these emergent moments of innovation and creativity on behalf of God's mission in the world is a key component of the capacity to be a spiritual leader in the missional church.

Therefore, leadership for the church of Jesus Christ is charismatic, resourced out of the gifts of God to the people of God for the sake of God's mission in the world. By the will of God, to state the obvious, God gives these gifts for leadership in the person of Christ by the power of the Spirit; therefore, leadership for the church is profoundly spiritual. As a parallel insight such charismatic, spiritual leadership thrives in the multidimensional, polyphonic, and diverse emergent reality that is the triune God.

In a relatively simple description, such leadership first means getting out of the way of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life within the mission of God and life in the triune God orients itself in an 'ethos of free self-limitation,' as the German theologian and bishop, Wolfgang Huber, has formulated it.[14] Effective and faithful spiritual leaders enjoy 'a free, creative self-withdrawal.'[15] Among spiritually disciplined leaders, one can see both the joy and personal gratification in opening the expansive space within which innovation and creativity within the Spirit reigns.

However, such joy and personal gratification flow from a personal spiritual journey, sometimes called a rule of life. It flows from a clear sense of what we have come to call one's God-centred self-definition, one's clarity of calling. When congregational leaders engage in a regular set of spiritual practices, they experience freedom and clarity of calling that recognizes and limits the power of the normal anxieties and fears that more often than not dominate our lives, especially in times of high social and personal stress and change. So the ancient biblical wisdom of a spiritual rule of life has profound practical outcomes for leaders when everything around them is in flux. Surely now is a time for congregational leaders in particular to prepare themselves and gird themselves for God's journey into mission with mindful, regular and intentional spiritual practice.

Congregational leaders following a rule of life experience freedom and clarity of calling

When local church leaders follow a set of personal spiritual practices, a rule of life, our research has shown that their capacity to provide a healthy, relatively low anxiety, leadership presence is strengthened. As a leader, the minister of a parish has tremendous influence upon the emotional field of the congregation. A leader's capacity to be a calm, centred, and spiritually anchored presence has been shown to have dramatically positive effects on the process and the

emotional health of the congregation members who are undertaking the chaotic journey of becoming more and more missional.

In practical terms, if the congregational leader engages in personal spiritual practice and therefore is able to set limits to their involvement in the answers to the questions that are part of answering the basic question, 'What is God's preferred and promised future for our local church?' then as the spiritual leader, they can effectively function as a servant of the rough and tumble of the spiritual journey the local church must make.

'Rough and tumble' seems a fairly accurate description from our years of experience; that is, seldom does the answer to the central question come easily or at first seem obvious. Later the members of the local church may ironically note that it is so obvious and ask, 'Why did we not see it?' However, in the journey itself many and different options appear as equally good options. The journey involves, to use the rather technical description of Michael Welker, 'the polyphonic interplay of the members (joints and ligaments) of the body of Christ.'[16] Theologically, each person of the Trinity bequeaths to the church the necessary gifts to accomplish God's mission in the communities they serve. However, God does not provide a one-size-fits-all calling. Rather, God invites the local church to participate in the polyphonic emergence of God's mission in their location, their place in God's world.

God does not provide a one-size-fits-all calling

We cannot help but be influenced by the culture in which we live. So even as modernity struggles against its own change, all the uncertainties in the world, coupled with the certain uncertainties of the spiritual journey, may tempt congregational leaders to drop anchor in the midst of the journey. The trap here is our own desire for control and certainty, especially in choppy waters. Spiritual leaders in this sort of spiritual journey may feel the burden to supply the vision and a strategic plan without going through the entire process. This often means dragging the congregation along kicking and screaming—a frequent recipe for burnout, of the leader, the congregation, or both. But our experiences have shown that the visionary leaders who calmly navigate around this trap tend to serve the local church's spiritual journey well. Time and time again, the basic role of spiritual leader as teacher of Scripture and president at worship becomes the occasion for turning points in the journey of spiritual discernment. The spiritual leaders' formal teaching of Scripture and, even more importantly, the informal, the apparent off-the-cuff attention to word and sacrament, fills the stories of transformation and diffusion of innovation. In these moments, more than in up front formal oversight of the process of discernment, the many powerful turns in the missional voyage are made. Teaching and presiding are critical to spiritual leadership.

5 Hospitality

Church notice boards betray a great deal about what the local congregation believes. Virtually all the ones I have ever seen have some version of the message, 'Everyone Welcome.' I often wonder, though, what would happen if one Sunday 'everyone' suddenly decided to take up the invitation to come. I suspect chaos might ensue. Most churches pride themselves on the welcome they offer to first-time visitors. Some are great at this, knowing the difference between smothering and personal warmth and enabling new people to navigate the quirkiness of participating for the first time. Others think they are great welcomers, but an observer at coffee time after the worship might notice the usual groups gathering together, unconsciously excluding newcomers who are left stranded. As we noted in chapter three, this is the centripetal church, focusing in on itself, inviting others in to join on the terms of the current members. The hospitality, however good it is, is only one way in which the welcome is being offered not received.

One of the core energizers of the missional church movement has been sustained dwelling and reflection in Luke 10.1–12 over many years. Such a close attentiveness to the text in partnership with the God of mission who seems to turn up when we listen for God and to each other has shown us several major truths for the challenge before us.

Jesus sends out missionaries into the abundant harvest that belongs to God. The task Jesus sets the workers is one of discernment. They are to look for what has become known as 'people of peace' (vv 5–6). How will they know who is a person of peace? How will they know which places God is at work in? These are the ones who will offer them hospitality. The first task of the missionaries is to *receive* hospitality from strangers, these others. They are told 'eat what is set before you'—and the message is repeated to give it even greater force (vv 7–8).

Once people of peace are identified through the hospitality they offer, the missionaries eat, heal the sick and announce the kingdom. They do not take it with them; it is already 'at hand' rather than 'in hand.' We can conclude therefore that *the future of the church is dependent upon the hospitality of the world*.

Receiving hospitality, in my experience, is really challenging. Food, as in Luke 10, seems to be the thing that often marks out whether we can truly receive

what the other offers or not—by eating what is set before you. I have lived and worked cross-culturally in India and Africa and I have been unable to eat what was set before me twice. One of those occasions was when I was offered goats' knees curry. Of course when meat is scarce, people learn to make palatable all parts of the animal that has given its life for us. This was just not my experience, having been told always, as a child, not to eat the gristle lest it get stuck in my throat. And yet just last Sunday I was presented with the same dilemma—this time a Nigerian delicacy offered to me at a post-baptismal lunch of what was called 'cows' legs.' I took courage and was able to eat a mouthful, but it was tough in every sense of the word

To receive hospitality, then, is to overcome our prejudice and our assumptions about others and ourselves. It requires us to suspend, or even let go of, what we think is precious in order to receive what the other has to give to us. It is not to stand on our culture, but to allow our culture to be open to different ways of thinking, being and doing.

To receive hospitality is to overcome our prejudice and our assumptions about others and ourselves

And while we begin with food, when receiving hospitality it is only the beginning. I spent seven years living and working in Tanzania. I could not do what I was sent to do without learning the national language, Kiswahili. It took me two years of hard work, sweating over the grammar book in the morning and embarrassingly trying my faltering learning out on my local colleagues in the afternoon. And yet learning the language was the key to my effectiveness in the task I was set over the seven years, because it signalled at some deep level that I cared enough about my adopted country to bother. Some people had long memories back to the colonial period and only began to trust me when I became fluent. Learning the language changed, even transformed, me at some deep level. I was never going to be a Tanzanian, but it was a joy when people would say to me '*Wewe, Bwana, wewe ni Mswahili,*' which, roughly translated, means 'You, you are truly one of us because you speak the language like us.'

Not all of us are called to work in another country and language; nevertheless, the principle is the same when we are sent out from the church to meet with the people of peace God sends to us. They are people of peace because they recognize at some deep level a connection with the God who has sent us and the kingdom, which is 'at hand'—*and* they will be different from us. We may share a common language, but their words, and the way they use them, might be quite different. For example, think of youth cultures that deliberately create their own discrete way of using words. Yet we do not take our agenda, our culture and language to them. We go intentionally, with a desire to receive their agenda, their culture and language and, in doing so, we may both be

changed, transformed. What is the key then to receiving the hospitality of the other? We believe it is learning the skill of *listening the other into free speech*.

Listening, or truly hearing, has to be learned. It does not come naturally to us and when connected to a belief that we somehow have or own the truth (we have the kingdom 'in hand,' not 'at hand'), which needs to be given to others (the opposite of the *missio Dei*), we then find it very hard to listen to those whom God sends to us who want to offer what they bring with them. At the heart of the spiritual practice of *dwelling in the word*, which we outline in the next chapter, is the idea of listening to a reasonably friendly-looking stranger who tells us what they have heard from God in a chosen biblical text. Such an act of listening disrupts and disturbs our normal practice around reading the Bible, again formed in modernity, of wanting to share our *opinion* about this text or find an expert through a commentary or other means who will tell us what it really says. Thus, we learn how to hear truly what another has heard God say. If we can learn to do this within the congregation, we can then learn how to do it outside with those people of peace God sends to us.

Here we find some deep connectivity with other universal human processes for growing community. Both community organizing,[17] which is overtly political, and asset-based community development proceed by training ordinary people in the skills of conducting one-to-one conversations or interviews.[18] The task is to find out all about the 'person of peace' who has identified themselves by offering hospitality in whatever way. The object of the meeting is intentional—clearly focused on what they are concerned about, what their self-interest is (and therefore how that connects with the kingdom's or the church's concerns). They might tell some of their personal story and so share what gives them joy, excitement and even what makes them angry. Their passions, beliefs and values will emerge. The goal of the meeting is to *form a relationship* around a common kingdom agenda. Again listening is at the heart of receiving what they have to offer. If there is enough congruity it will be a simple next step to invite them and others to a further meeting even though this is not why the conversation is being held. Communities grow by growing relationships—and we believe this is because God, the one in three persons, is relational.

The goal is to form a relationship around a common kingdom agenda

Not every person or place offers peace to the missionary. Hospitality can be withdrawn or not even offered in the first place. While it seems harsh when the belief that God is love generally drives the behaviour and actions of local churches today, the response of Jesus' sent ones in Luke 10 is clear. They are simply to move on, while making public the rejection they have received by shaking the dirt from their feet and still announcing the kingdom. There

is no special pleading, hanging around thinking things might change or the development of a persuasive apologetic for their continued presence. There are other people of peace waiting to be received and they need to be met, because God is at work with them and not here.

There is much more to be said about hospitality and, judging by the books published in recent times, it is increasingly recognized as a key to the future of the church.[19] Our emphasis here has been to show how deeply transformational receiving hospitality can be when we are so steeped in wanting to offer it to others on our terms.

6 Forming Missional Community: Six Missional Practices

As we write this book, both of us have come to a mutual understanding and friendship with an eclectic set of wide-ranging and interdisciplinary influences acting upon us both.[20] This illustrates the state of the conversation regarding local church renewal and change. We find no single theory, or even a small number of competing theories, dominant in this vital area of contemporary church life. Our own, developed in the learning community around PMC, took a model of diffusion of innovations developed for two-thirds world food development, combined with research into systems theory, both closed and open systems. In this chapter, we add another area of research to our sources: the neural psychological studies into habit formation.[21] In this chapter, we will summarize some of the earlier chapters and add some more detail to what we name as six missional practices.

The main culture that has shaped our scientific, business and social culture and progress for the past three centuries is changing. For some, the disruptions are as dramatic as a ship breaking apart on the rocks. For others, the changes have prompted retreat into the comfort of tradition, even as the purposes of those traditions are dissipating in the changing culture. It is a tremendous challenge for congregations to set aside the teachings and instincts of modernity, which prompt us to investigate symptoms and solve problems with mechanical or technical approaches. As we take on the need for a vital, missional church in this new era, we have used the metaphor of sailing, for both the image of a ship and its purpose to journey forth into waters unknown seems to fit well.

It is a tremendous challenge for congregations to set aside the teachings and instincts of modernity

At the same time, we use the image of a ship at sea to illustrate that the journey into the *missio Dei* is more akin to being on the ocean than driving down the dual carriageway or highway. We confess our faith in an untamed God, and therefore this journey is subject to unpredictable and critical forces that either propel or confound it. As any sailing crew might prepare for a journey with a sound ship, supplies, able leaders and navigators, it is just as important for them to develop and practise the skills needed to adapt and meet the challenges of wind and wave. You do not want to take to deep waters and then learn the difference between tacking and jibing, starboard and port, or how

to come about when the wind changes sharply. Even on a clear day, or when simply cruising around the bay, those who sail recognize deeply that they are on a journey into waters and wind that they do not—and will never—control. For the congregation sailing forth into the question of the *missio Dei*, there are six core missional practices that are essential.

These missional practices, or habits, are keystone habits: that is, a small list of habits that if put into place transform the entire local church system toward participation in God's mission in the world. They are:

- dwelling in the word;
- dwelling in the world;
- hospitality;
- corporate spiritual discernment;
- announcing the kingdom;
- focus for missional action.

Each of these keystone habits is also both faithful and disruptive. They are faithful because they have been practised for centuries in the church, especially when the church has focused its attention on joining God's mission for the sake of the world within the world and formed Christian community around that missional focus. But they are also disruptive in the sense that our wild, untamed God blows us out of our comfort zones and our assumptions with new and unexpected energy, callings, gifts, people and transformation.

Dwelling in the word is the central keystone habit, the one from which the others flow.[22] The practice is simple enough. At the beginning of a gathering someone is asked or volunteers to pray, asking the Holy Spirit's leadership and guidance in the group's dwelling in God's word. Then a preselected text is read aloud and the group is invited into a few minutes of silence. At the end of that silence, each of the members of the group are asked to find a fellow group member unknown to them and listen that person into free speech. We have used these two questions to prompt conversation: (1) Where was your imagination captured by the Scripture? (2) What question might you like to ask a biblical scholar regarding the reading? The pairs then listen one another into free speech and report back to the larger group what they heard, not what they said, from their partner. This dwelling becomes a habit because the group will begin every meeting in this same text, and at any time during the gathering anyone is free to call for this Scripture to be read and reflected on.

Our longitudinal studies show that when local church leaders practise this keystone habit at all their meetings and diffuse this innovation into every gathering or group, they often see changes within the entire framework and narrative of their church life. With its roots in the ancient practice of *Lectio*

Divina, this practice of calling upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit in prayer and entering a time of listening while a text of Scripture is read aloud hardly seems an innovation. Nonetheless, dwelling in the same text for a year and diffusing the practice to all the nooks and crannies of the local church's life disrupts many practices that no longer effectively enliven congregational life.

Dwelling in the world works similarly. Like dwelling in the word, it is simple. The basic practice of listening a reasonably friendly looking stranger into free speech is extended to everyday settings where the Christian is well embedded. It is amazing when this simple practice of listening another into free speech plays out in a conscious effort to hear another. Conversations that might otherwise simply be ways of passing time become caught up in the larger spiritual journey. The Christian is asked to anticipate the scriptural text as a clue for listening for what God is up to in the other person's life. This anticipation follows from being caught up into the life of the Trinity as one dwells in the word and the world.

As the previous chapter developed at greater length, the keystone habit of *hospitality* organically flows from these first two missional practices. As the Christian dwells in God's word and God's world and listens others into free speech, the dynamic of giving and receiving hospitality follows. Indeed, it becomes a mutual dependence and interdependence of hospitality—each person taking turns hosting and being guest.

As the conversation grows over time and comes to include others in many cases, the Christian community begins to discern what God's preferred and promised future for them might be. It is in this dwelling in word and the world, cultivated within the practices of hospitality, that the answers to the basic question of the journey begin to take shape. While there are many models of *corporate spiritual discernment,* and the traditions and habits of the local church must be respected, the PMC journey offers a particular model for public conversation around the central questions: 'What is God's preferred and promised future for our local church?' 'Who is God calling us to join in accomplishing that preferred future in our community?'

Out of the gathered discernment of conversations drawn from the keystone practices of dwelling in the word, dwelling in the world and practising hospitality, the ways the reign of God is impacting the local church and the various communities within which it is nested become clearer. In these interactions and reflections it becomes clear that someone needs to announce the reign of God in these locations. This can be as simple as someone noting that what is happening *actually is* the reign of God impinging and emerging within this setting. It might also involve a more public and clarified announcement that God is at work. Such is the spiritual practice of *announcing the kingdom.*

Local churches that practise these keystone habits, these faithful but disruptive missional practices, more often than not come up with a long list of good things they might join God and their neighbours in doing. If the local church were to stop its discernment at this point, it is most likely that they would dissipate all their energy into nothing. Every ministry setting has more good things to do and more good things to love than any local church can rightly or well take on. Without the practice of discerning a *focus for missional action,* the sixth missional practice, the others lead to a kind of disorderly love and dissipation of energy and life into nothingness. St Augustine refers to this pattern of behaviour as sin and it is a very common practice in most local churches. It is always easier to ask, 'Is this a good thing to do? Or, is this a good thing to love?' than it is to ask, 'Is this what God is calling us to focus on in forming Christian community in our setting?' The spiritual practice of discerning and disciplining a local church to focus their missional work becomes critical and is reflected in all the other missional practices.

The journey of one local parish illustrates all of these practices slowly but surely developing into a shared sense of calling with a particular group of people within their local (estate) community whom they identified and worked with to form a missional church. This group of persons had mostly been seen as a burden to the community, if seen at all. The local parish joined the PMC journey in a mode of desperation. They felt it was likely their last chance for survival. In this vein, some even said, 'What do we have to lose?'

As usual, many complained about dwelling in the same scriptural passage, Luke 10.1–12, over the first year but, mostly out of compliance, they did so. Some (two persons) began to actually dwell in the world in their conversations at the bus stop. They noted how many of their fellow bus riders were single mothers with very young children. They followed up with their demographic study to find that indeed a high concentration of such households existed in the community. In their conversations at the bus stop, these two dwellers in the world noticed persons of peace, persons who were welcoming to them. They accepted their hospitality by having tea with a couple of the young mothers. Listening them into free speech, these two dwellers in the world experienced a clear sense that God was calling the parish to join these young mothers in some practical ways of forming trust for building community. The parish began focusing on this group for their missional action.

This led by way of corporate spiritual discernment practices to a modest proposal of providing childcare for young children once a week from 6pm to 10pm on Saturday. Together with a handful of teenage young adults, three older single women and one older couple, the original dwellers in the world formed teams for providing the 'parents' break' service. Each team served at most once a month. The first year was celebrated with a gathering in June at

the church hall, where over 180 persons attended who had been served by the parents' break.

Through careful listening, including some focus groups of parents, further spiritual discernment took place, and a careful plan was focused on the parents who were becoming more than persons of peace; indeed, they wanted to participate and even lead in the developing community. Out of this group, it was decided to have during the coming year a short 30-minute worship time focusing on the children from 5.30pm to 6pm. Four mothers and the original dwellers in the world organized this service. By the second month, there were 23 children and their parents attending the Saturday evening worship. In short, a new congregation was developing. This experience helped focus the sense of calling, the local parish's sense of God's preferred and promised future. Soon the teams for each parents' break became small groups that became vital for the life of their members and for the growing edge of the missional church.

This one rather simple story illustrates the six habits in relationship to the spiritual journey. What becomes relatively clear to spiritual leaders in local churches and those who care and support them from outside that congregation is that these six missional practices interplay with one another in a polyphonic way. They allow both for the chaotic and uncontrolled exploring of relationships in which God is active while waiting upon the hard work of spiritual discernment that leads to missional focus.

These six missional practices interplay with one another in a polyphonic way

Of course, anyone who has walked with local churches through such a process also knows the pain and suffering that result when, inevitably, the spiritual journey has experiences of failure. Judgments are made that at the time seem quite right but prove not to flourish. People get hurt in so many ways, and conflict, more often than not, is a part of the journey. In these moments the church must be what it proclaims: a community of reconciliation. If the church is to give itself for the life of the world, it will fail and need to seek reconciliation, not only in the world, but also in the very life of the local church. In this profound sense, the need to embody the ministry of reconciliation becomes the heart and soul of the missional church.

7 Conclusion

I have worked for over ten years in the provision of diocesan training and development at a local, regional and sometimes national level. Most of the resource and effort we have put in has focused on individuals. Clergy and lay leaders have been equipped, either for taking up ministry roles or to reflect upon their leadership and ministry and then return to their context. While engaging individual leaders has produced positive fruit in a number of ways and continues to do so, it is fair to say that this approach has not delivered large-scale culture change in congregations towards an outward-looking missional orientation. But the challenges and changes of postmodernism still exist. So how can a Christian community, a congregation, be directly engaged in ways that transform its own culture—and, at the same time, make it a significant player in its own community and context? And what will this new incarnation look like?

There are several initiatives that offer potential for change and growth in the church such as Leading your Church into Growth, Mission Action Planning, Natural Church Development and others. All these initiatives are proving themselves useful and helpful as we address the challenges of twenty-first-century church. However, what we have sought to demonstrate in this book is that there is a deeper and wider task for the church that does not happen on a short course or even over a period of six months. Cultural change in organizations takes years of hard work. It may result in growth in the long term and studies show that after five years there is growth at all sorts of levels in congregations who stay with the practices. However, there may also be periods of profound loss and disorientation on the journey of the sailboat trying to catch the wind of the Spirit.

The challenge is so radical that we need to address fundamental assumptions, habits and practices developed over centuries. This is a tough ask; it offers us a fair amount of 'rough and tumble,' as Pat has so suggestively put it. To create deep cultural change in congregations towards mission requires courage and perhaps, if it is not too inappropriate a word, some bloody-mindedness. Despite being called to take up our cross, the symbol of certain death, in order to follow Jesus faithfully, most of us would rather do anything else.

How, then, can we find that courage? Knowing that the journey has been forged and researched in hundreds of congregations like ours helps. Joining

with partners that can offer theological and practical accompaniment such as the PMC academy can strengthen our resolve. Finally, though, only a desire to discover and meet the living God, the God of mission, can sustain us on the journey into our preferred and promised future.

Notes

1 See Pat Keifert's textbook describing the Partnership for Missional Church process: *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (St Paul, MN: Church Innovations, 2006) p 26.

2 The PMC process is currently running with congregations in Southwell and Nottingham and Leicester dioceses alongside the academy in the form of St John's College, Nottingham. To find out more about PMC go to http://www.churchinnovations.org/01_services/pmc.html or contact Nigel Rooms directly at nigel.rooms@southwell.anglican.org

3 See www.churchinnovations.org

4 For a full description of how this splitting occurred see Lesslie Newbigin's *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1995).

5 See Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002) p 13ff.

6 Somehow those engaged in fresh expressions seem to be much more amenable to this movement, which entails experimentation and failure, often over and over again, until something quite new emerges which fits with the particularity of the context to which the fresh expression is sent.

7 Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

8 It was published as part of a much wider study in Anne Richards, John Clark *et al*, *Foundations for Mission: A Study of Language, Theology and Praxis from the UK and Ireland Perspective* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2010).

9 Quoted in Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011) p 10.

10 Tim Dearborn, *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, A Heart for Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1988).

11 Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity).

12 If you are interested in learning more about *missio Dei*, you might consider reading some of the resources that have informed us, such as David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991). A fuller description is found in Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) and a popular reading of it in relation to the mission of Jesus is found in David Heywood's *Re-imagining Ministry* (London: SCM, 2011). Bevans and Schroeder deal with the criticism that *missio Dei* can be made to legitimate any kind of good in the world, while retaining the trinitarian basis for it in their own paradigm, which they call prophetic dialogue (see also their *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011). From a Protestant perspective, John Flett offers a thoroughly Barthian reconstruction of the *missio Dei* in his critical book, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei,*

Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

13 L William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood* of all (New York: Morehouse, 1999).

14 Wolfgang Huber, *Konflikt und Konses*, *Studien zur Ethik der Verantwortung* (Muenchen: Kaiser, 1990) pp 205ff.

15 *cf* Wolfgang Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht. Grundlinien Christlicher Rechtsethik* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher, 2006), pp 316ff.

16 Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013) p 238; *cf* Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Augsburg, MN: Fortress, 1994) for a fuller analysis of this very biblical understanding of both the body of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as 'polyphonic interplay.'

17 See www.citizensuk.org

18 See www.abcdinstitute.org

19 *eg* Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbours* (Maryknoll, MI: Orbis, 2008); George Newlands and Allen Smith, *Hospitable God: The Transformative Dream* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

20 We both owe great debts to multiple sources within multiple disciplines. We are deeply committed to the role of Scripture in the formation of missional community. We both believe that tradition can and will be a great source for missional innovation. Nigel worked for a number of years within a Tanzanian Anglican setting, where the work of major missiologists (especially from the Roman Catholic Church) and spiritual practices developed over decades in a non-Western culture formed and shaped his ministry. Since that time his interdisciplinary doctoral research work and writing has been in missiology and adult theological education, focusing particularly on aspects of faith formation and culture. Pat has spent thirty years as a teacher of systematic theology at a large American Lutheran seminary and an institute dedicated to research into local churches and the systems that support them, drawing on phenomenological and social scientific models of research. Within these theological, philosophical and experiential parameters we met each other at an international missiological conference looking at the future of mission in the contemporary West. This collaboration in writing is a result of that first meeting.

21 For further reading on how habit formation is fundamental to understanding personal, organizational and even societal change see Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do and How to Change* (London: Random House, 2012). Duhigg shows how habits form around a psychological loop of 'cue, routine, reward' and how shifting 'keystone' habits can and do make major changes to the whole system.

22 For more information and a small accompanying handbook to the practice see http://www.churchinnovations.org/06_about/dwelling.html

Change is a certainty in the life of any church, although it may be slow in coming to pass. This study argues that far from being resisted, change must be embraced if congregations are to become missional communities that can engage with an increasingly secular society. Combining theological insights with organizational theory, it explores how congregations can find within themselves, and in partnership with God and others, the understanding, the energy and the courage to change.

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ISSN 0144-171X

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Registered Charity No. 327014

Printed by Hassall & Lucking Ltd. Tel: 0115 973 3292

ISBN 978-1-85174-913-3

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