Liberty University: School of Divinity

Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project

Missional Metamorphosis: how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple making

within a post-Christian context.

A Thesis Project Submitted to

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Doctor of Ministry

By

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT

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Liberty University: School of Divinity, 2019

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The American Church's current disciple-making paradigm is struggling to engage post-Christian contexts with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Despite American society's steady trending away from a biblical worldview, dwindling church attendance, and declining religious affiliation, the American Church is still operating under a disciple-making paradigm conducive for the Christendom era. What changes must occur to help churches break away from an antiquated paradigm and embrace a more contextually appropriate expression? This project helps to answer that question by capturing and expressing how changes in ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are altering disciple-making paradigms within post-Christian contexts. Utilizing quantitative data derived from local churches within the Florida Baptist Association and qualitative data from leading practitioners within the field of the missional church movement, this project offers a way forward and suggests the changes necessary for transitioning toward a new disciple-making paradigm within post-Christian contexts.

Word Count: 145.

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Abbreviations

FBA *Florida Baptist Association*

MP *Missional Practitioner*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The problem this project will address is the American Church's inability to break away from the Christendom paradigm despite its situation within post-Christian contexts. While the American Church has witnessed the popularization of numerous organizational models over the years, they have been nothing more than variations of the Christendom paradigm, a repackaging of an antiquated mode of Church expression.[1] In describing the Church's attempt at contextualizing itself for a post-Christian context Alan Hirsch writes,

> Many of the new Protestant church movements of recent years are simply variations on the old Christendom mode. Whether they place their emphasis on new worship styles, expressions of the Holy Spirit's power, evangelism to seekers, or Bible teaching, these so-called new movements still operate out of the fallacious assumption that the church belongs firmly in the town square, that is, at the heart of Western culture.[2]

Because the American Church has struggled to break free from its historical Christendom mode, its approach to making disciples is not suited to effectively engage a post-Christian context. This can be most clearly seen given American culture's declining Church attendance. On its current trajectory, overall Church attendance in America is projected to decline to 14.7 percent of the total population by 2020.[3] This decline is expected to impact all churches,

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[1] Examples include the church growth movement, attractional/seeker-sensitive/hybrid models, emergent church movement, etc.

[2] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come: Innovation And Mission For The 21st-Century Church*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2013), 17.

[3] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 175. In 2005, 17.5 percent of the total American population regularly attended a religious gathering.

regardless of denomination or theological persuasion.[4] As overall Church attendance steadily falls behind population growth, an emerging group of individuals labeled the "nones" are steadily on the rise. The "nones" are those who claim no religious affiliation and now, they are not only the largest "religious" group in America (roughly 23 percent of the population or nearly one out of every four individuals); they are also the fastest-growing.[5]

Furthermore, as local churches and faith-based organizations have evaluated their processes for making disciples, their findings have only served to amplify the need to break away from the Christendom mode. For example, in 2007 Willow Creek Community Church released a brutally honest and highly transparent study entitled *Reveal*. In the study, Bill Hybels, the founding pastor, explained that the mega church's approach to making disciples, an attractional-extractional model, did not produce the spiritually maturing congregants they had anticipated.[6] Moreover, more than ten years have passed since the release of the study and American churches are still struggling with the same issues. A 2015 study entitled *The State of Discipleship*, produced in partnership between the Barna Group and the Navigators, revealed that a majority of church leaders (60%) believed that existing churches were "not [doing] too well" at discipling

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[4] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches*, 175-180.

[5] James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2017), 21.

[6] Greg L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, Eric Arnson, and Bill Hybels, *Reveal: Where Are You?*, (Barrington, Ill: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 12-13.

others.[7] As was blatantly stated in the study's executive summary, "Churches are in need of new models for discipleship."[8]

What is more pressing than the development of a "new model" for discipleship is the actualization of a new paradigm for both making and being disciples within twenty-first century, post-Christian contexts. Thus, the purpose of this project is to describe how the American Church's disciple making paradigm must change to engage post-Christian contexts with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

<div align="center">Terminology</div>

In order to promote a greater mutual understanding between this project and its readers, the following section will be devoted to providing key definitions and supplementary information used throughout the project. The following terms are listed alphabetically and not in order of significance.

Christendom*:* Christendom describes the period of time during which the Church became the recipient of the Roman Empire's imperial favor. This era, which began in roughly 313 A.D., witnessed dramatic alterations in how the Church organized itself and went about making disciples. Some of these alterations, to name a few, included the erecting of official church buildings, institutionalization of hierarchical leadership, and socio-cultural prominence. Christendom, a historical-cultural expression of Church, still influences how many, if not the majority of, American churches think and function in ministry today.

Contextualization*:* Tim Keller defines contextualization as, "translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the

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[7] Barna Research Group, and Navigators, *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators*, (IL: NavPress, 2016), 35.

[8] Ibid., 12.

essence and particulars of the gospel itself."[9] Contextualization takes into account the history, cultural narratives, and life rhythms of a local context and thinks strategically about how ministry will look in light of those aspects. Thus, contextualization ought not to change the essence of the gospel but it may and should influence its expression.

Culture: Culture is the conglomeration of several socio-cultural elements. When combined, these elements make up a context that is constantly shaping and being shaped by those that inhabit it. In describing what culture is, J.R. Woodward states, "The *language* we live in, the *artifacts* that we make use of, the *rituals* we engage in, our approach to *ethics*, the *institutions* we are a part of and the *narratives* we inhabit have the power to shape our lives profoundly."[10] Thus, culture is the context that encompasses all of life.

Disciple: In its most simplistic usage, a disciple is a learner. In the first century Jewish context, a student of the Torah could approach a rabbi requesting to become his disciple. Upon acceptance, the disciple would then apprentice himself to that rabbi and begin assimilating and imitating not only his interpretation of the Scriptures but also the rabbi's character and way of life. It was a completely immersive experience in which the disciple learned to be just like the rabbi. More specifically, concerning disciples of Jesus Christ, Dallas Willard comments,

> Nevertheless, the basic nature of the rabbi/disciple relationship of his day was retained by Jesus and his disciples and, arguably, remains normative to this day. That relationship is very simple in description. His disciples were *with him, learning to be like him*. "With him" meant in that day that they were literally where he was and were progressively engaged in doing what he was doing.[11]

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[9] Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 89.

[10] J. R., Woodward and Alan Hirsch, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 20.

[11] Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology, 2010, accessed December 13, 2017, http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=134.

Discipleship*:* This word is challenging to define for three primary reasons. First, discipleship is an extra-biblical term, which is to say, the actual word is never used in the Bible. Second, though there are similarities among various definitions, there arises no consensus among scholars on how the word is to be understood. Third, other words and phrases, though not synonyms, are often used interchangeably with discipleship.[12] In light of these challenges, this paper will define discipleship as the costly journey of learning to obey the words, works, and way of Jesus in increasing measure. Mike Breen writes,

> Since we are his disciples, our default posture should be to seek to emulate his way of doing things . . . It's not just about hearing the words of Jesus and doing the works of Jesus – it's about operating in the way of Jesus. Since Jesus reveals to us what God is really like, his word is authoritative for us, his works are definitive, and his way is normative.[13]

Identity*:* In broader terms than one's personal identity, this project understands identity through an organizational lens. Organizational identity has been defined as, "a set of statements that organization members perceive to be central, distinctive, and enduring to their organization."[14] The Church has many theological, historical, cultural, and practical statements that are deemed central, distinctive, and enduring to their identity. As such, identity is primarily concerned about answering the vital question of "Who are we?" as it relates to the nature of the Church.

Missional*:* Missional, much like discipleship, is a difficult word to define. In many ways, this word has become a Christian colloquialism, often preceding any number of ministry-related

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[12] Spiritual formation, spiritual growth, and maturation are often used interchangeably with the word discipleship.

[13] Mike Breen and Sally Breen, *Family on Mission: Integrating Discipleship into the Fabric of Our Everyday Lives*, (3DM Publishing: 2014), 29-30.

[14] Dennis Gioia, Shubha Patverdhan, Aimee Hamilton, Kevin Corley, "Organizational Identity Formation and Change," The Academy of Management Annals 7, no. 1 (June 2013): 123-192. Accessed September 4, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2013.762225.

words in an attempt to communicate relevancy. However, this word is much richer in meaning

and profoundly reorienting. Missional, in a broad sense, is a paradigm or mindset and as such,

contains basic assumptions about the nature of the Church. At its core, the missional paradigm

believes that the *missio Dei*, or the mission of God, both informs and organizes the Church.

Thus, the Church's collective identity is missionary in nature and functions in a sent fashion in

relation to the world. In further explaining what missional means, Alan Hirsch writes,

> Many churches have mission statements or talk about the importance of mission,
> but where truly missional churches differ is in their posture toward the world. A
> missional community sees the mission as both its originating impulse and its
> organizing principle. A missional community is patterned after what God has
> done in Jesus Christ. In the incarnation God sent his Son. Similarly, to be
> missional means to be sent into the world; we do not expect people to come to
> us.[15]

Paradigm*:* Broadly defined, Merriam-Webster states that a paradigm is "a philosophical

or theoretical framework of any kind."[16] As a framework for processing and thinking, a paradigm

contains assumptions, tenets, theories, and various laws that support itself. It is important to note

that everyone operates within an existing paradigm, whether cognizant of it or not. It becomes

critical, then, to evaluate *how* one thinks about the Church and ministry while being vulnerable

enough to dismantle personal paradigms in service to the gospel.

Post-Christian*:* Post-Christian denotes society's consistent trending away from the basic

assumptions of Christianity. Unlike the past, in which Western society generally prescribed to a

Christian worldview and ethic, today's fastest-growing religious affiliation is the group known as

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[15] Alan Hirsch, "Defining Missional," Christianity Today, Fall 2008, accessed Dec. 13, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2008/fall/17.20.html.

[16] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed Dec. 13, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradigm.

the "nones."[17] The "nones" reject any sort of identification with specific religions or denominations. Commenting on America's post-Christian context, James Emery White states, "And the rise of the 'nones' and the fall of Christians is widespread, crossing race, gender, educational, and geographic barriers. Forget the Bible Belt or the Catholic North. This is happening everywhere and across every demographic."[18]

Praxis: Having defined identity and presence, the Church is now postured to allow its sense of "being" to inform its method of "doing." Interestingly, this progression is often how the apostle Paul structured his epistles. This sequence, often labeled "the indicative to imperative," reinforces the idea that identity reorients activity. Hirsch and Frost write, "Having undergone union with Christ in regeneration, we are then called to live out our basic identity shifts that took place in that event."[19] Thus praxis will be understood as the action and application of the disciple-making paradigm and will be primarily concerned about answering the question of, "How do we get to live in light of the gospel?"

Presence: Presence refers to a church's mode of cultural engagement. How local churches express cultural engagement varies drastically. Some churches go as far as labeling their favored mode of cultural engagement (traditional, attractional, missional, seeker-sensitive, organic, etc.). Regardless, every church is situated within a unique context and develops practices and perspectives about their culture. This term will be used to answer the question of, "How should we relate to our local context?"

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[17] James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z,* 21.

[18] Ibid., 23.

[19] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come*, 147-8.

Statement of Limitations and Delimitations

The following section is devoted to furthering the reader's understanding of the nature of this project. It will accomplish this by narrowing the scope of the project's intent by explaining the limitations and delimitations of its research and application.

A limitation of this project exists in the collection of survey data. While the Florida Baptist Association is made up of local churches from several counties, the means to contact and inform each of these churches in different counties is not available due to the lack of a complete membership database. Therefore, obtaining data from outside of Leon County will not be feasible.

One of the first delimitations of this project is related to the target population of the survey. The survey will only be administered to members and attenders of churches affiliated with the Florida Baptist Association (FBA). The rationale behind this was twofold; one being a pragmatic reason while the other being more theological. First, this author's local church is affiliated with the FBA and has a good working relationship with the Executive Director of the organization. By leveraging that relationship, the potential for data is large enough to generate a sufficient sampling of the Baptist population in North Florida. Second, the FBA represents the ministry context in which this author currently operates. While the survey could certainly be administered to those outside of the Baptist denomination, gathering denominationally-specific data will generate greater specificity as to the changes necessary to begin transitioning towards a more missional expression of discipleship.

The second delimitation is related to the first in that a constraint was imposed on the selection of interviewees. Only persons considered to be leading practitioners within the missional movement were interviewed. Although other alternative interviewees exists, this

project required the insight and experience of those individuals who have made intentional changes concerning identity, presence, and praxis in their respective areas of ministry. With this being noted, interview questions were phrased in an open-ended fashion in an attempt to minimize the biases of the participants and presented in a way as to not lead them to a specific response.

Furthermore, a third delimitation exists within this project's thesis statement prior to conducting research. This project posits that a missional metamorphosis will require foundational changes in ecclesial identity, presence, and praxis. Due to this, the majority, if not all, of the survey and interview questions will be focused on these three areas. However, if, while analyzing the research, the interview and survey data reveal alternative changes that are paradigmatic in nature, they will be critically evaluated as well.

In addition, this project does not intend to develop a comprehensive discipleship plan or program for the local church. Instead, it will attempt to capture and express how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple making to more effectively engage post-Christian contexts. The rationale behind this is to present the findings in a more adaptable and general manner so that churches, ministries, and organizations can develop their own framework for application and implementation.

Statement of Methodology

The first portion of this project will begin by synthesizing current "missional" thought by reviewing and critiquing theological and applied academic research. Building upon that research, the theoretical and theological rationale for the project will be presented while highlighting the characteristic differences between a missional and Christendom paradigm of discipleship.

Next, research will be collected in two primary ways. First, a survey will be utilized and given to congregants from local churches in the Tallahassee, Florida area affiliated with the FBA. Then, participating churches in the FBA will be asked to take the survey. The surveys will be anonymous and will ask specific questions about identity, presence, and praxis (See Appendix A). Next, data will be collected through interpersonal interviews. The interviewees will be with those who oversee the primary discipleship responsibilities within their local church, para-church ministry, or organization. All of the interviewees will be practitioners of a missional expression of disciple making or will have been instrumental in helping local churches transition into a more missional expression of disciple making. They will be provided with a sample of questions before the interview (See Appendix B). The author will conduct 5 interpersonal interviews, all of which will be audio recorded.

The surveys and interviews will intend to understand and explore how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple-making paradigms in post-Christian contexts. Or stated another way, the interviews will seek to determine how a church's self-understanding, mode of cultural engagement, and corporate practices are reshaping their disciple-making paradigm. Once the surveys and interviews have been completed, the data will be gathered, analyzed, and crafted into a framework for change. This framework will capture and express how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping discipleship so that local churches can transition into a new paradigm of disciple making within a post-Christian context. A summary of the contents of each chapter will be presented below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will serve to explain the originating impulse of this project and give the reader a broad overview of the intentions and contents of the entire project. It will explain the

critical need for such a project, provide the reader with a list of project-specific terms, and offer a simplified version of how the research will be gathered, analyzed, and used for the latter portions of the project.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

This chapter will contain a review of the current and pertinent literature surrounding this thesis project's topic. It will serve to further amplify the differences between a Christendom and missional disciple-making paradigm while giving the reader a broad understanding of the challenges that a post-Christian culture presents for the American Church. From here, this chapter will move specifically into reviewing literature about the topics of identity, presence, and praxis. This portion of the literature review will help the reader understand how each of these aspects is being leveraged to influence discipleship within churches, institutions, and organizations. In addition to the review of literature, this chapter will provide the reader with both a theological and theoretical basis for the project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three will detail the author's research, discussing its subjects, their ministry contexts, and the rationale behind the survey and interview questions. It will outline the design intervention and give an accurate recounting of the implementation of the research phase. Next, it will present the collected data through the analytical lenses of themes, silences, and slippages.[20]

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will analyze the results of the previous chapter and begin to formulate a framework of transition for churches seeking to undergo a missional metamorphosis. Survey

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[20] These analytical frames will be discussed further in chapter three of this project.

responses will be paired against relevant interview responses in an attempt to find meaningful correlation and connection while pertinent survey data will be discussed to highlight the necessity for change in a post-Christian context. In addition, conclusions will be drawn as to what the data revealed about ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final section of this thesis project will be the conclusion. It will summarize the findings and serve as a call to action for American churches to critically evaluate their ministry paradigm for a post-Christian context. A framework for change will be presented to local churches wishing to make strategic changes in their disciple making paradigms. Lastly, recommendations will be made for further research in the areas of disciple making within post-Christian contexts and specifically areas pertaining to ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This thesis project will help to serve local churches in continuing to remain obedient to and productive in fulfilling the Great Commission.[21] As American society becomes increasingly post-Christian, churches will be forced to critically evaluate their methods and practices for making disciples who, in turn, make other disciples. Thankfully, other religious and sociological researchers have begun to note American society's steady trending away from a biblical worldview, declining church attendance, and diminishing religious affiliation. These truths should not become a source of anxiety or dread regarding the future of American churches. Rather, they should be understood as an opportunity to make necessary and strategic changes in how American churches go about being and making disciples within their evolving contexts.

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[21] The Great Commission can be found in Matthew 28:18-20.

The following chapter will review current and pertinent literature to give the reader a greater understanding of the predicament American churches are facing and how ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are offering alternatives to the customary Christendom paradigm.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Review of Literature

The following section will be devoted to summarizing pertinent resources relevant to this project. The resources will be arranged topically, beginning with the broader topic of Christendom and cultural change and transitioning into more specific topics of identity, presence, and praxis. As the reader will notice, while there exists a proliferation of source material about an overall "missional" paradigm, little exists in relationship to the idea of activating new forms of disciple making, much less on how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple making within a post-Christian context.

Christendom and Cultural Change

Transforming Mission[22] by David Bosch explores the historical relationship between the Church and mission and has become a quintessential resource for the study of contemporary missiology. Beginning with the Incarnation of Christ, Bosch details the complex relationship between Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology and, in so doing, notes the theological paradigm shifts that have occurred throughout the various epochs of Church history. Where this resource becomes invaluable to this project is in its discussion about how the Church is to thrive within the emerging post-Christendom paradigm. As Bosch and others have suggested, the American Church must embrace its missionary responsibility and allow the theology of mission to profoundly reorient both the understanding and application of being the Church.

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[22] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Publishers, 2011).

The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity[23] by Douglas John Hall reframes the "end of Christendom" in a positive light rather than as a catastrophe plaguing the Church in the American West. For Christianity to have a significant future in America, Hall suggests that the Church undergo an intentional and strategic "disestablishment." Hall describes this disestablishment as a process of distinguishing the Church from the assumptions of its "host society." By doing this, the Church will gradually regain a prophetic voice in the culture but this time, its voice will be speaking from the margins of society rather than from the forefront. This resource will be valuable to the latter half of this project as it makes projections about what the future of the Church may look like in a post-Christian context. More specifically, it identifies practices that will help the Church foster an incarnational presence within its local community.

The Shaping of Things to Come[24] by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost is a prophetic call to rethink being the Church in the twenty-first century. It strongly advocates for a putting off of the archaic institutional structures of the Christendom paradigm and a putting on of a more culturally appropriate expression, namely a missional expression. This book will be utilized in two predominant ways throughout this project. First, this book will serve as a research companion while imagining what a new discipleship paradigm will look like for the future of the Church in America. Second, this resource will be utilized to help communicate many of the unconventional practices for the success of discipleship in a post-Christian context.

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[23] Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997).

[24] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come.*

Meet Generation Z[25] by James Emery White builds on his previous book, *The Rise of the Nones*, and discusses the ever-deepening post-Christian context of the West. Whereas his previous book focused specifically on the religious group of "nones," this work focuses on the even younger generation, namely Generation Z. This generation, being born between 1995 and 2010, embodies all of their parents' (Gen. X) attributes while going one step beyond the "nones." While the "nones" state that they are "spiritual and not religious," Generation Z is labeled as "spiritually illiterate," meaning they have no contextual background for Christianity. This resource, much like the *Rise of the Nones*, will be utilized to generate a cultural portfolio of who the local church will be required to engage in the future.

The American Church in Crisis[26] by David T. Olson attempts to take a comprehensive look at not only local church participation in America, but also its growth and overall health. While the data is not promising for the Evangelical Church, Olson provides insights into how the Church should change to reverse the downward trend it is experiencing in the twenty-first century. While not pertaining to discipleship specifically, this resource will help provide a holistic perspective on the state of the Church in America. Furthermore, while church attendance and participation do not directly correlate with discipleship, it can be used as a supportive measure in determining the spiritual health of the individual.

The Rise of The Nones[27] by James Emery White, the precursor to *Meet Generation Z*, is a resource that focuses on this fast-growing "religious" group in America. Interestingly, this group, which prefers identifying themselves as spiritual instead of religious, is not religious at all in

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[25] James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z.*

[26] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis.*

[27] James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).

terms of the traditional understanding. In many ways, this group, labeled as the "nones," is the

embodiment of what it means for culture to be post-Christian. In addition to being a resource rich

in data, it is also thought-provoking in terms of practical change for the local church. Its

suggestions, in terms of the way it proposes the local church reach "nones," are unconventional

and in many ways counterintuitive for the Christendom paradigm. For these reasons, this

resource will prove to be immensely valuable to this thesis project.

The 2017-2018 Guide to New Church Models[28], published as a "special report" in CT

Pastors, is a collection of articles and interviews focusing on various expressions of the Church

in North America. The article covers everything from multisite churches and parish models to

more unconventional expressions of Church, such as missional communities and "Dinner

Church." Drawing on interviews and practitioners from each model, the article helps the reader

decipher which "new model" may be appropriate for their context. This article will be

particularly helpful in illustrating how changes in structure (i.e. one's "model of Church") do not

always equate to changes in paradigms or thinking. In addition, it provides practitioner feedback

on some of the benefits and challenges of the more innovative expressions of Church in post-

Christian contexts.

The State of Discipleship,[29] a report produced in partnership between Barna and the

Navigators, is an attempt to measure discipleship effectiveness among local churches in

America. This report also seeks to define discipleship, gauge the value of contemporary

approaches and models, and postulate as to what the future of discipleship will look like in

America. In addition to utilizing this report's survey data and graphs, this source will also be

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[28] Kyle Rohane, "Special Report: The 2017-2018 Guide to New Church Models," *CT Pastors*, 2017.

[29] Barna Research Group, and Navigators, *The State of Discipleship.*

used for describing the current state of discipleship as it relates to contemporary discipleship

models and as a springboard for imagining a new paradigm for the future of the local church.

Reveal: Where are you?[30] by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson was an entirely

groundbreaking study on the inadequacy of the Willow Creek Church discipleship model. The

report studied not only Willow Creek Church but also other local churches within the Willow

Creek Association and over 60 one-on-one interviews with those they considered more

spiritually mature in their faith. The report resulted in Willow Creek taking corrective measures

to improve their discipleship effectiveness in ministry. This report will primarily be utilized for

the plethora of survey data and questionnaires pertaining to the attractional/extractional model of

ministry.

What Should Ministry Look Like in Post-Christian America?[31] is an article originally

published in Christianity Today's "CT Pastors" magazine. In this article, four church leaders

give their recommendations for how ministry should change given America's twenty-first

century, post-Christian context.[32] This article will be utilized for its diversity of thought as it

relates to future strategies for the Church.

Identity

Organizational Identity Formation and Change[33] by Corley, Gioia, Hamilton, and

Patvardhan is an overview of the contemporary theories and perspectives within the study of

organizations. This article discusses two main theories of organizational identity, which clash

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[30] Greg L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, Eric Arnson, and Bill Hybels, *Reveal: Where Are You?*

[31] James Emery White, "What Should Ministry look Like in Post-Christian America?" *CT Pastors*, Fall 2017.

[32] The four authors include Claude Alexander, Matt Chandler, Danah Himes, and James Emery White.

[33] Dennis Gioia, Shubha Patverdhan, Aimee Hamilton, Kevin Corley, "Organizational Identity Formation and Change," The Academy of Management Annals 7, no. 1 (June 2013).

over whether identity is stable or unstable over time and then gives a brief synopsis of how identity is formed within organizations. The strength of this article lies in its definition of organizational identity and in its explanation of what helps to form corporate identity. Though not completely synonymous with how Church identity is formed, this article gives strategic insight into how a local church might begin the process of change concerning its practices, culture, and ultimately its identity.

Social Identity and Intergroup Relations[34] is a collection of social psychology research that spans a wide range of topics including group conflict, formation, and perception. Of particular interest to this project is the collection's section concerning a redefining of the "social group" based on cognition rather than behavior. That is to say, a "social group" may be defined as such based on the group's shared sense of "togetherness" rather than on a formal connection dependent upon their mutual interaction and affection for one another. The author terms this difference as the "social identification model" which is in tension with a more traditional theory, referred to as the "social cohesion model." Where this distinction becomes important for this project is how the social identification theory influences group formation and behavior. The author shows that, unlike the social cohesion model, which believes that group "togetherness" largely depends on emotional bonds between members, the social identification theory posits that group belongingness can be generated on a perceptual or cognitive basis. This has implications for the members of a local church attempting to redefine their identity in a post-Christian context. As this article and others suggest, a necessary first step in forming, or even reforming, identity is changing one's thought process or pattern concerning their group membership. In the

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[34] Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

local church's case, the essential paradigm shift occurs when the collective group begins to perceive their "church" as more than a place, time, or event.

A Light to the Nations[35] by Michael Goheen traces the mission of God through the entire biblical story. Like other theologians, Goheen holds that the mission of God is the most formative aspect of ecclesial identity. Thus, he believes that mission is one of the keys, if not the primary key, to unlocking the biblical story and revealing the nature of the Church. For Goheen, rediscovering church identity begins with revisiting and rediscovering the person and work of Jesus. Rather than acculturating to its surroundings, the Church ought to embrace its place in the biblical story and operate from a deep sense of identity. This resource is valuable to this project in that it gives a historical overview of the ways the Church has succumbed to its culture's worldview and how it has negatively influenced its identity. Furthermore, this project provides a glimpse into how missional ecclesiology may look in the life of the Church today.

ReJesus[36] by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch is a work of Christology for activating the missional church. Since Christology informs missiology, which in turn, informs ecclesiology, the person of Christ should heavily influence a local church's identity. Where this resource becomes valuable is in its discussion on organizational renewal. This renewal process is primarily concerned about recovering the organization's true identity which involves a rediscovery of the person and work of Christ.

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[35] Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

[36] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009).

Untamed[37] by Alan and Debra Hirsch may be the closest resource in relation to this thesis project's topic. Being grouped into three sections, this book attempts to reorient its readers through theological, cultural, and missiological cues. The last section of this book is the most crucial for this project. It gives practical examples concerning how a missional form of discipleship can be lived out in a localized context.

The Great Omission[38] by Dallas Willard discusses the disparity that has occurred between what disciples of Jesus Christ should be like and the actual lifestyles that Christians embody. He believes that, in the West, churches have somehow made being a disciple and being a Christian two different things. Willard suggests that being and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is not entirely complicated but churches, again, have tended to overcomplicate or obstruct the meaning of following Jesus. This work will be utilized to recalibrate our discipleship to the life of Jesus. After all, Jesus is the content of the church's discipleship and as such, his life should be paramount to our formation.

Creating a Missional Culture[39] by J.R. Woodward is an alternative perspective, albeit a biblical one, on equipping the local church for ministry. By focusing on the ascension gifts found in Ephesians 4, Woodward explains how each gift (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher) creates a cultural environment that activates God's people for mission. While the Christendom paradigm has seen the promotion and prominence of the latter two gifts (shepherd/teacher), the missional expression of church will engage the other three that have

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[37] Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010).

[38] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014).

[39] J. R., Woodward and Alan Hirsch, *Creating a Missional Culture.*

remained, by and large, dormant for years. This resource will be used primarily to come to a greater understanding of how to lead the local church through change. Woodward's work will help verbalize ways in which local church leaders can begin that process.

The Forgotten Ways[40] by Alan Hirsch is his quintessential work on missional ecclesiology. In it, Hirsch calls for the contemporary church to reevaluate, recalibrate, and rearrange itself around the mission of God. This total transformation will not only be appropriate in reaching the world in the twenty-first century, it will also realign the Church with its first-century, movement-based expression.

Transformed[41] by Caesar Kalinowski highlights the relationship that exists between one's identity and one's activity. Kalinowski insists that the biblical relationship progresses from identity to activity, or from "be to do," whereas a worldly understanding would promote the opposite, that is, one's activity determines one's identity, or "do to be." By reversing the subtle ways that Christians have appropriated the "do to be" philosophy in their own lives, Kalinowski helps them to experience the freedom to live a new way. This work highlights the intrinsic relationship between identity and praxis.

Presence

Becoming an Engaged Campus[42] by Beere, Votruba, and Wells is written as an instructional guide for institutions of higher education to begin engaging their local contexts. While terms may differ between institutions of higher education and local churches, many of

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[40] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*: *Reactivating the Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2009).

[41] Caesar Kalinowski, *Transformed: A New Way of Being Human*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

[42] Carole Beere, James Votruba, and Gail Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus: A Practical Guide for Institutionalizing Public Engagement*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

their ideas and thought processes translate seamlessly between the two. Of particular interest is the resource's delineation between the terms "outreach," a term for local churches, and "public engagement." While outreach is defined as one-way service or activity toward the community, public engagement is a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship between the institution and community. Thus, the idea of public engagement, with its emphasis on reciprocity, will aid this project in clarifying what "presence" means for the local church.

Rethink: 9 Paradigm Shifts for Activating the Church[43] by Brad Brisco is a collection of paradigm shifts that help mobilize the Church for ministry. Of particular interest to this project are the paradigm shifts regarding mission, the *missio dei*, and culture. When taken together, these three paradigm shifts help to clarify how this project defines "presence." Brisco suggests that the Incarnation of Christ serves as the guiding principle for how the local church interacts, identifies, and relates to its context. Thus, he advocates for an "incarnational presence" for the local church in contrast to an "extractional presence," in which the local church dissociates itself, whether intentionally or unintentionally, from its surrounding context.

Faithful Presence[44] by David Fitch offers a fresh perspective on seven key disciplines that have been integral to the life of the Church since its inception in the first century. By considering the Church's current post-Christian cultural context, Fitch argues that the Church must reexamine these disciplines in order to extend Christ's presence into the world. Each of the disciplines is, in themselves, a means for being present with others and extending the presence of Christ. This resource will be critical to this project in that it elaborates upon the theological idea

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[43] Brad Brisco, *Rethink: 9 Paradigm Shifts for Activating the Church*, (Alpharetta, GA: The Send Institute, 2017).

[44] David Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016).

of "presence" and seamlessly connects the gap between presence and praxis. In addition, Fitch offers a slightly different approach on how the missio Dei and incarnation of Christ influence the form or expression of the Church.

The Faith of Leap[45] by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch is a cultural challenge for the Church to release its hold on security and delve into the risky work of embedding itself into a local context. Expounding upon principles for contextualization, Frost advocates for local churches to discover the interconnected life of their town or city. This resource goes on to say that while necessary, establishing presence within a community is inherently risky, as the local church must identify with its context without compromising its beliefs.

Subterranean[46] by Dan White Jr. is largely a retelling of his journey of spiritual formation, moving from an "uprooted" expression of church to a more local and "rooted" expression of church. White develops three practices (submerged in community, in neighborhoods, and focused faithfulness), which become the pillars of what he means by "rootedness." He suggests that if the American Church is to have a stake in the future of its local context, it must move away from its "up-rootedness" (culture of personality, information indulgence, ambitious production) and alter its mode of cultural engagement. By embracing fidelity, locality, and community, White imagines a way forward for the local church within a post-Christian context.

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[45] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure, and Courage*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

[46] Dan White Jr. and J.R. Woodward and David E. Fitch, *Subterranean: Why the Future of the Church is Rootedness*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

The New Parish[47] by Paul Sparks, Tim Sorens, and Dwight Friesen advocates for an entirely different expression of Church. Citing neither the traditional, attractional, or missional forms of church as the way into the future, Sparks, Sorens, and Friesen suggest that the "neighborhood church" provides the most holistic and vibrant expression for the future. They suggest that deeply rooting into one's local context and discovering the rhythms, quirks, and possibilities of the neighborhood provide the organic potential for a symbiotic relationship between the Church and its local context. This resource provides this project with tools for measuring a local church's sense of "presence" within a city and neighborhood, which may be used toward the latter half of this project when a framework for change is proposed.

The Abundant Community[48] by John McKnight and Peter Block is a book solely focused on the neighborhood. They help to explain many of the sociological and cultural shifts that transitioned the American neighborhood from a vibrant, connected community to a largely disjointed grouping of people. They explain many of the necessary shifts, which a neighborhood must undergo if it is to, once again, be the self-sustaining and life-giving building block of society. Not written from a Christian perspective, this resource is valuable to this project due to this unique standpoint. The concepts it advocates are ideals shared by those with a biblical worldview and contain an aggressive emphasis on indigenous, local expressions of community.

Bowling Alone[49] by Robert Putnam takes a robust look at the rise and decline of American civic engagement over the last few decades. Taking into account generational theories,

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[47] Paul Sparks, Tim Sorens, and Dwight Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014).

[48] Peter Block and John McKnight, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2012).

[49] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

technology, race, marital status, and numerous other social factors, Putnam proposes a possible theory for the decline in civic engagement while also noting some of the changes necessary for revitalizing it. Putnam's work will help to accentuate some of the forces that local churches may have to combat in the future to embrace a new mode of contextual presence.

Praxis

De Bono's Thinking Course[50] by Edward de Bono is a course in thinking about the way we think. He suggests that ideas, which immediately elicit a strong opinion or answer, are the very ideas that need to be investigated because they are, by and large, immune to one's unprejudiced consideration. For the contemporary American Church, saturated within Christendom, to begin the process of rethinking it must embrace risk and a willingness to explore new possibilities. This resource will explore new ways to think about how the local church lives out their shared faith within post-Christian contexts.

Making Room[51] by Christine Pohl is both a presentation of the centrality of practical hospitality throughout Church history and a calling to, once again, embrace this highly potent practice. Pohl begins her work by surveying several biblical texts that describe the intertwining of hospitality and the work of God. She then shares how the practice of hospitality has changed in form over the course of history before concluding her work by spotlighting ministries built on this very practice. This work represents a tangible expression of how identity and presence can influence praxis and in turn, help to reshape the way the Church makes disciples within a post-Christian context.

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[50] Edward de Bono, *de Bono's Thinking Course*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1994).

[51] Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

A Meal with Jesus[52] by Tim Chester takes a look at one of the most ordinary, and often overlooked, aspects of Jesus's earthly ministry and helps his readers rediscover how Jesus leveraged this practice to both show and share the Kingdom of God. Chester journeys through several passages in which the shared meal serves as the backdrop for Jesus's teachings about redemption, forgiveness, grace, humility, and community. However, the meal is not simply the setting in which these teachings took place. In many cases, the meal was part, if not central to the teaching. Chester argues that the shared meal, when shared with gospel-intentionality, is one of the richest and most potent practices available to the Church today. This resource highlights how hospitality is a practical means through which identity and presence can manifest themselves in the life of the Church.

The Art of Neighboring[53] by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon takes the command "love your neighbor as yourself" and establishes it as a practice by making the reader's home the center of ministry in the neighborhood. Pathak and Runyon suggest that it is easy to read the command, "love your neighbor as yourself" in a metaphorical sense. It becomes much more of a challenge for the Church to *actually* love their neighbor. By addressing some simple ways that any person can begin engaging with their neighbors, as well as some of the challenges that come with it, Pathak and Runyon provide an outlet for the Church to begin influencing the post-Christian culture within their neighborhoods.

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[52] Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

[53] Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

Next Door as it is in Heaven[54] by Lance Ford and Brad Brisco is a resource that attempts to alter the reader's perspective on neighborhoods and specifically, their neighborhood. They argue that the majority of Americans have lost their sense of "place," that is, one's appreciation for and rootedness in a particular local context. This, they argue, is at the root of many of the societal fractures people are experiencing today, such as boredom, loneliness, alienation, and consumerism. Ford and Brisco advocate for a completely new perspective on the neighborhood; one that embraces its quirks, possibilities, and inherent resources. By coupling this new perspective with gospel-intentionality, Ford and Brisco suggest a plethora of practices the Church can begin to utilize to engage their neighborhoods with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Practicing the Way of Jesus[55] by Mark Scandrette is a book framed entirely around an invitation to experiment with the literal words of Jesus. In direct contrast to the contemporary pedagogy of most institutional forms of higher education, which tend to overemphasize knowledge acquisition, Scandrette's methodology for spiritual formation is entirely driven by application and reflection. This resource is valuable as it is filled with examples of how to both experiment in community and reflect on how the practice impacted the participants.

Everyday Church[56] by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis draws a cultural parallel between today's post-Christian context and the marginalization that the first century Christians experienced. Utilizing the book of 1 Peter as a guide, Chester and Timmis point to ways in which the Church in the West can once again become a community of people living out their shared

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[54] Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, *Next Door as it is in Heaven: Living Out God's Kingdom in Your Neighborhood*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016).

[55] Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011).

[56] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

lives of faith and be a contagious witness to the gospel. In contrast to the concept of "Church" as a one day a week event, Chester and Timmis propose that the Church can and should function in an "everyday" capacity through the practices of community, pastoral care, mission, and evangelism. In this respect, this resource provides a practical way forward for the Church in light of the challenges of a post-Christian context.

Right Here Right Now[57] by Lance Ford and Alan Hirsch paints an accurate picture of the typical challenges most church-going Christians face in twenty-first-century America. While not making apologies, Ford and Hirsch depict how Christianity is being influenced by American ideologies of individualism, consumerism, and materialism. In an attempt to bring vitality back to their readers' lives, they highlight ways to combat those ideological impulses while simultaneously describing practices that help readers see "missional opportunities" in all of life. This book is valuable to this project in that it is very self-evaluative. While it does mention practices that other resources have provided, it does so by first helping readers understand why they may have neglected certain practices or behaviors. For that reason, and for its recalibrating nature, this resource will help the latter part of this project.

Evangelism in a Skeptical World[58] by Sam Chan offers a fresh approach to sharing the Good News of the gospel within increasingly prevalent post-Christian contexts. Chan suggests that while Americans used to operate from a belief system called "modernism," they currently operate out of a belief system called "post-modernism." These belief systems contain unique assumptions, theories, laws, and values that, in turn, shape how they understand and interpret the

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[57] Lance Ford and Alan Hirsch, *Right Here Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[58] Sam Chan, *Evangelism in A Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News About Jesus More Believable, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018).*

truth of the gospel. As such, local churches should become aware of such changes and tailor their evangelistic approaches to suit their culture. This resource helps to explain how local churches can begin to alter their methodology when it comes to sharing the gospel within a skeptical culture. Whereas previous evangelism methods employed the logic of presentation, resolution, and invitation (i.e. a truth claim, a decision, and a new way of life), Chan advocates that we must change our pedagogy to "praxis, belief, and then truth" or stated another way, invitation, resolution, and then presentation.[59]

Theological Basis

The theological basis for proposing that changes in identity, presence, and praxis are essential for reshaping discipleship can best be understood by attempting to look at each of these aspects individually and then later, in tandem with one another.

From the very beginning of the biblical narrative, God is the agent who forms His people's identity. In the creation account, God is seen forming both man and woman out of the things of the earth (man from the dust of the ground and woman from the rib of man) and, in so doing, forming their identity as His beloved children who are submissive to the will of their Creator. One of the next major events in the biblical narrative is the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve, which is essentially an attack on God's identity as well as their own. When this scene in the biblical narrative is paired with the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-15), the enemy is seen, yet again, assaulting the very identity of the Son of God.[60] Yet, this time, the Son of God would model how to remain faithful to God and ultimately, affirm his identity as God's beloved Son who would lead humanity in the way of

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[59] Sam Chan, *Evangelism in A Skeptical World,* 125.

[60] See Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4.

everlasting life. If taken as biblical case studies, these two scenes highlight how profoundly

reorienting the concept of identity can be to discipleship. Commenting on this, Brian Rosner

writes, "The two archetypal episodes of temptation in the Bible were fought over the issue of

personal identity…In both cases, the lesson is that true freedom is found in knowing God as your

Father, trusting his word, resisting satanic lies, and finding your identity in being known and

loved by him."[61] In one sense, a malformed identity, as displayed by Adam and Eve, can have

disastrous consequences in the lives of God's children. In another sense, a realigned identity, one

that has been reformed in light of who God has made his children to be, is life-giving.

The apostle Paul affirms the importance of identity within several of his pastoral epistles

as well. Many of the Pauline epistles are structured in a manner scholars refer to as "the

indicative to imperative," that is, the first half of Paul's letters remind his readers of who they are

(saved, justified, set apart, etc.) and the second half commands them to live out of that identity.

This suggests that Paul believed that life change is not primarily influenced by instructing people

on what to *do* or avoid but rather, getting them to both understand and believe who they have

been made to *be* in Christ. For example, commenting on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Mark

Roberts writes, "Although Ephesians 4 begins an extended explanation of how we are to live out

our calling, the text reminds us that the dos and don'ts of Christian living must never be

separated from the theological foundations of our faith…Thus, the 'is' leads to the 'ought'; the

indicative leads to the imperative."[62]

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[61] Brian Rosner, *Known By God*: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 88-89.

[62] Mark Roberts, *The Story of God Bible Commentary*: Ephesians, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 122.

These same principles apply to how the American Church understands it's identity today. Rather than believing and speaking as though the "church" is an event, time, or place, the Scriptures challenge Christians to believe and live out of, their true ecclesial identity. One of the most profoundly reorienting aspects of identity for the local church is its missionary nature. Commenting on how missionary identity influences discipleship, Frost and Hirsch write,

> It [missionary identity] changed everything, absolutely everything—the way we perceived the church, how we do ministry, why we even exist. It even included a thorough reconceptualization of the way we connected with God and perceived his working in the world, and how we could find him in the stranger places, places normal good ministers never ventured.[63]

Rooting the very identity of the Church within God's redemptive mission not only reorients Christian discipleship theologically, but it can also influence it methodologically and practically as well.

Embracing a missionary identity will inevitably alter a local church's *presence* within its local context. Even after the Lord judged the nation of Israel and sent them into captivity, He still called them to embrace their missionary identity in their temporary residence. In a letter written to the exiles in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah penned:

> Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.[64]

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[63] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come,* 148.

[64] Jeremiah 29:4-7. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version.

Rather than extracting themselves from the local context, God commanded the nation of Israel to intentionally seek their new city's welfare through the everyday things of life. Further explaining Israel's contextual presence in exile, Michael Gohen writes, "Along with the threat of assimilation is the danger that the people of Israel will simply *withdraw* from the dominant culture into a ghettolike existence, avoiding assimilation by escaping into isolation…Yet in this context Jeremiah calls Israel into full participation in the cultural life of the Babylonian empire."[65] Likewise, disciples of Jesus Christ are to deeply embed themselves into the cultural life of their local city and be both salt and light to the watching world.

Perhaps the clearest example of contextual presence is seen in the person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation of Jesus is not simply a theological truth, that "the Word became flesh," but can also be interpreted as a methodological truth as well. Jesus was raised in a specific and localized context, worked the majority of his adult life as a tradesman, and deeply embedded himself in the social milieu of his day. In describing how the Incarnation informs presence, Michael Frost writes, "…incarnational mission implies a *real and abiding* incarnational presence among a group of people . . . Why? Because you cannot become part of the organic life of a given community if you are not present to it and do not experience its cultural rhythms, its life, and its geography."[66] If Jesus is the model for discipleship, and He certainly is, then his methods for discipling others ought to shape contemporary discipleship today.

When a missionary identity informs a church's contextual presence a reshaping of discipleship will occur in *praxis* as well. In the Bible, faith always manifests itself through action. In the Gospels, Jesus is said to have witnessed or "seen" the faith of others. On one

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[65] Michael Gohen, "*A Light to the Nations*, 64.

[66] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping Of Things To Come,* 39.

occasion, four friends lowered a paralytic man through the roof of a home to place him in front

of Jesus while he was preaching to a crowd. It states "And when he [Jesus] *saw their faith*, he

said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'" (Lk 5:20). Additionally, the letter of James also

indicates that faith will ultimately manifest itself through action. It states,

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if
> anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently
> at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once
> forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of
> liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will
> be blessed in his doing (Jas 1:22-25).

In an information-saturated society, Christian discipleship tends to be equated with

knowledge acquisition. American churches have access to more discipleship resources (sermons,

curriculum, books, conferences, podcasts, etc.) than ever before and operate as though

information produces transformation. Yet, Jesus's discipleship philosophy would indicate that

discipleship is primarily application-driven not information-driven.

In John 8, Jesus gives a snapshot of his disciple making pedagogy. It reads, "If you abide

in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you

free" (Jn 8:31). Noting the order of Jesus's words (abide, disciple, know, free), the process of

discipleship is initiated by walking in God's ways and obeying Jesus's teachings. However, the

typical American church tends to reverse this order (free, know, disciple, abide). Caesar

Kalinowski further explains this distinction:

> We have traditionally thought that if we could get a person to believe what we
> told them about Jesus, they would get set free, and *then* we should start discipling
> them. But this is not what Jesus said or how he modeled this concept. Jesus spent
> years with his disciples, none of whom were yet "Christians," leading them to
> walk in his ways and obey his teachings. Then, over time, they came to believe
> the truth about him and his Father, being set free from their sin and unbelief.[67]

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[67] Caesar Kalinowski, *Transformed,* 94.

When discipleship is reduced to mere knowledge acquisition, praxis is inadvertently portrayed as optional and soon becomes obsolete. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch comment further, "Indeed, obedience is the evidence that knowledge of God has been received and understood. In the Bible, the real test of what you know is how you live. Something goes seriously wrong with our capacity to integrate or even comprehend Scripture if we do not obey but just study it."[68] Thus, ecclesial identity, presence, and praxis are interrelated and have the inherent capacity to transform how discipleship is thought about and carried out within the local church today.

<center>Theoretical Basis</center>

The theoretical basis for proposing that identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple-making paradigms can be broadly understood if Church history is first simplified into three primary epochs. Alan Hirsch suggests that these three epochs help explain the paradigmatic progression of the Church, and thus its disciple-making paradigm, throughout the centuries.[69] The first epoch, which existed from roughly A.D. 32 to 313, was primarily apostolic in expression. That is to say, the mission of God was being primarily carried out through the ministry of the apostles. In this epoch, the Church's *identity* could be thought of as missionary servants, its *presence* thought of as marginalized yet culturally proximate, and its *praxis* thought of as a grassroots, decentralized movement. These distinctives would be forever altered within the next epoch of Church history.

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[68] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus,* 154.

[69] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 64.

The next epoch of Church history was a Christendom mode of church expression, which

roughly began in 313 A.D. and arguably continues to this day. By comingling with the Roman

Empire under Emperor Constantine's rule, the Church would undergo substantial changes

concerning identity, presence, and praxis. A summary of some of the keynote changes is

provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Christendom's Influence on Identity, Presence, and Praxis

Christendom Change	Nature of Change
1. The adoption of Christianity as the official religion of city, state or empire	Presence
2. The assumption that all citizens (except for Jews) were Christian by birth	Identity
3. The development of a "sacral society," where there was no effective distinction between sacred and secular, where religion and politics were intertwined	Presence
4. The definition of "orthodoxy" as the common belief, determined by socially powerful clerics supported by the state	Identity
5. The imposition of a supposedly "Christian morality" on the entire population	Praxis
6. A political and religious division of the world into "Christendom" and "heathendom"	Presence
7. The defense of Christianity by legal sanctions to restrain heresy, immorality and schism, and by warfare to protect or extend Christendom	Praxis
8. A hierarchical ecclesiastical system, based on diocesan and parish arrangement, which was analogous to the state hierarchy and was buttressed by state support	Identity
9. A generic distinction between clergy and laity, and the relegation of the laity to a largely passive role	Identity
10. Obligatory church attendance, with penalties for non-compliance	Praxis

11. The practice of infant baptism as the symbol of obligatory incorporation into this Christian society	Identity
12. The imposition of obligatory tithes to fund this system	Praxis

Source: Information adapted from Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 66.

With the emergence of the age of Christendom came the embracing of a new narrative for the Church in which its *identity* began to take on more of a territorial orientation; its *presence* marked by socio-cultural prominence and its praxis understood more in terms of institutional compliance. In describing how the Christendom shift influenced the nature of the church and its mission, Murray writes,

> Another fundamental impact of the Christendom shift was the church's preoccupation with maintaining its dominance in a society now coterminous with the church itself. Christianizing Western Europe took many centuries and involved both extension of the boundaries and deeper penetration of societies that had accepted Christianity…But, over the centuries, the church became an *institution* rather than a *movement* and its energies were primarily directed towards *maintenance* rather than *mission*.[70]

The third epoch is what Alan Hirsch labels the "emerging mode."[71] This mode has begun to gain substantial traction within the last ten years and is a renewal movement that seeks to reorient itself around the mission of God. The struggle with this epoch is its attempt to be the Church in relation to culture without slipping back into a Christendom mindset. Hirsch writes, "It is high time for us to dethrone Constantine; as far as matters of church go, it seems he is still the emperor of our imaginations. The church now faces the challenge of discovering mission in a new paradigm while struggling to free itself from the Christendom mindset."[72] Within this

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[70] Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 98.

[71] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 64.

[72] Ibid., 66.

epoch, the Church's *identity* begins to take on more of a missional expression; its *presence* becomes more incarnational and local, and its *praxis* is once again decentralized and more grassroots in nature.

Though not equivalent, the first and third epochs of Church history contain striking similarities and there may be a sense in which the Church that existed during the first century can help the Church that now exists in the twenty-first century. For example, contemporary churches in America may find it helpful to analyze the approaches taken by the first century Church when confronted with differing cultures, namely those cultural contexts found in Acts 2 and Acts 17.

In Acts 2, the apostle Peter addressed a predominately Jewish cultural context. The crowds, being familiar with the basic tenets of Judaism, were able to understand the spiritual concepts and connections the apostle Peter was making. Thus, Peter knew his culture and shared the gospel in a contextually appropriate fashion.

Acts 17, on the other hand, reveals a vastly different cultural context. In this scenario, the apostle Paul finds himself within the Hellenistic city of Athens, Greece. He is urged by the local philosophers to share more about his faith in Jesus Christ and is taken to the Aeropagus, where he is given their undivided attention and an opportunity to speak freely. His approach is quite different from that of the apostle Peter and he chooses not to rely on the basic tenets of Judaism to make his case for Jesus Christ. Instead, the apostle Paul took a much more philosophical approach and shared the truth about God in a way that the people would have understood.

In commenting on these two cultural contexts and how they relate to today, James Emery White states, "Different culture. Different approach. This is precisely where Christians in the US

find ourselves today. We are not speaking to the God-fearing Jews in Jerusalem. We are standing on Mars hill, and we need an Acts 17 mindset with an Acts 17 strategy."[73]

Having outlined the conceptual framework for the project by providing a literature review and explaining its theological and theoretical foundations, the following chapter will be devoted to outlining the project's methodology.

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[73] James Emery White, "What Should Ministry look Like in Post-Christian America?" *CT Pastors*, 10.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As the spiritual landscape of America becomes increasingly post-Christian, local churches are being presented with real challenges related to ministering within this evolving context. In many ways, the post-Christian context is causing local churches to enter into a type of pragmatic crisis. That is to say, what used to work from a pragmatic standpoint either no longer does or is dramatically losing influence within the secularizing culture. There is no question—the local church's ecosystem is changing and when ecosystems change, species are threatened. Commenting on the difference between survival and extinction within ecosystems, David Olson writes, "Extinction occurs most often when a species faces a crisis or change in its environment and is unable to adapt."[74] This crisis raises many questions for the Church and when considering solutions two options quickly rise to the surface: continue operating from within a Christendom paradigm doing what has always been done and expecting the same results, or completely altering the paradigm and embracing a new way of thinking about making and being disciples of Jesus Christ within an increasingly post-Christian context.

Unfortunately, many churches have embraced the former of the two choices, opting to stay the course and preserve the methodologies of a contextually irrelevant paradigm. Perhaps this is part of the reason that church-planting efforts among evangelical churches consistently fall behind population growth while their closure rates remain consistent year to year.[75] Couple this with the nation's general decline in religious affiliation and church attendance and the effectiveness of the local church's disciple making paradigm quickly comes into question. What becomes even more shocking is that this information is neither new to nor unknown by the

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[74] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis,* 118.

[75] Ibid., 120-124.

majority of evangelical churches. The way forward lies in how local churches respond and adapt to these changes. It would seem that the American evangelical Church is experiencing an inability to break away from the Christendom paradigm despite its situation within a post-Christian context. The question is no longer, "Should local churches change their disciple making paradigm?" but, "How can local churches change their disciple making paradigm to engage a post-Christian context with the Good News of Jesus Christ?" This has become the critical question for local churches finding themselves within ever-increasing post-Christian contexts. Thus, this project aims to help answer that question by devoting the remainder of this chapter to explaining the methodology of this study. It will detail the project's design for capturing and expressing how changes in ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are changing disciple-making paradigms within post-Christian contexts.

Intervention Design

To explain the following process, this project will follow Sensing's twelve-step procedure for describing the intervention design.[76] Like following a cooking recipe, this twelve-step process serves to aid future readers or researchers in both understanding and carrying out a similar research methodology. Thus, the intervention design serves as a functional roadmap for those who might want to replicate this project in the future or for those who simply want to know how the research was accomplished. The intervention design will detail the approach taken to address the research problem and bring the reader to the next phase of the research project: implementation.

The first step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the purpose and objectives of the intervention design. The primary purpose of this intervention design will be to capture and

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[76] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 66-67.

express how changes in ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are changing disciple-making paradigms within post-Christian contexts. This will be accomplished through two main objectives. In order to capture this, the first objective (Obj. 1) will seek to determine which specific aspects of identity, presence, and praxis are most influential in reshaping discipleship paradigms. In order to express this, the second objective (Obj. 2) will generate a new "scorecard" for measuring discipleship effectiveness within the new paradigm of discipleship.

The second step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the tasks of the intervention design. These tasks help to fulfill each of the aforementioned objectives. Two tasks will be required to accomplish objective one (Obj. 1). The first task will require the surveying of local area churches on the conventional determinants of identity, presence, and praxis and the second will require the interviewing of missional practitioners on the most influential determinants of identity, presence, and praxis within their respective fields of ministry.

 Only one task will be required to accomplish the second objective (Obj. 2). This task will require the interviewing of missional practitioners on a set of key measurements related to identity, presence, and praxis and cross-referencing their responses with other experts in the field of missional ministry. How each of these tasks will be completed is detailed below.

The third step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the task steps of the intervention design. The first task step associated with the intervention design is to develop and generate materials to facilitate the research. Two research instruments will be produced to facilitate the data collection portion of this project and will correspond to a specific participant group. A 24-question survey (Research Instrument A) will be generated for Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) and a 15-question interview (Research instrument B) will be generated for

Group 1 (missional practitioners). Each research tool focuses on the areas of identity, presence, and praxis.

The next task step will be to contact the research participants. The survey participants, or Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches), will be contacted by two means. First, the executive director of the FBA will contact local area pastors at their semi-annual meeting where he will summarize the research project and gauge the initial interest of local area pastors and churches. Next, a list will be generated containing the potential churches and the researcher will contact them with further information on how to participate in the research project. The other group of participants, interview participants in Group 1 (missional practitioners), will be contacted via email or social media. Once initial contact has been made and the practitioner agrees to take part in the research, further information on how to participate in the project will be sent.

The final two task steps will be to distribute the research materials to each group of participants and to conduct the research in order to collect the data. Each participant will have received an informed consent detailing the project's confidentiality policy and since the survey participants (Group 2) will take the survey on their own time, collecting the data for the interview participants (Group 1) will be the only group requiring scheduling.

A flow chart will be produced for the reader to gain an overview of how the purpose, objectives, tasks, and task steps relate to one another (see Table 2). This flow chart does not convey new information but simply serves as a visual aid in grasping the overall implementation design.

Table 2 Overview of Intervention Design

Purpose	Objectives	Tasks	Task Steps
To capture and express how changes in identity, presence, and praxis are changing disciple making paradigms within post-Christian contexts.	1. Determine which aspects of identity, presence, and praxis are most influential in reshaping discipleship paradigms	Survey local area churches on conventional determinants of identity, presence, and praxis	Create survey
			Contact local area pastors and churches
			Provide essential research documents
			Conduct research and collect data from survey
		Interview missional practitioners on most influential determinants of identity, presence, and praxis	Create Interview
			Contact missional practitioners
			Provide essential research documents
			Conduct research and collect data from interview
	2. Generate new "scorecard" for measuring discipleship effectiveness within new paradigm	Interview missional practitioners on key measurements and cross-reference with experts	Gather top responses and develop new scorecard

The fourth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the people involved in the intervention design. The first group (Group 1) will be comprised of leading practitioners within the field of missional ministry. These individuals will serve within a non-traditional form of ministry and will have produced, and many will have continued to produce, numerous resources focusing on the areas of Christian discipleship and missional living within post-Christian contexts.[77] The unique research participants will be selected based upon previously produced works (books, podcasts, workshops and teachings, conference sessions, etc.) and their associated content.

The second group (Group 2) will be comprised of local churches within the Tallahassee, FL area who are affiliated with the FBA. The anticipated research participants will include all members and active attendees associated with the designated churches, including vocational ministry leaders as well as non-vocational members and/or attenders.

The fifth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the places where activities will occur within the intervention design. The respective locations for conducting the research will vary based on the research group. For example, Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) will complete their survey in any number of locations. Research participants will have access to the electronic survey and need only have Internet access to complete it. For that reason, this activity will not occur in a single location. However, Group 1 (missional practitioners) will all be interviewed in a single location. Interviews will take place at Canopy Roads Baptist Church in Tallahassee, FL within the office of the Associate Pastor of Discipleship.

The sixth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the timelines and duration of activities within the intervention design. To generate a sufficient sample from Group 2 (FBA

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[77] These "non-traditional" forms of ministry include leading missional communities, founding centers for spiritual formation, coaching future co-vocational church leaders, and leading collaborative non-profits.

affiliated churches), the survey will be open for six weeks. This period will range from Saturday, January 26, 2019 to Saturday, March 2, 2019. The time required to complete the survey will depend upon the unique research participant. Inevitably, some participants will complete the survey faster than others but most will finish the 24-question survey within 10 minutes. The time required to complete each interview within Group 1 (missional practitioners) will be much greater. Interviews will be scheduled during the months of November 2018 through January 2019. The exact length of each interview will depend upon the length of the research participant's responses but most will complete the 15-question interview within thirty minutes to an hour's worth of time.

The seventh step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality within the intervention design. The Institutional Review Board at Liberty University classified this research project under a category deemed, "specific, minimal risk studies" and as such, contains limited ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality.

The eighth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to discuss the required resources of the intervention design. Only two handouts will be provided to research participants. Local area pastors (Group 2- FBA affiliated churches) will be provided with the survey questions before data collection for their church leadership to determine if they would like to participate. A copy of the survey questions can be found in the project appendices (Appendix A). Also, interview participants (Group 1- missional practitioners) will be provided with the interview questions before the interview. A copy of the interview questions can also be found in the project appendix (Appendix B).

The ninth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the types of data to be collected within the intervention design. Two main types of data will be collected during the research phase of the project. The first type of data will be quantitative in nature and will be gathered through the 24-question survey (Research Instrument A). The purpose of the survey will be to capture the extent to which identity, presence, and praxis have shaped the participants' development in discipleship. Within "Research Instrument A" the first 11 questions will be devoted to the concept of *identity* and will attempt to cover a broad range of influencers in the formation of individual and organizational identity. The next five questions (questions 12-16) will be devoted to the area of *presence*. These questions will capture the nature of the participant's contextual engagement and their perceptions of the surrounding culture. The remaining eight questions (questions 17-24) will focus on the area of *praxis*. Specifically, these questions will look at how the two traditional ordinances of the Church have been carried out through the participant's local church experience as well as their involvement within a "small group" and a number of its commonly associated practices.

The second type of data that will be collected is more qualitative in nature. This data will be gathered through the use of a 15-question interview (Research Instrument B). These questions, similar to Research Instrument A, are focused on the three areas of identity, presence, and praxis. Each aspect was designated five individual questions.

The tenth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the tools for collection within the intervention design. The tools needed for gathering information for Group 1 (missional practitioners) include a cell phone, audio recorder, Internet connection, and a word processor. The tools needed for gathering information from Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) are much simpler as only a computer and/or smartphone with an internet connection is required.

The eleventh step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the protocols for tools within the intervention design. Once the interview has been scheduled, the interviewer will place a phone call and immediately begin recording the call. The audio recorder is to remain on during the duration of the conversation and will be turned off once the phone call has officially ended. The audio file generated by the conversation will be uploaded to an online transcription service site. Once the audio file has been transcribed it will be downloaded from the website and opened into a word processor to check for accuracy. The protocols for data collection will be much simpler regarding the research participants from Group 2. Once research participants from Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) submit their surveys, their responses will be automatically uploaded, recorded, and saved on Google Drive and will only be accessible from a password-protected account.

The twelfth step of Sensing's twelve-step procedure is to define the analysis and evaluation procedures of the intervention design. The data will be collected and analyzed through two primary means. The data collected from the surveys will be gathered in Google Drive and analyzed through Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel. The results will be presented using a combination of diagrams and charts. The data collected from the interviews will be analyzed using a qualitative analysis program called "ATLAS.ti." The data will be coded and grouped using an inductive analysis and then presented through the use of charts and diagrams. Having provided an overview of the project's intervention design, the following section will offer a narrative of this project's implementation and describe how the data was analyzed.

<center>Implementation of the Intervention Design</center>

Buy-in was achieved in Group 1 (missional practitioners) entirely through email correspondence. All of the research participants within this group were accessible through email

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and responded in a timely manner. The initial email included an overview of the project focus and an official recruitment letter, which gave additional details about the project and what each participant would be asked to do as well as a stamped letter of consent. The participants were then asked to read through the documents, sign the consent form, and return it via email. Once received, an interview was scheduled and carried out. The identity of each research participant was kept confidential and as such, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Table 3 details the participant's pseudonyms as well as their respective ministry locations.

Table 3 Research Group I

Research Group I- Missional Practitioners	
MP I	Location: Seattle, WA
MP II	Location: San Francisco, CA
MP III	Location: Denver, CO
MP IV	Location: Alpharetta, GA
MP V	Location: Panama City, FL

Though every interviewee was given "Research Instrument B" before the interview, most of the interviewees did not review the document. This document contained not only the questions that were likely to be asked but also key definitions of identity, presence, and praxis. At the beginning of each phone interview, the interviewer asked each participant if they had the chance to prepare for the interview by reading the document. If the answer was "no," then they were read the key definitions over the phone and answered the questions accordingly.

Although Research Instrument B was slated to generate responses to fifteen questions, only nine questions were administered to the majority of the interview participants and as such, only those nine questions will be analyzed in the results. This, in large part, was a result of poor

implementation. As the interviews were taking place, variations of questions were asked that went "off-script." Unfortunately, many of these "off-script" questions were not synonymous with other "off-script" questions given to other interviewees. Therefore, these questions were not analyzed within the results section of the project.[78]

Buy-in was achieved for Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) in three primary phases. Phase one included contacting the executive director of the FBA through email. The email gave an overview of the project focus and included an official permissions request, which requested access to any sort of membership database the FBA would have kept. Unfortunately, the FBA does not keep any sort of database and therefore, generating participant involvement became based solely on the recruitment efforts of the senior pastors and other church leaders. Upon the executive director's agreement, buy-in for Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches) transitioned into phase two. Phase two included the executive director sharing the project at the FBA's upcoming association meeting. The initial contact was made with local-area pastors at this meeting and he presented an overview of the nature of this project. None of the pastors in attendance made any sort of commitment to participate but the executive director provided the researcher with a list of individuals present at the meeting. Thus, "phase three" of buy-in was initiated with a follow-up email being sent to each pastor who was present for the meeting. An email was sent to each pastor informing them of the project focus and included an official recruitment form and a letter of consent. Once they reviewed the documents and agreed to participate in the study, the pastors then dispersed the survey link in a manner they deemed most appropriate (email, newsletter, bulletin, flyer, etc.) to their congregants. A representation of the participating churches is presented in Table 4.

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[78] To read the interview transcripts, please see Appendices D through H.

Table 4 Research Group II

Research Group II- FBA Affiliated Churches
Canopy Roads Baptist Church
Bradfordville First Baptist Church
City Church Tallahassee
Thomasville Road Baptist Church
East Hill Baptist Church
Celebration Baptist Church

Triangulation

A process called triangulation was used to ensure the accuracy of the collected data throughout each phase of the research. Tim Sensing, commenting on the importance of triangulation within qualitative research states, "It is a way to cross-check your data that provides breadth and depth to your analysis and increases the trustworthiness of your research."[79] While four major categories of triangulation are largely recognized, this project employed the use of two categories: data triangulation and methodological triangulation.[80]

Data triangulation, which employs the use of multiple sources of data, was performed by utilizing the three angles of insider, outsider, and researcher.[81] Each interview was conducted over the phone and was simultaneously being recorded by a handheld recording device. The *researcher* angle was accomplished by uploading the audio file to an online transcription service, audibly playing the recorded interview through Apple iTunes, and crosschecking the file transcription for accuracy. The *insider* angle was accomplished by asking each research

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[79] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72.

[80] The four major categories of triangulation are as follows: data, investigator, theory, and methods.

[81] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 75.

participant if they wished to receive and review the transcribed interview. The *outsider* angle was achieved by crosschecking the participants' responses with the larger academic community surrounding the topics of identity, presence, and praxis. To accomplish this, a list of possible keywords and phrases was generated from the academic community during the construction of the interview questions. This table served to corroborate the statements made by the interviewees during the data collection process. By establishing this baseline metric, the data received from the research questions was able to be categorized as consistent or inconsistent with the larger academic community. Table 5 displays the outsider responses below.

Table 5 Key Words and Phrases Derived from Academic Community

Identity	Presence	Praxis
Ambassadors for Christ	"Go and Be"	Blessing
Body of Christ	Decentralized	Celebrating
Bride of Christ	Embedded or Rooted	Gospel Proclamation
Community		Hospitality
Exiles/Strangers/Sojourners	Fringes of Culture	Integration/Spaces/Places
Family	Grassroots	Lord's Supper/Shared Meals
Household		Neighboring
Ministers of Reconciliation	Localized	Oikos
Missionaries	Marginalized	Parties/Celebrations
Movement/ Apostolic Movement	Missional/Incarnational	Prayer
People of God	Peripheral to Society	Serving Others/Least of These
Priests/Priesthood of Believers	Proximate	
Sent	Relational	
Servants	Underground	
Temple		

The next method of triangulation used within this research project was that of methodological triangulation. Michael Patton defines methodological triangulation as, "the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents."[82] This project employed the use of three primary methods to study the research problem. The first method was that of interviewing missional practitioners on

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[82] Michael Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 60.

their observations regarding identity, presence, and praxis as they relate to discipleship. Their responses were gathered and then coded and analyzed using a qualitative analysis program called "ATLAS.ti." The second method was that of surveying local area churches on the conventional determinants of identity, presence, and praxis. The results were gathered using Microsoft Excel and then graphed to visually represent the results. The final method utilized in studying the research problem was observing and recording the responses from the larger academic community concerning the topics of identity, presence, and praxis.

Themes

Tim Sensing suggests viewing data through three analytical frames: themes, slippages, and silences.[83] Each of these frames will be discussed in the following sections to give the reader an understanding of how the data was analyzed. Since this project has already identified the themes of identity, presence, and praxis as contributing to a reshaping of discipleship within post-Christian contexts, the data analysis will naturally follow this pattern as well.

Though not revealed to the participants in Group 2 (FBA affiliated churches), the first eleven questions within the survey all pertained to the theme of *identity*. More specifically, the first eight questions all pertained to the "conventional" determinants of ecclesial identity. Church-wide identity statements, vision and mission statements, key values and practices, recorded histories, and statements of faith or belief are many of the most common determinants of identity from an institutional and organizational point of view. The next two questions gauged participants' general usage and understanding of the word "church," both key determinants in revealing ecclesial identity. The final question within this section of the survey gauged participants' self-identification with many biblical terms and phrases relating to ecclesial

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[83] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 197.

identity.[84] Within the interviews conducted for Group 1 (missional practitioners), the first five questions all related to the theme of *identity*. They were asked about key determinants of ecclesial identity as well as factors that may contribute to malformed ecclesial identity, how they train others in identity formation, and how they measure the effectiveness of said training.

The next theme that helps organize and analyze the data is *presence*. Again, unbeknownst to the survey participants (Group 2), questions twelve through sixteen all pertained to the theme of presence. These questions revealed data pertaining to contextual engagement, perceptions of the surrounding culture, and to whom their church focuses its discipleship and evangelism efforts. Interview participants (Group 1) were asked five additional questions that all focused on the theme of presence. These questions followed the same format as the questions relating to ecclesial identity.

The final theme used to organize and analyze this data is *praxis*. Survey participants (Group 2) were asked eight questions (questions 17-24) that pertained to the topic of praxis. Results generated information regarding participants' involvement with small groups, the ordinances of baptism and communion, as well as several small group associated practices including serving "the least of these," "making disciples," and "multiplying into new groups." The interview participants (Group 1) were asked another set of five questions relating to the theme of praxis, which followed the same pattern as the questions for identity and presence.

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[84] The terms included here were "disciple of Jesus Christ," "missionary," "called into the ministry," "saint," and "full-time minister of the gospel."

Slippages

Sensing defines a "slippage" as incongruent or contradictory data that seeks disconfirmation of findings.[85] A slippage is simply another lens through which to view and interpret the data and focuses on considering the "alternative explanations" of the recorded data. When considering this project's data, a slippage occurred within the survey data around the theme of *identity*. Specifically, questions seven and eight revealed the slippage. These two questions pertained to how survey participants understand and used the word "church" respectively. Although a vast majority (greater than 83%) of survey respondents reported that they understand the word "church" in terms of people, a majority (51.2%) also reported that when they actually say the word "church" they are referring to either a place or an event. It would seem that it is possible to cognitively know something about one's identity yet behave, and in this case speak, in a contrary way.

It should also be noted that a slippage occurred across the survey and interview data sets as well. While survey participants were asked about the conventional determinants of identity (questions 1-8 within the survey), none of the interview participants mentioned these conventional determinants as "critical" or "foundational" to ecclesial identity. The data from these interviews revealed responses that were geared more toward biblical concepts associated with identity formation such as the missionary nature of the church and being a member of the family of God.

Another slippage within the survey data centered around the theme of *presence.* When asked about how one's church engages their local context, nearly a quarter of survey participants (23.1 %) reported that they were "missional." However, contradictory data was revealed when

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[85] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 200.

asked about the means through which they engage their community. Only 10% stated that they engage their community primarily through relationships whereas 83.3% indicated that they engage their community through events, projects, and programs (vehicles more congruent with traditional and attractional modes of cultural engagement).

Once again, when analyzing the data sets between the survey and interview, a slippage was exposed around the theme of presence as well. While the survey responses revealed that a majority of churches engage their local context through "attractional" means (greater than 55%), none of the interview respondents indicated that an "attractional" presence shaped their mode of cultural engagement. What is more, the interview participants even warned against the attractional mode by suggesting that it assumes a relationship between Church and culture that no longer exists. While the attractional model may be the most prevalent model within post-Christian cultures, it may not be the most contextually appropriate.

Lastly, a slippage within the survey data occurred within the theme of *praxis* and specifically within question twenty-four. Survey participants were asked to rate their level of frequency concerning several practices associated with small groups. When asked about the frequency with which their small group makes disciples, 78% stated that their small group does so frequently and/or occasionally. However, when asked about the frequency with which their small group multiplies into new groups, only 17.9% reported that they do so frequently and/or occasionally. Since multiplying into new groups is a natural outflow of making disciples, one would expect the percentages to not have been so disparate.

Silences

Silences within the data are results that one would expect to see but for whatever reason did not. Often, silences are just as valuable to analysis as the generated data and as such, warrant

attention. Sensing states that the question "silence" asks is, "What is left unsaid that needs to be examined?"[86] The following section will seek to answer that question by analyzing some of the various categories of silences.

One of the most surprising omissions came after the interviews. Once all of the interviews had been completed as well as a cursory review of the transcripts, one topic was immediately noticed as absent: Christendom. Not a single missional practitioner mentioned the influence of the Christendom mindset on the current identity, presence, and praxis of the Church in America. Though no single question probed the historical influences on the current state of the American Church, questions were asked that could have led to such a response. Considering the extent to which Christendom has impacted the development of each topic of interest (identity, presence, and praxis), why was it absent from the conversation? Interview participants may have failed to mention it by name assuming that the Christendom paradigm was implied in the questioning but nevertheless, it was never stated.

A further silence occurred with regard to measuring discipleship within the interview process. Each participant was asked about how they measure spiritual growth within the lives of those to whom they minister. Apart from one exception, most of the missional practitioners did not provide a nuanced response for measuring change regarding discipleship. When asked about measuring discipleship as it relates to identity, presence, and praxis, some participants were recorded as stating, "We haven't figured out how to put metrics on it" and "It's very hard to make this a tangible measurement."[87] Others mentioned that people "start to live differently" and one practitioner seemed to indicate that he asks his trainees specific yet subjective questions to

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[86] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 200.

[87] See Appendices D-H for interviewee responses.

gauge where they are at regarding the discipleship process. However, one practitioner did provide a tangible tool for measuring change. Using the Lord's Prayer as a guide, several spiritual practices and exercises were created to be used as a type of "scorecard" for those seeking to grow in their discipleship and spiritual maturity.

There also existed silences within the survey data as well. One notable silence occurred within question eleven specifically. When asked to rate their level of agreement with several identity statements, respondents highly agreed with the statement, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ" (98.7% agreed). However, when asked about their level agreement with terms such as "missionary, called to ministry, saint, and full-time minister of the gospel" affirmation declined consistently and disagreement increased simultaneously. There may be an unspoken and alternative narrative contributing to these drastic changes that need further investigation.

This project's intervention design and implementation sought to capture and express how changes in ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are changing disciple-making paradigms within post-Christian contexts. The research was primarily accomplished by collecting data from two groups. Quantitative data was derived from local church attendees involved with an FBA-affiliated church in Tallahassee, Florida and qualitative data was collected from a number of missional practitioners across the U.S. Though the implementation of the research encountered a few obstacles, a sufficient amount of data was generated and analyzed through three frames: themes, slippages, and silences. Therefore, this project will now offer an in-depth look into the results of the study. Thus, the following section will detail the results of the intervention plan.

Chapter 4: Results

As local church contexts across America become increasingly post-Christian with time, discipleship paradigms will need to be critically evaluated and theologically reviewed to produce disciples of Jesus Christ who are equipped to engage the ever-changing culture with the Good News of Jesus Christ. By answering the questions of "who are we (ecclesial identity)?" "where are we (contextual presence)?" and "how do we get to live in light of the gospel (corporate praxis)?" local churches will be able to help mature their congregants in a biblically-grounded and contextually-appropriate discipleship paradigm. In order to provide answers to some of these questions, two groups of research participants were identified and questioned about their views on ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis. A twenty-four-question survey was produced and sent to six local churches within the Tallahassee, FL area. These churches were selected based upon their affiliation with the FBA and, other than being eighteen years old or older, there were no eligibility requirements for the individual research participants within these local churches. From these six local churches, seventy-eight surveys were completed and submitted. In addition to this, a fifteen-question interview was conducted with five missional practitioners. These missional practitioners were selected based upon their practical ministry experience within the field of missional ministry as well as the discipleship resources they have produced and are continuing to produce. These five interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded using qualitative data analysis software. Both the survey and interview results will be discussed in further detail below.

Survey Results: Identity Questions

The survey was designed to gauge the participants' thinking and beliefs around the discipleship concepts of ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis. Thus, a

twenty-four question survey was produced around these themes. The questions were distributed

thematically throughout the survey with the participants being unaware of the question order.

The first eleven questions centered around the concept of ecclesial identity while the next five

focused on the area of contextual presence. The remaining eight questions covered the area of

corporate praxis. The results from the survey will be discussed below, beginning with the

questions concerning identity.

The first six questions of the survey sought to discover two things: the extent to which

local churches utilized the conventional determinants of identity and the degree to which

congregants were aware of them. According to Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, and Corley, several

factors influence organizational identity with key values, labels, practices, and history being

among the most influential.[88]

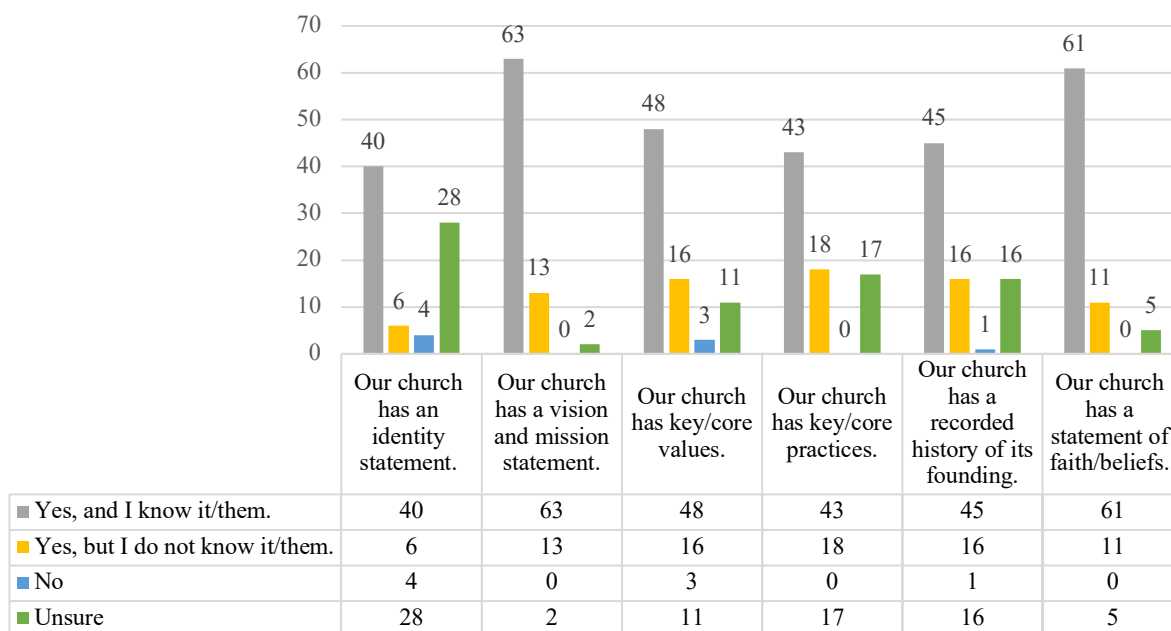|	Our church has an identity statement.	Our church has a vision and mission statement.	Our church has key/core values.	Our church has key/core practices.	Our church has a recorded history of its founding.	Our church has a statement of faith/beliefs.
■ Yes, and I know it/them.	40	63	48	43	45	61
■ Yes, but I do not know it/them.	6	13	16	18	16	11
■ No	4	0	3	0	1	0
■ Unsure	28	2	11	17	16	5

Figure 1. Survey responses, questions one through six

[88] Dennis Gioia, Shubha Patverdhan, Aimee Hamilton, Kevin Corley, "Organizational Identity Formation and Change," The Academy of Management Annals 7, no. 1 (June 2013).

A majority of participants (no less than 55%) affirmed that their church utilized the presented aspects of organizational identity and that they were personally aware of them. Two determinants, however, stood out above all the rest. When asked if their church had a vision/mission statement and if it had a statement of faith/belief, 80% and 78% of participants stated, "Yes, and I know it/them" respectively. Interestingly, when asked if the participant's local church had an "identity statement," 35.8% responded as "unsure," the highest percentage of uncertainty out of all the conventional determinants.

The next question, question seven, sought to gauge the perceived level of congruency between how the participants' local church identifies itself and its operational life. In other words, did participants note a discrepancy between their local church's beliefs and actions?

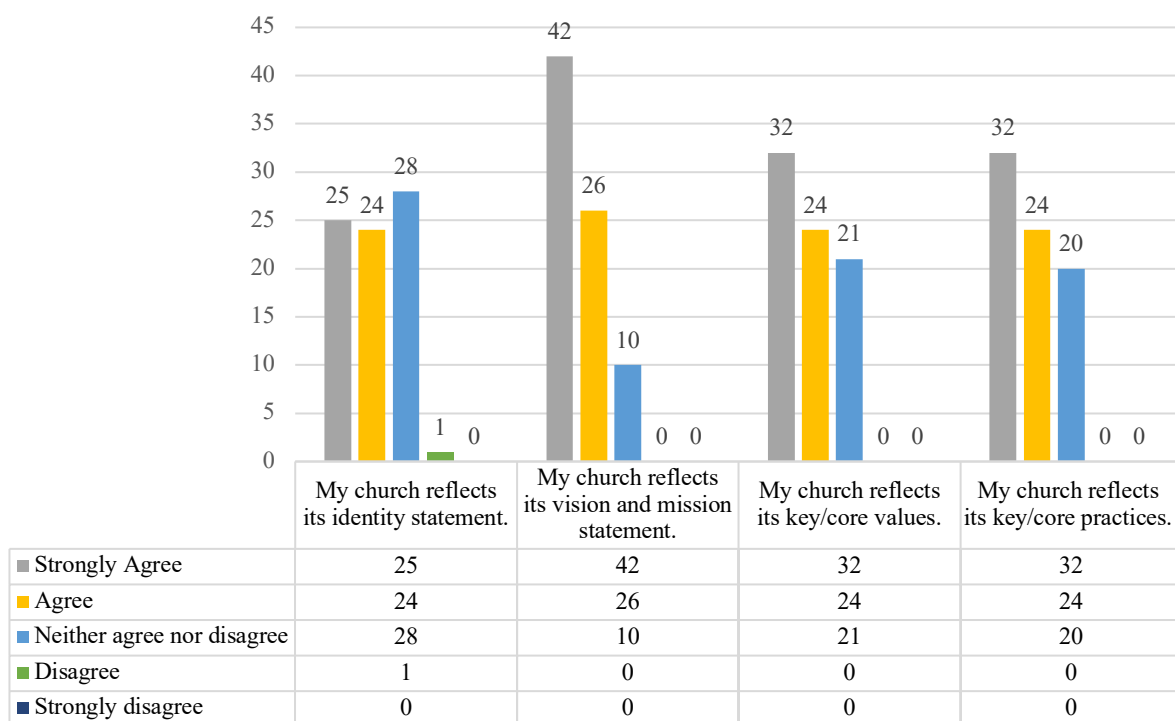|	My church reflects its identity statement.	My church reflects its vision and mission statement.	My church reflects its key/core values.	My church reflects its key/core practices.
■ Strongly Agree	25	42	32	32
■ Agree	24	26	24	24
■ Neither agree nor disagree	28	10	21	20
■ Disagree	1	0	0	0
■ Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0

Figure 2. Survey responses, question seven

No less than 62% either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with each of the statements. When asked if the participants' church reflected its identity statement, 35% indicated that they "neither

agreed nor disagreed" and one person selected "disagree." This high percentage may be due, in part, to participants being "unsure" if their local church even has an identity statement (see question one where uncertainty was also 35%).

Question eight, similar to that of question seven, asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with their local church's conventional determinants of identity.

	I support and believe in my church's identity statement.	I support and believe in my church's vision and mission statement.	I support and believe in my church's key/core values.	I support and believe in my church's key/core practices.
Strongly Agree	36	55	41	40
Agree	18	19	19	17
Neither agree nor disagree	24	4	15	17
Disagree	0	0	0	1
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
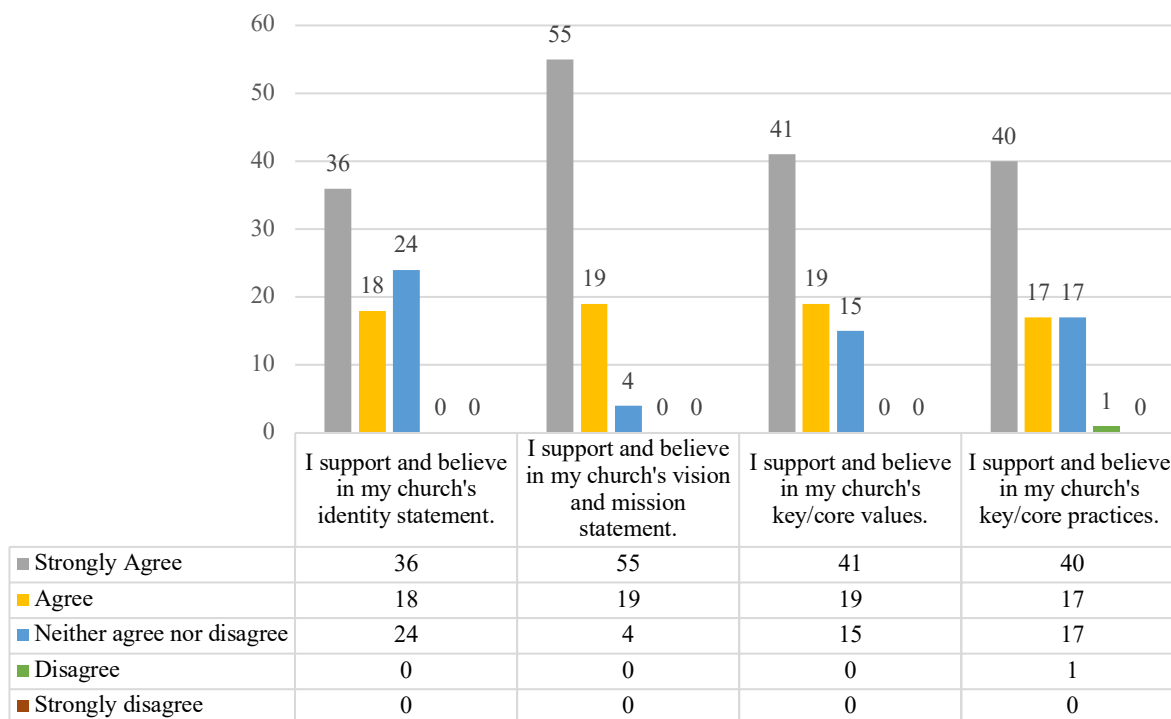
Figure 3. Survey responses, question eight

When presented with the above statements, a majority of participants (≥ 69%) indicated that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with their local church's determinants of identity. The highest level of agreement (94.8%) occurred on the statement concerning their local church's vision and mission statement.

The next questions within the "identity" section of the survey, questions nine and ten, probed participants on two key aspects of ecclesial identity: their understanding and their usage of the word "church" in everyday conversation. When asked how participants understand the

word "church," 83.3% stated that they understand the word primarily in terms of "a people" while only 14% indicated "a place" or "an event." Interestingly, when asked how they use the word "church" in everyday conversation, results varied drastically. When using the word "church," the option of "a people" decreased by over 50% while the option "a place" increased by over 400%.
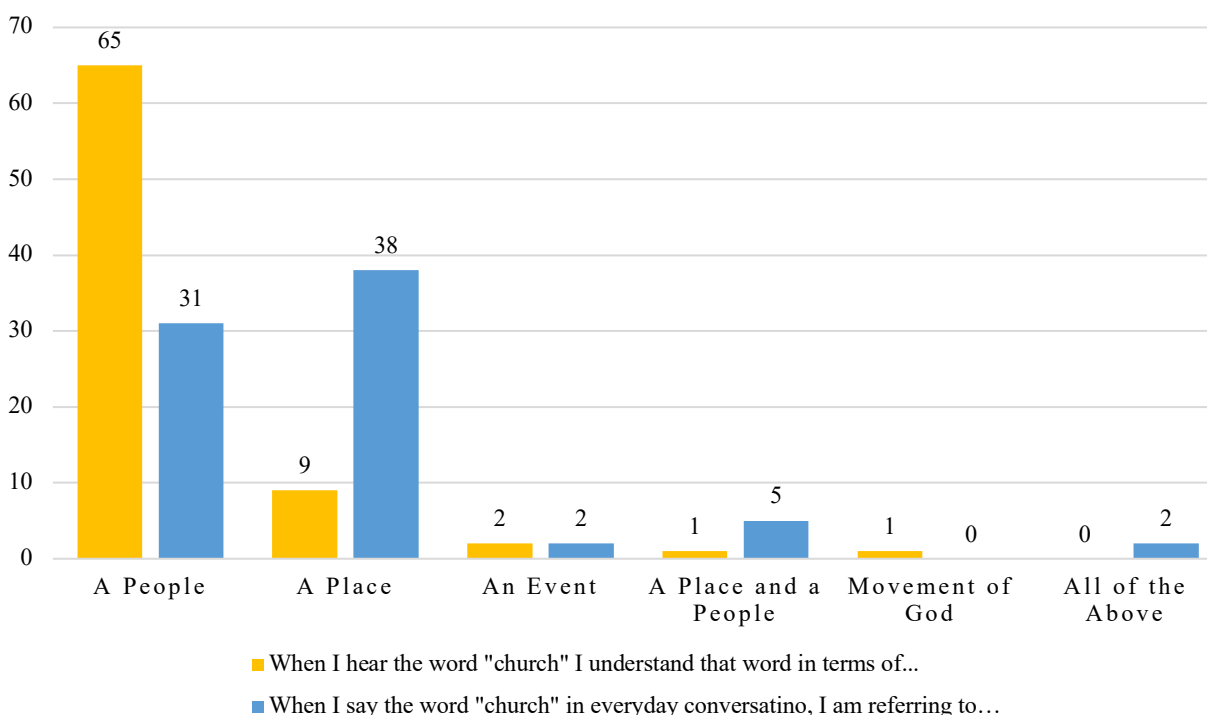
Figure 4. Survey responses, questions nine and ten

The last question within the identity section of the survey prompted participants to rate their level of agreement with a number of biblical terms and phrases related to ecclesial identity. While there was nearly unanimous agreement (98.7%) regarding the statement, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ," levels of agreement steadily declined as participants progressed through each statement (82%, 76.9%, 65.3%, and 55% respectively). What's more, participants' levels of disagreement also generally increased as they progressed through each statement with nearly a quarter of participants either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, "I am a full-

time minister of the gospel."[89] This general pattern may have been influenced, in part, by the participants' interpretation of each statement. For example, though the New Testament never divides the Church into two separate classes (the "clergy" and the "laity" or those "in ministry" and those "not in ministry"), conventional usages of these statements and phrases may have influenced participant responses.
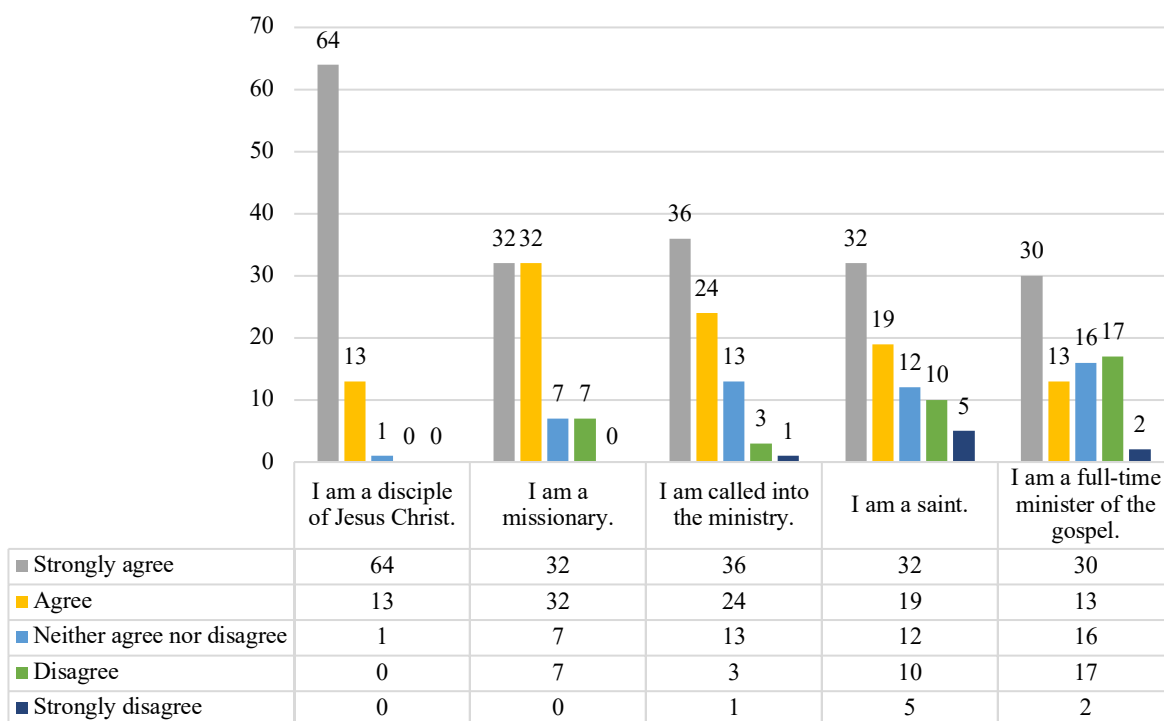
	I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.	I am a missionary.	I am called into the ministry.	I am a saint.	I am a full-time minister of the gospel.
Strongly agree	64	32	36	32	30
Agree	13	32	24	19	13
Neither agree nor disagree	1	7	13	12	16
Disagree	0	7	3	10	17
Strongly disagree	0	0	1	5	2

Figure 5. Survey responses, question eleven

Identity Conclusions

Questions one through eleven concluded the identity section within the survey and a few notable conclusions may be drawn from the results. First, the results revealed that language can betray theology. While participants stated that they predominately understood the word "church" in terms of people, they also indicated that when they use the word "church" in conversation, they mean something quite different. Thus, participants may believe that the "Church" is a

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[89] Participants who selected "disagree" and "strongly disagree" rose from 0%, 8.9%, 5.1%, 19.2%, and 24.3% respectively.

people but their language does not seem to support this belief. Second, the results revealed that participants might have an incomplete narrative as it relates to ecclesial identity. As levels of agreement steadily decreased and levels of disagreement steadily increased, question eleven revealed unfavorable responses to the more audacious statements of ecclesial identity ("missionary," "called to ministry," "saint," "full-time minister"). Third, the results revealed that while conventional determinants of identity may help facilitate a sense of organizational belonging, they do not necessarily help participants believe those things of themselves. For example, question eight revealed that a majority of participants ($\geq 69\%$) supported their local church's mission/vision statements, key/core values, and key/core practices (i.e. ministry), yet question eleven revealed that far fewer participants believed themselves to actually be "ministers" (i.e. those who do the ministry). Thus, the results seemed to display a dissonance between what a participant believes the Church does (ministry in this case) and who the Church is (the Body of Christ made up of "ministers").

Some of the discrepancies within the data above could very well be vestiges of the Christendom paradigm. For example, not identifying with the more audacious statements of ecclesial identity such as "missionary," "called to the ministry," "saint," and "full-time minister" is likely an indication that most believe in a bifurcation of the Church (i.e. the clergy-laity divide), which was established during the Christendom era. Or to say it another way, some may still hold to the fallacious belief that there are those who do ministry (clergy, staff, professional ministers, etc.) and those to whom ministry is done (laity, congregation, everyone else, etc.).

Survey Results: Presence Questions

The next five questions (questions twelve through sixteen) within the survey focused on the area of contextual presence. The first of these questions sought to determine the means through which the participants' local church engages their community.
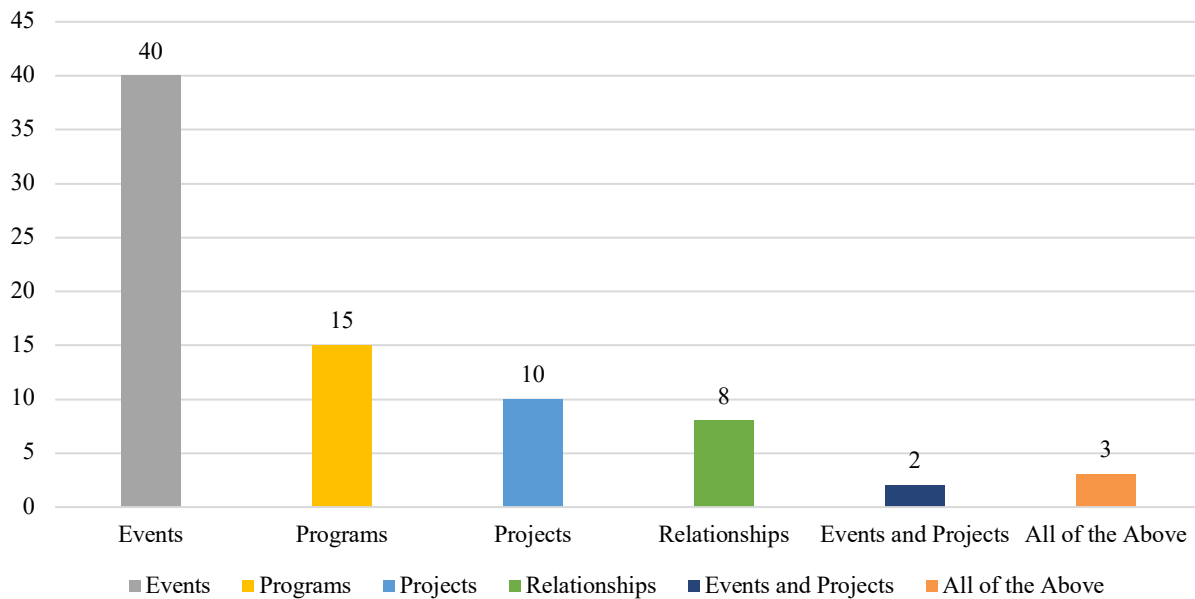

Figure 6. Survey responses, question twelve

A majority (51.3%) of participants indicated that their local church primarily engages their local context through "events." The next largest segment, that of "programs," only accounted for 19.2% of responses while "projects" and "relationships" tallied less than a quarter (23.1%) of all responses. "Help text" was provided on this question to aid participants in selecting the best choice.[90]

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[90] "Events" were interpreted as things such as Sunday services, affinity-based events, and holiday events. "Programs" were interpreted as things such as service projects and local mission projects. "Programs" were interpreted as things such as evangelism programs and Sunday morning ministries. "Relationships" were interpreted as being built through one's vocation or hobbies.

Question thirteen sought to gauge participants' perception of their local church's mode of contextual engagement. "Help text" was provided on this question to aid the participants in selecting the most appropriate term.[91]
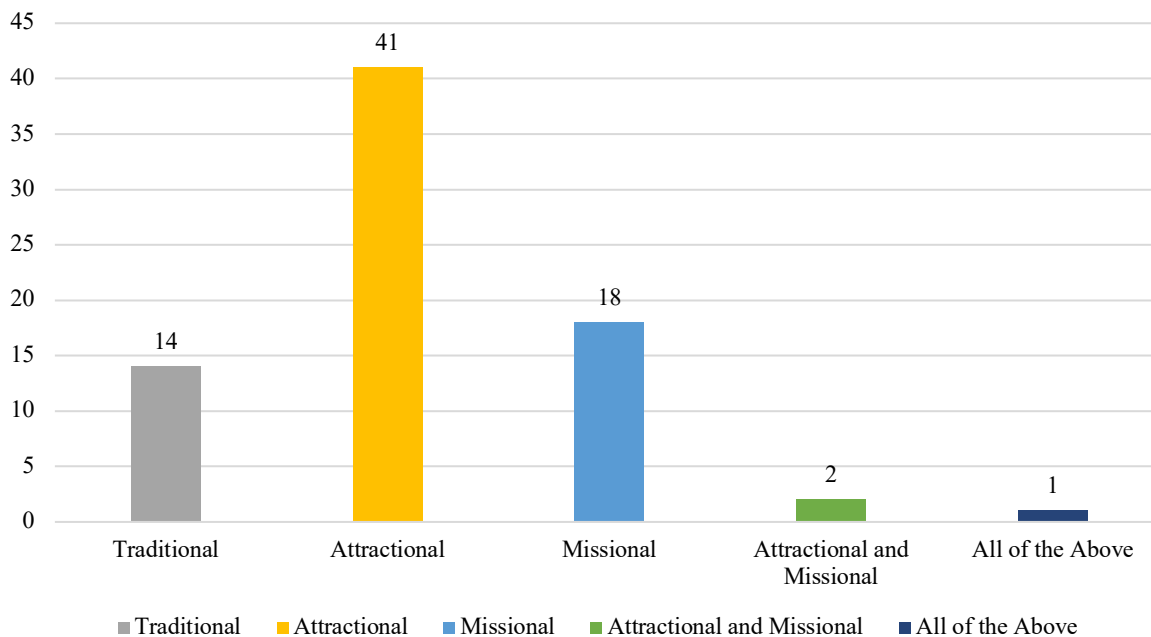

Figure 7. Survey responses, question thirteen

While a majority of participants (52.6%) indicated that their local church was "Attractional," the next largest segment was that of "Missional" at 23.1%. Considering the fact that in the previous question only 10.3% of respondents said that their local church engaged the community through "relationships," the percentage of those who selected the option of "Missional" seems high.

The next question sought to determine the effects of a post-Christian culture on the local church's contextual presence. In other words, would an ever-increasing post-Christian culture

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[91] Traditional was defined as "we expect our community to come to our services/events where the Gospel will be shared." Attractional was defined as, "we invite our community to come to our events/programs where the Gospel will be shared." Missional was defined as, "we embed into our community where the Gospel is made visible through word and deed."

alter a local church's perspective on their community? "Help text" was also provided on this question to assist the participants in determining their best responses.[92]

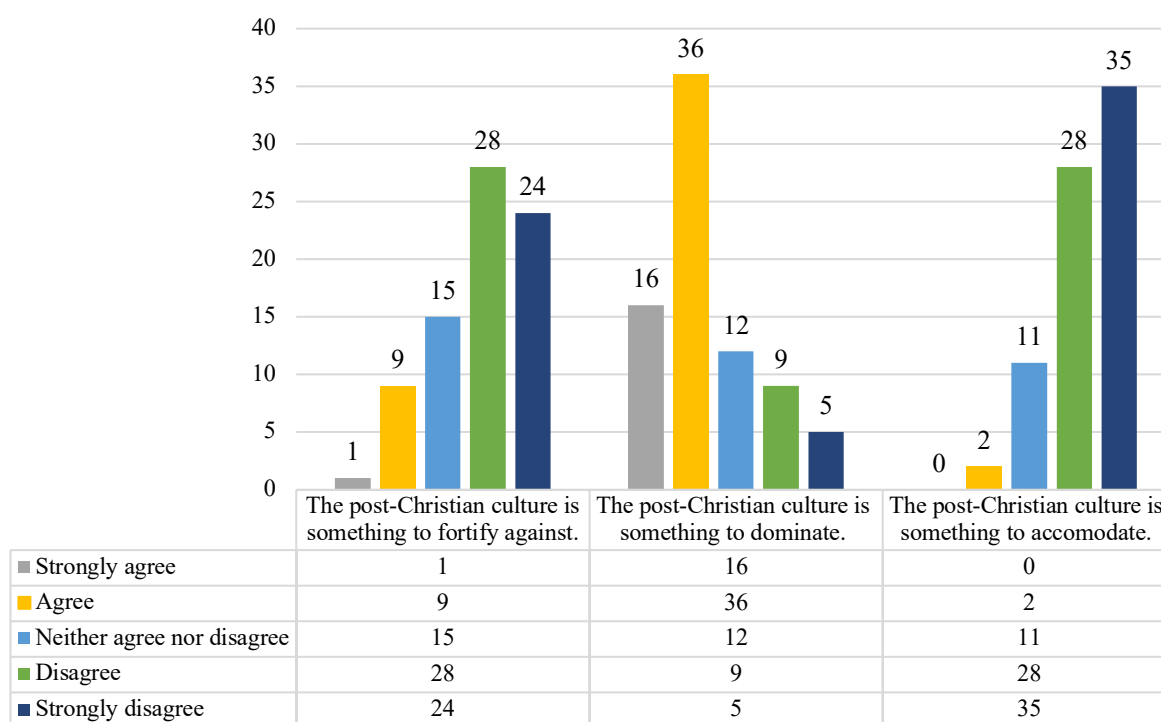|	The post-Christian culture is something to fortify against.	The post-Christian culture is something to dominate.	The post-Christian culture is something to accomodate.
Strongly agree	1	16	0
Agree	9	36	2
Neither agree nor disagree	15	12	11
Disagree	28	9	28
Strongly disagree	24	5	35

Figure 8. Survey responses, question fourteen

A majority of respondents (67.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with "fortifying against" a post-Christian culture. Similarly, 82.8% of respondents indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed on "accommodating with" a post-Christian culture. Interestingly, 66.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the post-Christian culture is something to 'dominate."

The last two questions within the presence section of the survey (questions fifteen and sixteen) sought to determine the primary recipients of evangelism and discipleship within the participants' local church. The terms "evangelism" and "discipleship" were intentionally left ambiguous in order to gauge the unique perspective of each participant. 85.9% of respondents

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[92] "Fortify against" was defined as, "to hide or retreat from because of its negative influence." "Dominate" was defined as, "to fight against so as to win back a Christian worldview." "Accommodate" was defined as, "to settle with or compromise with."

indicated that their church focuses its evangelism efforts on the "un-churched" and "not-yet believers" while only 6.4% stated that they were focused on "believers." Conversely, when asked about their church's discipleship efforts, 34.6% stated that they were focused on the "un-churched" and "not-yet believers" while 55.1% indicated that they were focused on "believers."
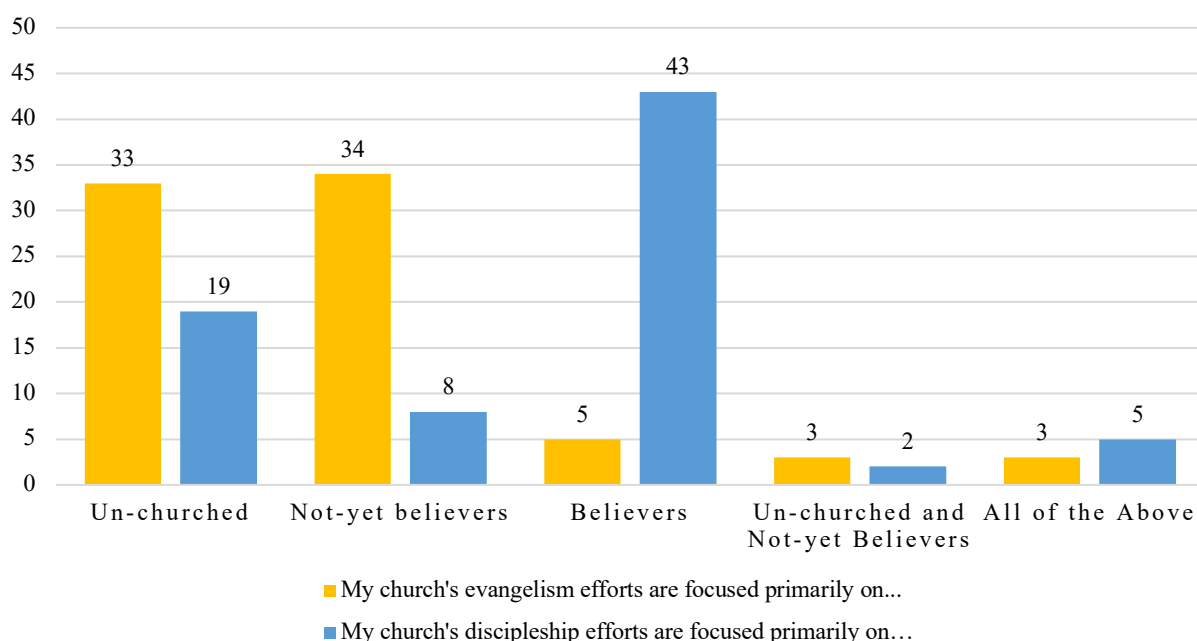

Figure 9. Survey responses, questions fifteen through sixteen

Presence Conclusions

Since every local church is situated within a unique context, understanding how the immediate culture perceives the Church becomes vital to the health of their relationship and vice versa. To simply assume that what has been done in the past will continue to be effective is to suggest that either nothing has changed or ever will. Thus, analyzing a local church's contextual presence must be an integral part of their discipleship paradigm. Questions twelve through sixteen conclude the presence portion of the survey and a few notable conclusions may be drawn from the results. First, there is a desire for participants to identify their local church as missional. Question thirteen revealed that 27.6% of participants indicated that their church was either

"missional," "attractional and missional," or "all of the above," yet question twelve displayed results more congruent with "attractional" expressions of ministry. Thus, participants displayed a desire to think of one's church as "missional" while exhibiting more "attractional" means of ministry. Second, the "threat" of an ever-increasing post-Christian culture may be leading to an overly aggressive cultural posture. With 66.7% of participants indicating that the post-Christian culture is something in which to "dominate," are local churches exhibiting a counterproductive posture to those around them? Third, results displayed a rigid segmentation between evangelism and discipleship. The majority of participants indicated that their local church's evangelism efforts are reserved for those who do not yet display a saving faith in Jesus Christ and their discipleship efforts are reserved for those who already identify as Christians. This rigid segmentation may inadvertently produce a ministry philosophy that is more conquest-like in nature as opposed to incarnational.

<div align="center">Survey Results: Praxis Questions</div>

The final section of the survey, questions seventeen through twenty-four, focused on the area of praxis. Specifically, the first four questions of this section probed participants on the two ordinances of the local church: baptism and communion. These questions asked about where each of these ordinances has occurred and the personnel responsible for administering them. A majority of respondents (50% and 65.4% respectively) indicated that both baptism and communion had been observed outside of a typical Sunday morning service. However, when asked if either of these ordinances had been entirely "lay-led," 57.7% indicated that communion had not been administered without the assistance of clergy while 46.2% indicated that baptisms had not been performed without the assistance of clergy. Therefore, baptisms had a much higher

chance of being performed outside of a typical Sunday morning church service and being "lay-led" as opposed to communion.
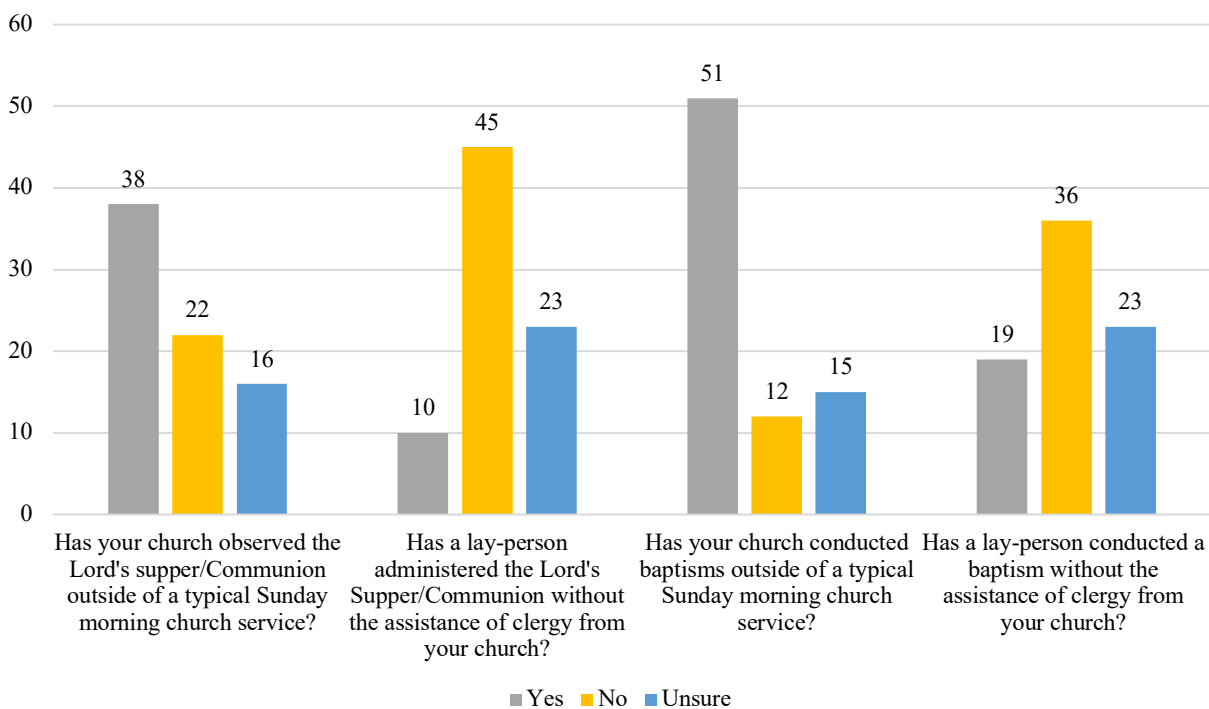
Figure 10. Survey responses, questions seventeen through twenty

The next question, question twenty-one, asked participants to gauge the percentage of individuals involved in a small group within their local church. 53.2% of respondents stated that their church has less than 40% of people in small groups while only 10.4% indicated that their church has more than 80% of people in small groups.
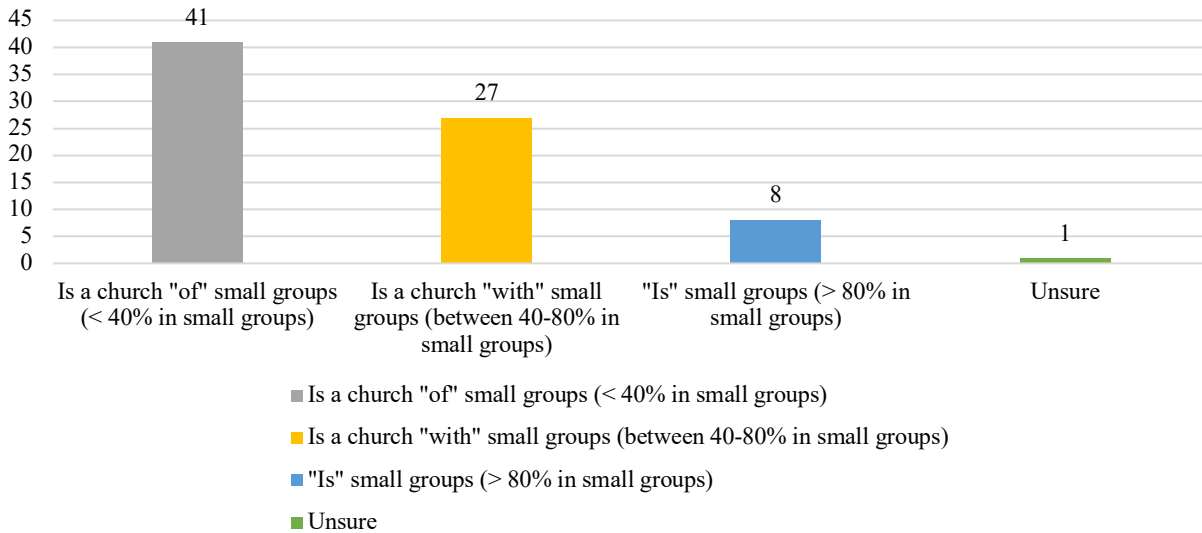
Figure 11. Survey responses, question twenty-one

Question twenty-two asked participants about the meeting location of their small group. The majority of respondents indicate that they either met on their local church's property (48.7%) or within someone's home (38.5%). Only 2.6% of respondents indicated that they meet in a public space such as a coffee shop, bookstore, or restaurant.
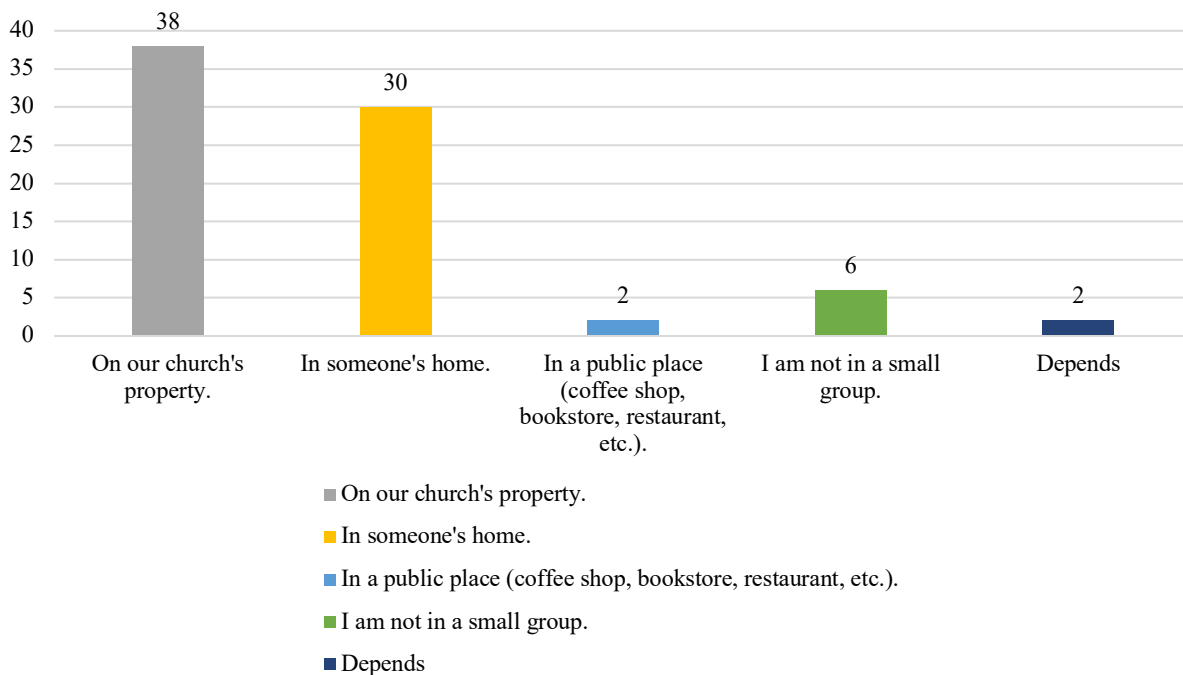
Figure 12. Survey responses, question twenty-two

Question twenty-three sought to gauge the participants' perceived level of importance with attending a small group as compared to attending a typical church service. 78.9% indicated that they view attending a small group as equally important as that of a church service while 17.1% indicated that they view small group attendance as less important than attending a typical church service.
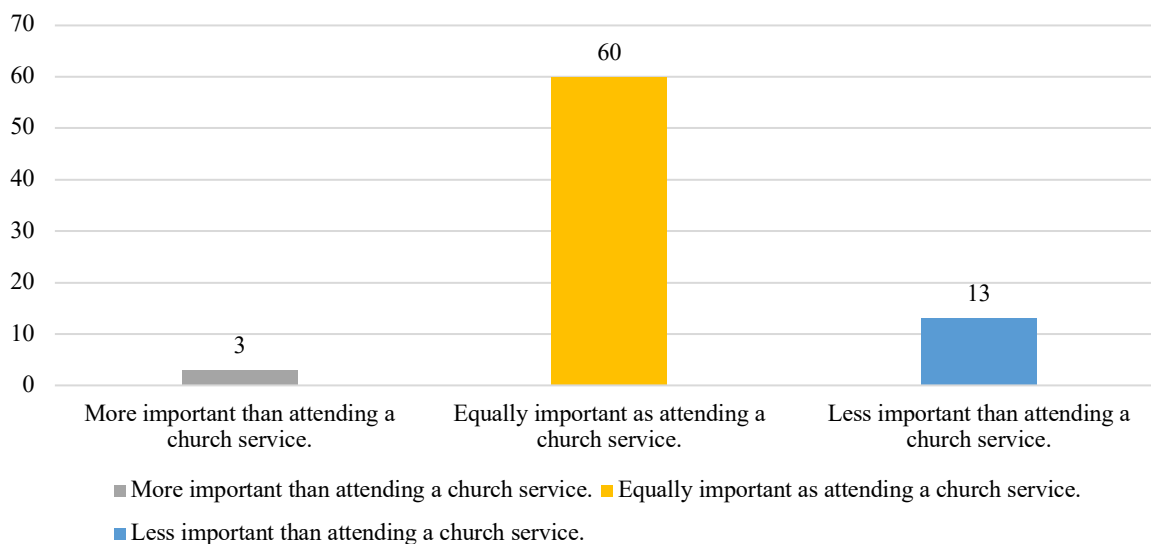
Figure 13. Survey responses, question twenty-three

The final question within the praxis section of the survey questioned participants on their level of frequency concerning several commonly associated small group practices. Interestingly, 75% of respondents stated that their small group "never" shares the Lord's Supper together and 84% indicated that their small group "never" baptizes people. What's more, when asked if their small group makes disciples 21.6% indicated that they do so "frequently" while a majority (55.4%) reported that they do so only "occasionally." Further, when asked if their small group multiplies into new groups, 49.3% stated they do so either "rarely" or "very rarely" while 30.9% reported that they never do so.

	My small group shares the Lord's Supper together.	My small group baptizes people.	My small group makes disciples.	My small group invites not-yet believers to the group.	My small group serves the "least of these."	My small group multiplies into new groups.
Frequently	0	0	16	20	16	2
Occasionally	3	0	41	31	26	12
Rarely	9	9	9	12	14	19
Very Rarely	7	3	5	8	10	16
Never	57	63	3	3	0	22

Figure 14. Survey responses, question twenty-four

Praxis Conclusions

Questions seventeen through twenty-four conclude the praxis portion of the survey and a

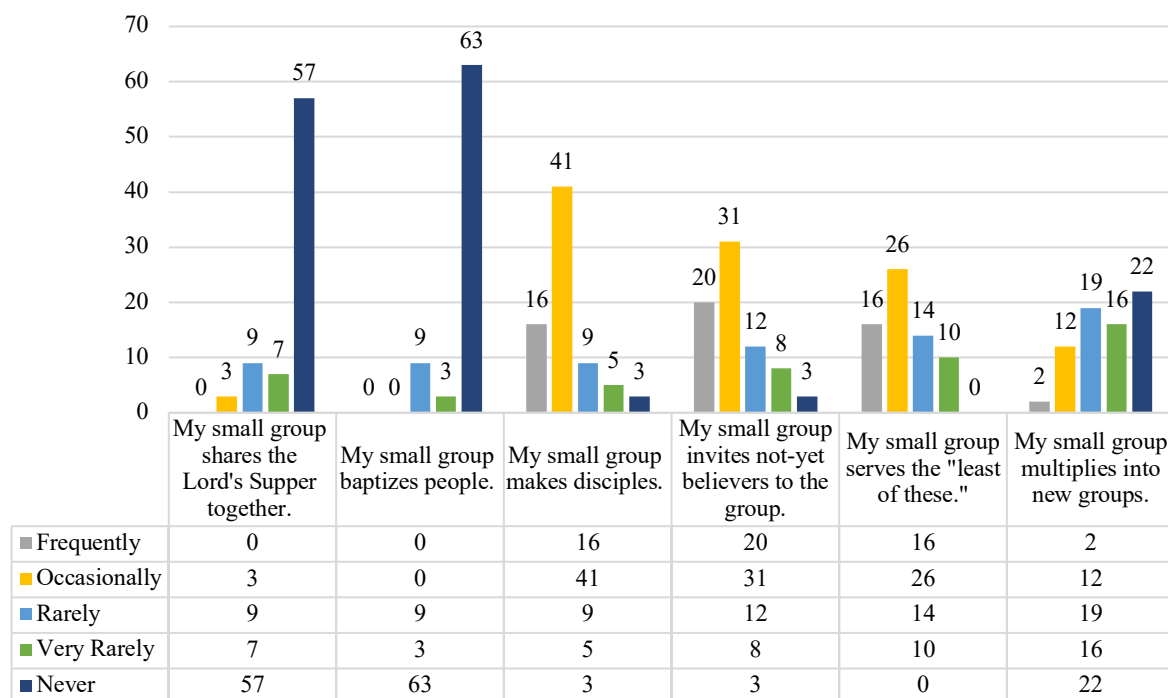few notable conclusions may be drawn from the results. First, many formative practices are

absent from the smaller expressions of church life, namely small groups. When questions

seventeen through twenty and question twenty-four are juxtaposed with one another, two

practices are immediately absent within the majority of small groups: baptism and communion.[93]

What's more, when it came to the participants' small group "making disciples," "inviting not-yet

believers" to the group, "serving" others, and "multiplying into new groups" those who selected

"rarely," "very rarely," and "never" progressively rose from statement to statement (22.9%,

31.1%, 36.4%, and 80.3% respectively). Second, the purpose of small groups may need to be

clarified within local churches. While question twenty-three revealed that 78.9% of participants

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[93] 75% and 84% of participants indicated that their small group never shares the Lord's Supper together and never baptizes people.

believe that gathering with their small group is equally as important as attending a church service, understanding why it is important to intentionally gather with a small group may need to be recalibrated.

Having presented the results from Research Instrument A (the twenty-four-question survey) and provided a few notable conclusions from each section (identity, presence, and praxis), the results from Research Instrument B (interview of missional practitioners) will now be presented and discussed.

Interview Results: Identity Questions

The interview portion of this project was designed to measure how missional practitioners have leveraged the aspects of ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis to reshape discipleship paradigms within their unique ministry contexts. The interview was organized around these themes with four questions being allotted to identity, three questions to presence, and two questions to praxis. The interviewees were given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. Thus, the designations "MP I-V" correlate to each missional practitioner (MP I= "missional practitioner I" and so on).[94] The terms that are used in the left-hand column of Figures 15 through 23 represent the unique responses from each missional practitioner and serve as a summation of the ideas presented by each interviewee.[95] The results from these interviews will be presented below beginning with the questions pertaining to identity.

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[94] For a reference of each missional practitioner's ministry location, reference Table 3 "Research Group I" in Chapter 3.

[95] If further clarification is needed regarding what each statement means, the interview transcripts may be found in the appendices (Appendix D-H).

Question one gauged which aspects of ecclesial identity were most influential for discipleship within the ministry context of each missional practitioner. A number of responses were recorded but two responses were more prevalent than the rest. The aspects of "Family" and the "Missionary Nature" of the Church generated a frequency percentage of 22.22%. These two results not only correspond with the larger academic community concerning identity but also affirm that a missional understanding of the nature of the Church is reshaping discipleship at least within the interviewees' contexts.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● **A Blessing**	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)	0	2 (11.11%)
● **Agents of God**	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)	0	2 (11.11%)
● **Family**	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)	2 (11.11%)	4 (22.22%)
● **Missionary Nature**	2 (11.11%)	0	2 (11.11%)	0	0	4 (22.22%)
● **Movement**	0	2 (11.11%)	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)
● **Radical Love**	0	2 (11.11%)	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)
● **"Servanthood"**	0	2 (11.11%)	0	0	0	2 (11.11%)
Totals	2 (11.11%)	6 (33.33%)	2 (11.11%)	6 (33.33%)	2 (11.11%)	18 (100%)

Figure 15. Interview responses, central and foundational aspects of identity

Question two asked interviewees about false beliefs, or potentially destructive beliefs, concerning ecclesial identity and the implications of adopting or perpetuating such views. Results varied drastically with responses such as "Do to Be," "Church as Time," and "Narcissism" appearing in 16.67% of responses. However, the most frequent response was viewing the local church through a lens of "Consumerism." This "negative" aspect of identity appeared in 25% of the responses. Determining which "false beliefs" pose the greatest threat to ecclesial identity aids the discipleship process. Discipleship is as much a process of "unlearning" as it is learning and often times a deconstruction of beliefs must occur prior to reconstructing a more biblical paradigm.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● "Do to Be"	0	0	0	0	2 (16.67%)	2 (16.67%)
● Church as Business	1 (8.33%)	0	0	0	0	1 (8.33%)
● Church as Place	1 (8.33%)	0	0	0	0	1 (8.33%)
● Church as Time	2 (16.67%)	0	0	0	0	2 (16.67%)
● Consumerism	1 (8.33%)	2 (16.67%)	0	0	0	3 (25%)
● Living "Above Place."	0	0	1 (8.33%)	0	0	1 (8.33%)
● Narcissism	0	0	1 (8.33%)	1 (8.33%)	0	2 (16.67%)
Totals	5 (41.67%)	2 (16.67%)	2 (16.67%)	1 (8.33%)	2 (16.67%)	12 (100%)

Figure 16. Interview responses, false beliefs about identity

Question three probed interviewees as to the ways in which they help train others in ecclesial identity. Two interviewees mentioned processes of "Introspection and Self-Awareness" as their preferred means for training in ecclesial identity (22.22%). When questioned further, these processes of introspection and self-awareness took place within the context of conversations, training, and/or personal times of devotion. Only one interviewee (MP IV) mentioned an intentional, reproducible, and specific tool used for training others in identity formation. The vast majority of responses were more subjective in nature and unique to their ministry context and the individual needs of those to whom they were training.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● "Gospel Re-engineering"	0	0	1 (11.11%)	0	0	1 (11.11%)
● Introspection and Self-Awareness	0	1 (11.11%)	0	1 (11.11%)	0	2 (22.22%)
● Missiology and Ecclesiology	1 (11.11%)	0	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)
● Mission Experiences	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)	0	1 (11.11%)
● Narrative Bible Teaching	0	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)	1 (11.11%)
● Paradigm Shifts	1 (11.11%)	0	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)
● Proclaim "Kingdom Reality"	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)	0	1 (11.11%)
● Spiritual Practices (Prayer, Meditation, etc.)	0	0	0	1 (11.11%)	0	1 (11.11%)
Totals	2 (22.22%)	1 (11.11%)	1 (11.11%)	4 (44.44%)	1 (11.11%)	9 (100%)

Figure 17. Interview responses, training in identity

Question four asked the missional practitioners about the indicators they looked for when measuring or validating the effectiveness of their training. The two most frequent responses were "Language Shift" and "Lifestyle Changes" (25% and 37.5% respectively). Although difficult to quantify, practitioners insisted that these two indicators were the strongest, believing that personal change necessarily manifests itself through one's language and behavior.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● Exhibiting a "Holy Discontent"	1 (12.5%)	0	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)
● Language Shift	0	0	0	0	2 (25%)	2 (25%)
● Lifestyle Changes	1 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)
● Multiplying Disciples	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (12.5%)
● Self Awareness	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)
Totals	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)	8 (100%)

Figure 18. Interview responses, reshaping in identity

Identity Conclusions

Questions one through four conclude the identity portion of the interview and a few notable conclusions are worth mentioning. First, cultural ideologies may be eroding many of the critical and foundational aspects of ecclesial identity. For example, the most destructive aspect of "false identity" (consumerism) is antithetical to the most influential aspects of identity (family and missionary nature). The very aspects that local churches are attempting to cultivate within their congregants are being challenged by consumerism, which permeates their surrounding culture. Second, training in identity formation needs greater specificity and reproducibility. Surprisingly, most interviewees were unable or did not articulate a specific plan for measuring the success of their identity training among their trainees. As identity formation becomes more important over time, a specific and measurable tool will need to be developed. Third, witnessing changes in identity, and ultimately discipleship will require greater proximity to one another. As question four displayed, "Lifestyle Changes" and "Language Shifts" are only noticeable when

lives intersect and when people are in close proximity with one another. Thus, discipleship training will require other modes that encourage closer proximity with one another besides the typical classroom, lecture hall, and seminar modes of discipleship.[96]

<p style="text-align:center">Interview Results: Presence Questions</p>

The next three questions comprise the "presence" section of the interview. Like the first question within the identity section of the interview, the first question within this section asked interviewees which aspect of presence was most influential for their ministry context. The results revealed that both the "Incarnation" and a "Theology of Place" were most influential (both had a frequency rating of 25%). These two aspects align with the broader academic community regarding the development of presence within a local context.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● "Go and Be"	0	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
● "Micro-Focus"	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (12.5%)
● Humility	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	1 (12.5%)
● Incarnation	1 (12.5%)	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)
● Neighboring	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (12.5%)
● Theology of Place	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0	0	2 (25%)
Totals	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	8 (100%)

Figure 19. Interview responses, influential aspects of presence

The next question within this section asked interviewees which false belief about presence is most problematic or destructive within their ministry context. This question was only asked to MP I and MP III and no one answer stood out more than the rest. With that said, these answers do provide a glimpse into the challenges that many local churches experience within their contexts.

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[96] For a list of all the coded responses from the identity questions, see Appendix C.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● **Attractional Model**	0	0	1 (25%)	0	0	1 (25%)
● **Impatience**	0	0	1 (25%)	0	0	1 (25%)
● **Presence Without Engagement**	0	0	1 (25%)	0	0	1 (25%)
● **Sacred/Secular Divide**	1 (25%)	0	0	0	0	1 (25%)
Totals	1 (25%)	0	3 (75%)	0	0	4 (100%)

Figure 20. Interview responses, false beliefs about presence

The final question within the presence section sought to discern the best practices for training others regarding "presence." MP I was the only interviewee who was not administered the question. Even among the remaining four interviewees, a common answer never emerged. Responses varied from different aspects of theology to cultivating actual practices among trainees.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● **"Shema" Theology**	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	1 (12.5%)
● **Creation Theology**	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	1 (12.5%)
● **Hospitality**	0	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
● **Kingdom Theology**	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	1 (12.5%)
● **Literal Neighboring**	0	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (12.5%)
● **Making Disciples**	0	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
● **Theology of Incarnation**	0	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
● **Theology of Place (Jer. 29; Acts 17)**	0	1 (12.5%)	0	0	0	1 (12.5%)
Totals	0	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	8 (100%)

Figure 21. Interview responses, training in presence

Presence Conclusions

These three questions conclude the presence portion of the interview and a few notable observations can be made. First, presence requires a rootedness within the local culture. As question one demonstrated, establishing presence requires a robust theology of place as well as a theology of the Incarnation. These two theological concepts have the potential to reshape how both local churches and individuals engage their community, neighborhoods, workplaces, and

households. Second, further investigation is required to establish best practices for training others in presence. Surprisingly, a consensus was not established regarding training in presence. Each missional practitioner found certain theological aspects to have greatly influenced their contextual presence and no one aspect stood out as most important. Further study will be required to determine exactly which aspects of presence need to be deconstructed and reconstructed within trainees' theology and lives.[97]

<div align="center">Interview Results: Praxis Questions</div>

The first question within the praxis section of the interview asked which expressions of praxis were most influential from the perspective of a believer and not-yet believer. Answers varied drastically but "Radical Hospitality" was mentioned by three separate interviewees and generated a frequency rating of 30%. This answer correlates to the larger academic community's insistence upon this highly potent practice. Not only is radical hospitality a spiritually vibrant practice for Christians but it also can be an irresistible and contagious practice for not-yet believers within post-Christian contexts.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● "Mixed" Discipleship	0	0	0	1 (10%)	0	1 (10%)
● Acts of Mercy and Justice	0	0	1 (10%)	0	0	1 (10%)
● Family on Mission	0	0	0	0	1 (10%)	1 (10%)
● Foster Care	1 (10%)	0	0	0	0	1 (10%)
● Generosity	1 (10%)	0	0	0	0	1 (10%)
● Radical Hospitality	1 (10%)	0	1 (10%)	0	1 (10%)	3 (30%)
● Sacrifice	1 (10%)	0	0	0	0	1 (10%)
● Spiritual Experiments	0	0	0	1 (10%)	0	1 (10%)
Totals	4 (40%)	0	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)

Figure 22. Interview responses, expressions of praxis

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[97] For a list of all the coded responses from the presence questions, see Appendix C.

The last question within the praxis section asked interviewees about praxis that should be altered for the future health of the local church. Though this question was only asked to three practitioners (MP I, MP III, and MP IV), the results were interesting. Two separate practitioners believed that local churches often overemphasize and over-prioritize planning Sunday services and preaching. Rather than devoting the majority of one's time, money, and energy to this behavior, the interviewees suggested allocating time, money, and energy elsewhere.

	MP I	MP II	MP III	MP IV	MP V	Totals
● **Activities for Ourselves**	1 (33.33%)	0	0	0	0	1 (33.33%)
● **Overemphasizing Services and Preaching**	0	0	1 (33.33%)	1 (33.33%)	0	2 (66.67%)
Totals	1 (33.33%)	0	1 (33.33%)	1 (33.33%)	0	3 (100%)

Figure 23. Interview responses, praxis to alter

Praxis Conclusions

These two questions conclude the praxis portion of the interview and one notable conclusion may be drawn. First, praxis is shifting from the macro-level (corporate gatherings, traditional church services, etc.) to the micro-level (smaller and simpler gatherings of the church) within post-Christian contexts. As the culture has become increasingly post-Christian, local churches have experienced a decrease in regular worship attendance and yet, many local churches continue to function as if this is not the case. As question one within the praxis section revealed ("Radical Hospitality" at 30%), embracing praxis on a micro-level as opposed to a macro-level is more contextually appropriate and conducive for engaging with not-yet believers. Furthermore, as question two suggested, an "overemphasis on services and preaching" may be counter-productive given these trends within post-Christian contexts. Reallocating resources toward micro-level praxis may be more contextually appropriate.[98]

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[98] For a list of all the coded responses from the identity questions, see Appendix C.

Overall, the interview data derived from each missional practitioner corresponded to the larger academic community's perspective on identity, presence, and praxis. In general, there is an emphasis on the missionary nature of the church, developing a more robust theology of the Incarnation, and establishing a more decentralized, grassroots expression for small groups. These emphases seem to serve as the backbone for reshaping discipleship within post-Christian contexts.

While the majority of the results from the survey indicate a ministry philosophy more conducive to the Christendom era, it was interesting to note that the interviewees neglected to mention Christendom's influence upon the current state of discipleship in America. The reason for this is not necessarily clear given the current data. While only speculative, this silence could have been produced, in part, by the wording of the interview questions. It is doubtful to believe that the interviewees' silence in this area indicates a denial of Christendom's influence on discipleship given their consistent correlation to the larger academic community throughout the rest of the interview. In all, the interview results indicate that strategic changes are occurring, and must continue to occur, with regard to identity, presence, and praxis within post-Christian contexts. Having noted these results this paper will now propose broader conclusions and discuss where the research should go from here.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This specific aim of this research project was to capture and express how changes in ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis are reshaping disciple making within post-Christian contexts. Since American churches have displayed an inability to break away from a Christendom paradigm despite a shift in the religious and spiritual landscape, many churches are experiencing a disciple making crisis. This crisis has manifested itself in a number of ways but can most notably be seen through decreases in church attendance, religious affiliation, and biblical worldviews. While a number of specific conclusions were drawn in the previous chapter as to how ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis may actually alter disciple making within post-Christian contexts, this chapter will outline a few broader conclusions to consider as the research regarding this problem moves forward.

First, the conventional determinants of organizational identity were largely absent from the interviewee's responses. The interview data revealed that biblical concepts such as the missionary nature and familial nature of the Church were much more formative in establishing ecclesial identity within post-Christian contexts. This is in line with the larger academic community's findings as well. For instance, David Bosch in articulating a major paradigm shift in missiology writes, "Here [in 1 Peter 2:9] the church is not the *sender* but the one *sent*. Its mission is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission. Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology (*emphasis added).*"[99] Brad Brisco adds further clarification to this aspect of identity by stating,

> Therefore, the church doesn't just *send* missionaries; the church *is* the missionary. Individually and collectively as the body of Christ, we are a sent, missionary church. We should be sending the people in the church out among the people of

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[99] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 381.

the world rather than attempting to attract the people of the world in among the people of the church.[100]

The risk with relying solely upon conventional determinants to produce ecclesial identity (vision/mission statements, key/core values, key/core practices, statements of belief/faith, recorded histories, etc.) is that local churches may generate organizational membership without facilitating identity transformation within their congregants. Data collected from the survey participants' level of agreement with specific terms associated with identity affirms this. Specifically, the survey respondents' language displayed a readiness to ascribe to and support their organization's identity statements but were less sure about assigning those same aspects to themselves (see survey questions one through eleven in the previous chapter). However, the interviewees expressly stated that when true identity reshaping is occurring, it manifests itself through both lifestyle changes and language shifts. Sociologists agree that language not only creates culture but can also confirm or deny it. Thus, listening to the way congregants speak about the Church, themselves, and others can offer clues into how they understand their own identity and suggest areas that may need to be reconstructed to align more fully with the critical and foundational aspects of ecclesial identity found in the Scriptures.

Second, there was a strong desire for local churches to consider themselves missional while displaying more attractional means of ministry. Though the majority of survey participants indicated that their local church engages their immediate context through events (Sunday services, affinity-based events, holiday events, etc.), a disproportionate amount also described the *way* they engage their community as "missional." This may be due, in part, to an inaccurate understanding of what the word "missional" means. In speaking to what the word "missional" does not mean, Alan Hirsch indicates that it is not simply a synonym for the "emerging church"

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[100] Brad Brisco, *Rethink,* 11-12.

or being "evangelistic" or "seeker-sensitive." In addition, the word is concerned with more than social justice and should not even be thought of as coterminous with "church growth."[101] This discrepancy may actually be considered a positive finding for the local church in America. In other words, this may reveal a desire to embrace a more missional and incarnational presence within post-Christian contexts but uncertainty about how to go about changing current means and mechanisms of ministry. Since the culture is becoming increasingly post-Christian, to assume that people will attend religious services and activities because local churches simply exist can no longer be considered a realistic expectation. Furthermore, invitations to attend church services, while well-intentioned, ultimately require the post-Christian culture to act as the missionary, crossing over cultural boundaries into new cultural territory. Said another way, a traditional or attractional contextual presence asks the post-Christian culture to come to them on their terms.

Third, praxis within small groups gravitated toward group maintenance rather than mission. Praxis survey questions, particularly question twenty-four, revealed that the more outward, missional practices of small group life were observed less frequently than expected. Such things as inviting "not-yet believers" to one's small groups, serving the "least of these," and multiplying into new groups were all conspicuously observed with less and less frequency. In contrast to this, interview results revealed that the most potent and significant expression of praxis within post-Christian contexts was that of "Radical Hospitality," a distinctly outward practice. Given the fact that post-Christian contexts are becoming more entrenched and more

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[101] Hirsch, Alan. "Defining Missional." *Christianity Today*, Fall 2008.

prevalent, practicing "Radical Hospitality" provides a less threatening and highly relational

bridge with which to engage others with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Local churches that express a desire to begin acting upon some of the findings of this

research may find it helpful to focus on one aspect of their discipleship paradigm at a time. As

was mentioned earlier, reshaping paradigms does not occur quickly nor is it always linear,

therefore beginning with small, incremental steps may be the best way forward for local

churches wishing to implement change. Since, as Max De Pree once said, "The first job of a

leader is to define reality," local church leadership would be wise to take inventory of their

current state of discipleship as it relates to ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate

praxis.[102] Taking an inventory could occur in a variety of ways but is likely best executed within

small, focused groups. For example, local churches may wish to use the assessment utilized by

this research project (Research Instrument A) in an attempt to gauge how the executive

leadership or current staff are thinking about these aspects of discipleship. Once the initial

inventory has been taken, a follow-up meeting concerning their responses would add further

clarification to the responses received. Establishing this baseline will be critical for

implementing further changes regarding ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate

praxis. What follows are some simple suggestions for ways in which local churches can begin to

delve more into these topics.

Since it is probable that most local churches do not have an official identity statement,

crafting one may be a good place to begin. Local churches can begin to formulate their identity

statements by referencing some of the keywords and phrases related to biblical identity (a sample

can be found in Table 5). Furthermore, asking questions may be helpful in beginning the

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[102] Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art*, (New York: Doubelday, 1989), 9.

conversation. Who are we as a church? Who has God called us to be as a people? What do we want to be known for/How do we want to be remembered in this community? Once local churches begin to formulate their responses, it would be profitable to then perform a simple organizational diagnostic. Using their identity statement as a baseline, local churches could then begin to critically evaluate their ministry programs and operating budgets by this official statement. Do their beliefs match their practices and programs? Does their overall budget and allocation of resources align with their beliefs or does it seem to contradict their identity statement? What changes are necessary to bring all of these things into agreement and alignment?

Local churches looking to influence change related to contextual presence may wish to begin by gaining a bird's-eye view of their local context. This can be performed by generating a basic demographical overview of their county, town, or city and establishing a five to ten-mile radius of interest around their current property. These basic tools will allow local churches to identify what neighborhoods, local businesses, and natural features are in the greatest proximity to their local church as well as understand the basic composition of their immediate context. Simply knowing and sharing this information with local church leadership could serve to promote new strategic partnerships, ministry initiatives, and mission-focused projects within the community.

For local churches looking to initiate change related to corporate praxis, utilizing smaller groups such as Sunday school classes, life groups, and/or community groups are likely the most effective means. As was noted in the research, smaller gatherings of the church trended more toward practices that maintained the status of the group rather than practices that facilitated the overall mission of the local church. Therefore, small groups are in need of practical ways to

begin engaging their post-Christian contexts. The most reasonable place to begin doing so is within the neighborhood. A simple and productive means for doing so would be to begin utilizing what Howard Lawrence calls, "Neighborhood Conversation Guides."[103] These conversation guides are designed to help community-oriented individuals (Lawrence calls them "block connectors") meet their closest neighbors and discover the assets of their particular neighborhood. The guide covers a list of simple "get-to-know-you" type questions before asking the more significant questions related to the individual's dreams for a vibrant community, what skills and abilities they possess, as well as their hobbies and interests. Once complete, the Neighborhood Conversation Guide could provide small groups, community groups, or Sunday school classes with a plethora of ideas and opportunities for engaging with their neighbors. An initiative like this will require effort and the willingness to attempt something new. However, the results of something very simple done with intentionality have the potential of being very profound. Brisco and Ford, commenting on the effectiveness of Lawrence's neighborhood initiative write,

> Using his [Howard Lawrence] contacts throughout the Highlands, Howard found people who lived on other blocks who were willing to do what he had done on their own blocks. These "block connectors" as he called them began to cross-pollinate their databases in order to join neighbors with one another per the things they had in common. Strangers quickly became friends as the simplicity of the project started yielding rich rewards.[104]

However local churches decide to begin, the reshaping of discipleship paradigms will require an immense investment of both time and risk. Local churches should expect certain

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[103] Howard Lawrence's "Neighborhood Conversation Guide" can be found on the Abundant Community website at abundantcommunity.com.

[104] Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, *Next Door as it is in Heaven,* 152.

initiatives to fail, yet be willing to try again if they wish to influence lasting change within their congregations and communities.

Moving forward, it may be beneficial to local churches to critically evaluate their metrics for discipleship against the backdrop of this research. Traditionally, these discipleship metrics have centered upon the number and size of buildings, attendance records for church services and other peripheral ministries, organizational budgets, and baptisms. The trouble with measuring the effectiveness of one's disciple making paradigm regarding these traditional metrics is that they all are based on information in the past. That is to say, once these measurements have been recorded, the action has already taken place. Rather, developing an evaluative tool based on more biblically-based measurements around identity, presence, and praxis could have a greater impact on disciple making paradigms within post-Christian contexts. For example, measuring the missional behaviors within small groups (ex. How many times did you host a dinner for others within your home? How many new neighbors have you met in the past month?) or establishing an outcome-based goal within the local community (ex. To see poverty reduced by a certain percentage or to increase literacy rates among a certain socio-economic class or people group) would not only provide a new metric for discipleship effectiveness but also a predictive action that positively influences the surrounding local context. A helpful way to begin thinking about the difference between traditional metrics and biblical metrics of discipleship is to consider the former a "lag measurement" and the latter a "lead measurement." Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling elaborate on this distinction by stating,

> A lag measure is the measurement of a result you are trying to achieve. We call them *lag* measures because by the time you get the data the result has already happened; they are always lagging…Lead measure are different; they foretell the result. They have two primary characteristics. First, a lead measure is *predictive*, meaning that if the lead measure changes, you can predict that the lag measure

also will change. Second, a lead measure is *influenceable;* it can be directly influenced by the team.[105]

Not only do biblically-based metrics for discipleship generate a better depiction of the overall health of the Church but they also reinforce and train people as to what matters most. Thus, further research could explore how adopting new metrics for counting and measuring ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis aid in the disciple making process.

What became abundantly clear while implementing this research is that influencing any type of paradigmatic change requires an immense amount of time. None of the changes within ecclesial identity, contextual presence, and corporate praxis will occur overnight within the life of the American Church. In speaking with the missional practitioners who are attempting to pioneer new ground, train new Christ-centered leaders, and engage post-Christian contexts with the gnationrospel, all of them have been working in the same place and with the same people for quite some time. They shared their success stories and mentioned that though the fruit of the labor can be seen, it often comes with a high price and with a large investment of time, energy, and resources. However, they all understood their work and sacrifice to be worth it.

Furthermore, the implementation of this research highlighted the immense amount of risk involved in attempting to accomplish these changes. Most American churches have been operating out of a deeply-entrenched and dearly-beloved ministry philosophy for decades. Some of these changes will require profound theological and philosophical shifts within the operational life of the local church but nevertheless, the conversation must begin. Jesus said this toward the end of the Gospel of Matthew,

 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore
 and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

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[105] Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012), 46-47.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have
commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt
28:18-20).

Though the culture is changing Jesus's imperative does not. The Church is commanded to

make disciples. Remaining faithful to his command will require embracing the risk and investing

the time in reshaping our disciple making paradigms through ecclesial identity, contextual

presence, and corporate praxis.

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Appendix A

Research Instrument "A"

The aim of this work, *Missional Metamorphosis: how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple making in the post-Christian context*, is to capture and express a new paradigm of disciple making for local churches. The rapidly changing spiritual climate of America presents evidence that a reshaping of disciple making must take place in order to effectively engage the post-Christian context with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructions:
1. This survey is anonymous and consists of 24 questions about you and your local church.
2. Your answers should reflect your personal interpretation of each question; there are no incorrect answers.

Survey Questions
1. Our church has an identity statement.
   a. Yes, and I know it.
   b. Yes, but I do not know it.
   c. No
   d. Unsure

2. Our church has a vision and mission statement.
   a. Yes, and I know it.
   b. Yes, but I do not know it.
   c. No
   d. Unsure

3. Our church has key/core values.
   a. Yes, and I know them.
   b. Yes, but I do not know them.
   c. No
   d. Unsure

4. Our church has key/core practices.
   a. Yes, and I know them.
   b. Yes, but I do not know them.
   c. No
   d. Unsure

5. Our church has a recorded history of its founding.
   a. Yes, and I know it.
   b. Yes, but I do not know it.
   c. No
   d. Unsure

6. Our church has a statement of faith/belief.
   a. Yes, and I know it.

b. Yes, but I do not know it.
c. No
d. Unsure

7. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My church reflects its identity statement.					
My church reflects its vision and mission statement.					
My church reflects its key/core values.					
My church reflects its key/core practices.					

8. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I support and believe in my church's identity statement.					
I support and believe in my church's vision and mission statement.					
I support and believe in my church's key/core values.					
I support and believe in my church's key/core practices.					

9. When I hear the word "church" I understand that word in terms of…
   a. A place
   b. A time

c. An event
d. A people
e. Other _____

10. When I say the word "church" in everyday conversation I am referring to…
    a. A place
    b. A time
    c. An event
    d. A people
    e. Other _____

11. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.					
I am a missionary.					
I am called into the ministry.					
I am a saint.					
I am a full-time minister of the gospel.					

12. My church primarily engages our local context through…
    a. Events (Sunday services, affinity-based events, holiday events, etc.)
    b. Projects (service projects, local missions projects, etc.)
    c. Programs (evangelism programs, Sunday morning ministries, etc.)
    d. Relationships (built through one's vocation, hobbies, etc.)
    e. Other: _____

13. The way our church engages the local context could best be described as…
    a. Traditional (we *expect* our community to come to our services/events where the gospel will be shared)
    b. Attractional (we *invite* our community to come to our events/programs where the gospel will be shared)
    c. Missional (we embed into our community where the gospel is made visible through word and deed)
    d. Other: _____

14. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The post-Christian culture is something to fortify against (to hide, retreat, or withdraw from because of its negative influence)					
The post-Christian culture is something to dominate (to fight against in order to reclaim a Christian worldview).					
The post-Christian culture is something to accommodate (with whom to settle or compromise).					

15. My church's *evangelism* efforts are focused primarily on (select all that apply)
    a. Not-yet believers/unbelievers/non-believers
    b. Un-churched people (those who may have faith in Jesus but do not regularly attend a worship service)
    c. Believers/followers of Jesus Christ
    d. Other: _____

16. My church's *discipleship* efforts are focused primarily on (select all that apply)
    a. Not-yet believers/unbelievers/non-believers
    b. Un-churched people (those who may have faith in Jesus but do not regularly attend a worship service)
    c. Believers/followers of Jesus Christ
    d. Other: _____

17. Has your church observed the Lord's Supper/Communion outside of a typical Sunday morning service?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
    d. Other: _____

18. Has a layperson administered the Lord's Supper/Communion without the assistance of clergy from your church?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
    d. Other: _____

19. Has your church conducted baptisms outside of a typical Sunday morning service?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
    d. Other: _____

20. Has a layperson conducted a baptism without the assistance of clergy from your church?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
    d. Other: _____

21. Our church is…
    a. A church with small groups (less than 40% of members are in small groups)
    b. A church of small groups (between 40-80% of members are in small groups)
    c. Small groups (more than 80% of members are in small groups)
    d. Other: _____

22. If you are in a small group, where do you meet?
    a. On our church's property
    b. In someone's home
    c. In a public space (coffee shop, bookstore, restaurant, etc.)
    d. I'm not in a small group
    e. Other: _____

23. I view gathering with a small group as…
    a. More important than attending a church service
    b. Equally important as attending a church service
    c. Less important than attending a church service
    d. Other: _____

24. Rate your level of frequency with the following statements.

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Very rarely	Never
My small group shares the Lord's Supper together.					
My small group baptizes people.					
My small group makes disciples.					
My small group invites not-yet believers/lost people to the group.					
My small group serves "the least of these."					
My small group multiplies into new groups.					

Research Instrument "B"

The aim of this work, *Missional Metamorphosis: how identity, presence, and praxis are reshaping disciple making in the post-Christian context*, is to capture and express a new paradigm of disciple making for local churches. The rapidly changing spiritual climate of America presents evidence that a reshaping of disciple making must take place in order to effectively engage the post-Christian context with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Definition of Key Terms:
1. *Identity*: In broader terms than one's individual identity, this project understands identity through an organizational lens. Organizational identity has been defined as, "a set of statements that organization members perceive to be central, distinctive, and enduring to their organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985)." As such, identity is primarily concerned about answering the question of, "Who are we?" as it relates to the nature of the Church.
2. *Presence*: Presence refers to a church's mode of engagement with others. Just as Jesus was *with* his disciples, the local church is *with* their local context in some form or fashion. The way in which local churches express presence varies drastically but this term will be used to answer the question of, "How should we relate to our local context?"
3. *Praxis*: Having defined identity and presence, the church is now postured to allow its sense of "being" to inform its approach to "doing." Praxis will be understood as the action and application portion of the disciple-making paradigm. Thus, it is primarily concerned about answering the question of, "What should we do?"

Identity
1. Which aspect, or aspects, of identity have been the most influential in reshaping discipleship for your ministry context? Why do you think that is?
2. How have you witnessed those aspects of identity reshaping discipleship in your ministry context?
3. Which, if any, false beliefs about identity do you find most challenging to discipleship in your ministry context? Why?
4. How are those aspects of identity being applied in your ministry context to make other disciples?
5. In what ways have you helped equip or train others to embrace and apply the aforementioned aspects of identity?

Presence
1. Which aspect, or aspects, of presence have been the most influential in reshaping discipleship for your ministry context? Why do you think that is?
2. How have you witnessed those aspects of presence reshaping discipleship in your ministry context?
3. Which, if any, false beliefs about presence do you find most challenging to discipleship in your ministry context? Why?
4. How are those aspects of presence being applied in your ministry context to make other disciples?

5. In what ways have you helped equip or train others to embrace and apply the aforementioned aspects of presence?

Praxis
1. Which aspect, or aspects, of praxis have been the most influential in reshaping discipleship for your ministry context? Why do you think that is?
2. How have you witnessed those aspects of praxis reshaping discipleship in your ministry context? In others?
3. Which, if any, false beliefs about praxis do you find most challenging to discipleship in your ministry context? Why?
4. How are those aspects of praxis being applied in your ministry context to make other disciples?
5. In what ways have you helped equip or train others to embrace and apply the aforementioned aspects of praxis?

Appendix C

Code Responses from Interview Questions

Identity Coded Responses

Color	Name	Groups
●	"Do to Be"	False beliefs about identity
●	"Gospel Re-Engineering"	Training in identity formation
●	A Blessing	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Agents of God	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Church as Business	False beliefs about identity
●	Church as Place	False beliefs about identity
●	Church as Time	False beliefs about identity
●	Consumerism	False beliefs about identity
●	Exhibiting a "Holy Discontent"	Indicators of reshaping discipleship
●	Family	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Introspection and Self-awareness	Training in identity formation
●	Language Shift	Indicators of reshaping discipleship
●	Lifestyle Changes	Indicators of reshaping discipleship
●	Living "Above Place."	False beliefs about identity
●	Missiology and Ecclesiology	Training in identity formation
●	Mission Experiences	Training in identity formation
●	Missionary Nature	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Movement	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Multiplying Disciples	Indicators of reshaping discipleship
●	Narcissism	False beliefs about identity
●	Narrative Bible Teaching	Training in identity formation
●	Paradigm Shifts	Training in identity formation
●	Proclaim "Kingdom Reality"	Training in identity formation
●	Radical Love	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Self Awareness	Indicators of reshaping discipleship
●	Servanthood	Influential Aspects of Identity for discipleship
●	Spiritual Practices (Prayer, Meditation, etc.)	Training in identity formation

Presence Coded Responses

Color	Name	Groups
●	"Go and Be"	Influential aspects of presence
●	"Micro-Focus"	Influential aspects of presence
●	"Shema" Theology	Training in presence
●	Attractional Model	False beliefs about presence
●	Creation Theology	Training in presence
●	Hospitality	Training in presence
●	Humility	Influential aspects of presence
●	Impatience	False beliefs about presence
●	Incarnation	Influential aspects of presence
●	Kingdom Theology	Training in presence
●	Literal Neighboring	Training in presence
●	Making Disciples	Training in presence
●	Neighboring	Influential aspects of presence
●	Presence Without Engagement	False beliefs about presence
●	Sacred/Secular Divide	False beliefs about presence
●	Theology of Incarnation	Training in presence
●	Theology of Place	Influential aspects of presence

Praxis Coded Responses

Color	Name	Groups
●	"Mixed" Discipleship	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Activities for Ourselves	Practices to stop
●	Acts of Mercy and Justice	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Family on Mission	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Foster Care	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Generosity	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Overemphasizing Services and Preaching	Practices to stop
●	Radical Hospitality	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Sacrifice	Powerful Expression of praxis
●	Spiritual Experiments	Powerful Expression of praxis

Appendix D

Interview Transcript: Missional Practitioner I

Researcher: **Could talk just a little bit about how important, if at all, you believe identity is to discipleship specifically within your ministry context?**

MP I: Well, um, I think it's very important and I'll have to back up to like the main purpose of why we're created and that's, I think it's bigger than people think, but we've seen the results of focusing, helping people focus on their identity and here's why its important. I believe God's eternal plan as revealed in Scripture has always been about one thing: filling the whole world with his glory that all things may be full of your glory. The prophets all say it over and over and over and over. That is, that is God's eternal plan that he was filling the world with his glory. Now, what's the word? Glory means we don't use it properly in church very well. We make it a lot of different things like an 'attaboy' to God or give God credit or like just focusing on God.

You know? It's like in a song is going Lord. He's no to glorify means to, to magnify the hidden essence or value of the reality of a person or thing, and the word glory in Hebrew means weightiness or the original heaviness of a, of, of a person or a thing like their, their value. So God wants to fill the world with that, with himself, and we are as his image bearers. Why? Well, we're not a hundred percent sure it necessarily at the get go of the story. But later on, Paul calls it the mystery revealed. Angels long to look into this, that God's eternal purpose of filling the world with his glory. How would he do that? He would do it by filling the world with humans that bear his image and now has his spirit guiding them. Jesus was the first human that did that and he was also God and man, but he bailed his diety and he was guided by that spirit and he said, I only do what I see the father do.

I only say what I've heard the father say, and if you've seen me, you've seen the father and Hebrews says that Jesus is the glory of the father, so the eternal purposes that the world will be filled with God's identity through humans. Oh my gosh. Guided by God's own spirit, the mystery reveal, and so that's why identity in grounding people do you realize who you were created to be and God's eternal purposes is fulfilled through you. Wow. Insane, and they also gives us a tip into why is his grace then so big? Why is the cross of scandal? Because he will not be forwarded from his eternal purpose, which has always been about his glory and as his image bearers. People say, well, you're like a reflection, a mirror; no you bear his identity. You're like him now and guided by his spirit. Jesus says that you're going to do what I did and greater things. You're gonna make more disciples even so, it's so core to it, man. Without identity, it's all law is to do. It's do to be. If we don't ground in identity to work, we're always on the precipice of do Equals be and you obviously follow me at all. You've heard me talk about that.

Researcher: **Which aspects of identity have been the most influential in actually reshaping discipleship for your ministry context? I know that you've served in different capacities over the years, but which ones have been most influential in actually reshaping discipleship from your point of view?**

MP I: Well, I think we have one identity and it's God's identity, but we were created in the image of a triune God: a God who is father, God who his son and God who is spirit and each of that aspects of our being created in that likeness has great implication to our collective identity, just like gods, and this gets where it gets trickier. People, because we've never really understood how we could ever gotten was three one now understanding that we've also created, I believe tripartite. Um, that's what it says in Genesis, but some people want to say now it's just its body and soul or finance spirit, interchangeable words. They're not in scripture, but anyway, so we get, we get really key aspects and understandings of our triune identity as well for that we received from God the father, from the son and from the spirit.

I would say for myself personally, the one that has shaped my ministry probably in every role the most is because God is father and we are all his sons and daughters. We're a family. And understanding my identity is not individual so much, yes I'm a son, but I'm part of a family. I'm a son and his family family identity reshapes, all of our ecclesiology and therefore our polity in church and how we deal with people, how we get paid, how we don't, how we work, how we solve problems, how we resolve things, how we view, how you view Matthew talking about what you do with people who are not listening to the elders and you know, and how do you treat them. Everything is completely changed when you go, wait a minute, but we're a family and we got God as our father and we got Jesus as our brother. Uh Oh, that, that's huge. And the church doesn't run that way right now. Unfortunately, not in most cases. It's more we adopted a business model and it doesn't, it doesn't fit or work pretty good, just like it probably wouldn't work or near home either. I don't know if you're married yet or have kids, but

yeah. So think about it. If all of a sudden you go, you know, hunny, we've been running things a certain way, but I just read this book on Mark Zuckerberg and how they, you know, how they organize a facebook and their management team. That's what we're going to because it's super efficient. Look how big they are and so it must work and your wife would be like, what are you freaking nuts? And your kids are like that, but we did it at church. A family that the church is people. It's not a building, it's organization.

Researcher: **Well, let me ask you this, just kind of as a follow up, which if any false beliefs about identity do you think are most challenging to discipleship or present the most problems?**

MP I: It's the same challenge from us from Genesis, where the serpent said to Eve in a challenge of her identity. No, no, no, no. God just knows when you eat this, when you do this, then you will be like him. So there's the greatest challenge to discipleship, connected to identity is that we still think that you have to do certain things to be seen and you have to be to be so you have to do this is what Christians do and that's how you know and it's like what's true of you, it's true of you because of who God is. And when we go through the story of God training, I'll ask a diagnostic question, but really trying to get at part of our identity in the spirit. I'll say, how much did you have to do with your own inception? A physical inception, you know, with your parents being conceived.

And I'll say I don't have anything to do with my conception. Okay. How much did you have to do with your birth? When you were born, how dependent, where you upon your parents for care, nurture and sustenance: 100 percent. When you were born, how much did you know about the world and how it actually worked? Zero. Okay. So that you see what's going on here. That's what's true for us too, is that we, we had nothing to do with our conception. We were created in God's image to be like him for his glory and the fact that my heart was still beating when I woke up this morning. Science cant explain it yet. That's crazy to me. I think about that all the time. We still need to figure out what keeps our hearts beating? No, we haven't, but we know that God breathed breath into us giving up his life and wow.

And it goes in this physical outer thing changes. But here's a mind bending thought: Are we physical beings that have a spirit, or are spiritual beings that have been given a body? I think it's the latter. And helping people understand it. So the do to be thing, it's like, wait a minute, this is what I talk about is transform. Let me tell you what's true of you, even if you've never known it, if you're in Christ, let me just tell you all it's true of you and how dad sees you and you know, and I try to get people analogies of, you know, if you were a rockefeller or if you were born, you know, super wealthy but didn't know it, you've lived a certain way and if you found out later that all of this was true of me, I would have lived very differently.

Yeah, exactly. And I probably will go to my deathbed preaching that same stuff because I, it's so core, so crux. If discipleship is about knowledge acquisition, your head is flesh and when you've learned it, then you're a disciple, but there's no proof. There's no proof that it's actually transformed you. You're not living out of your identity. You're living out of do to be well. That's the world. That's the beast. That's what scripture called the beast. The system. The system is you do to be. You earn to have. You improve your worht everyday instead of image bearer. Inherently valuable. Inherently full of privilege and authority. Wow.

Researcher: **So in what ways have you helped or are you currently helping equip or train others to embrace and apply some of that rethinking that you talked about as far as identity goes?**

MP I: So many ways, man. Like everything we do really. Through preaching, teaching through your coursework, through the podcast. You know, it's really all about that. We're all, it's all about trying to help people understand who god is, what he's done to prove that's true of himself and while now what's true of us. So then out of that we go. Then how do we get to live? So, I mean, I would say a baseline thing though that we've done for a long, long time now, and I and I still do all the time, all over the world. I get to do it, is we teach people the story of God in narrative and dialogue. And teach the Bible from front to back through narrative and sitting around dialogue and what emerges is I didn't really understand who god was, like I sort of put Old Testament God in one box and Jesus in another.

               And I just thought, you know, my understanding was kind of like I said, a prayer that gets me into heaven someday and now Christianity is kind of waiting for that and trying to sin less, you know, behavioral modification. And so it's everything we do. But baseline people ask me all the time, how did you go from being raised in a traditional church? And even teaching and preaching a certain sort of understanding of things to life in community and grounded in gospel identity? And I'll say, well, there's not one thing. It's a million little things. But the biggest one I have to point to as being the story formed: being shaped by this narrative that is ongoing and true. And it's God's story and we're part of it now and ongoing. And the other thing too is making sure that every message, every preaching, every sermon, everything we do always ties back to that. I mean listen to the lifestyle podcast, just like every episode always goes back to what's the thing behind the thing. What's true about God and therefore true of our identity.

               So it starts to speak into what our response is and gets to be and how we think about things and talk about things and live it out. So having everything really goes back to we use everything. So like when people, sometimes when we've passed on our teaching identity, they'll say, hey, yeah, we did that a few years ago without people, but it didn't seem to stick. Well, you can't change a person's identity in one 30 minute sermon or three of them or something, you know, it's like every sermon ties back to who is God for questions? Who is God? What's he done to prove that in scripture, in our own life and at the cross? What's that speak into our identity, our authority are privileged? And then how do we get to live in light of that? Those four questions frame everything and they always point back to God to hero and we get to, we get to live in light of what he says is true of us now. So liberating.

Researcher: **So what are some of the indicators that you look for that let you know that people not only are beginning to rethink some things about identity but also are trying to act upon it, trying to live it out?**

MP I: I think that's really two questions. Or at least, I'll perceive it as two okay? Some of the indicators that they're thinking has started to shift is, is their language starts to shift language creates culture. Literally just sociologically our language and shared experience is what creates a culture. That's true of every nation, tribe,

family unit. And so we start watching for is our, is how people are speaking about the church as people, people speaking about God and his people. Is it starting to shift to familial language? Do people pray Lord or they pray Father? I'm not saying you can't pray both. I remember discipling a guy who never ever would pray 'father' and after some time and some challenge there with that, it's like, yeah, because he saw God as a taskmaster because that's how his dad was and so once he started to change his heart around who the father was his prayer started change: father, dad, and he started to be able to receive the love of that father in a different way.

So language starts to shift. There's a term that you've probably heard us use. We call it gospel fluency. We start to pay attention and it's very hard to make this a tangible measurement. Okay? Just like if we were teaching somebody Portuguese. Like how do you know that they're learning Portuguese? Will you hear them start to use the language and they're using it more and more and it's clearer and more understandable. Gospel fluency as much in the same way we start to hear people speaking about so and so's the issue or this problem in the church or in my family, my sister and I are this. What they refer to is not the actions as much as what's the unbelief behind those actions. They are not believing this to be true about God, and they are not believing this to be true. I want to help them move from unbelief to belief in that area.

They start to hear a language shift which is then becomes a doing: a living it out shift, because no longer are people trying to address life which includes sin and not sin, but they're not trying to address everything by behavioral modification: "Stop that. Do this." Because that only reinforces that you have to earn. That's the attack of the enemy in the garden it's also, by the way, it's the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. The first two temptations of the three that we have listed. "If you are God's son, then do this." An attack of the identity. So we start to hear a change. Then part of that, that's a reality changes. People speak to one another differently, but then when you start to see yourself as family also starts to bear with one another differently, and if you believe your servant identity, because the son came as one who serves these certain to be a servant not to be served and you realize that's part of my identity too, and now you look at service at the highest thing, serving as the highest thing we get to do because it shows the world with God's like, i.e. glorifies Him.

That's the eternal purpose. Okay, so why would I do that? Because I'm his child. This is the family business. This is how we get to roll. Other people do it for themselves. They get to do it, to look good, to look altruistic, to get an Atta boy, to be thought of a certain way, seen a certain way. We just do it because it's who we are and we already received the payment of an infinite love and acceptance. I can't add to it so I don't need to try to add to it because I already it right. It's so awesome. It's like this week we saw on the news this morning actually, Phil Mickelson, Tiger Woods, two very famous golfers, if you don't follow golf, are doing a pay-per-view one-on-one golf thing, you know, this was the two of them

and they're going to make, there's a $9,000,000 purse and it's a 19.99, but watch it pay per view. They'll probably make another $20 million on that, but it's all being given away to charity and it's like for them it's like we just get to play golf. We're already so freaking rich. We can't really even add to the pile and where we could. It wouldn't matter. We wouldn't feel it, so we're giving it away.

I love it. I'm like, you're so rich, but you still love the game. So through giving away, through serving, you get to be. Yeah. It's just gorgeous. I don't know. I liked it. I was happy for them because they just seem. They seem unlocked up about who really wins. We just get to have fun with it and other people get the benefit. That's how service is. Because it's our identity as servants, family and missionary servants, that's who we are.

Researcher: **I'd like to move onto presence now. By presence I'm referring to a church's mode of engagement with their context or culture in general. Just as Jesus was *with* his disciples, the local church is *with* their local context in some form or fashion. Churches basically express that in various ways but I'm looking at how we actually relate to our local context. So I wanted to ask a little bit on that: Which aspect or aspects of presence have been most influential for you guys in Washington?**

MP I: Could you put a little more meat on the question? The aspects of presence-because I'd say you've got to be there. You've got to show up, you've got to incarnate.

Researcher: **Some churches will basically say, "Oh, we're an attractional church. To me, that reveals a little bit, or that tips their hand, about how they perceive the way they are to relate to their context. It's very much, "Hey, you guys come to us. Cross this line. Come into our culture." Do you guys view it differently? If so, how?**

MP I: I know what you are saying now. What you just really articulated well brother is, they tip their hand to an identity issue.

And that's the thing behind the thing. And if your presence issue is come and see. Come and see.

That's an old covenant. The old covenant, right? You came to the temple, you came to the Tabernacle. You came to the temple to do your business and if you did this then you would be right with God. The new covenant is, it's No, it has been done for you. Now all of the sacrifice that needs to be made has been paid in and through Christ. And now you get to be. There's no more "Do to Be" anymore. That's finished. And so there's an identity thing going on behind that. If you think the presence is come and see you and your old covenant, you don't believe the new covenant really: not in practice. At least. Maybe for some day we'll fly away you believe it. But what about now? Like if the Jews, all of a sudden, if God said,

hey, by the way, the last day of Atonement, when the high priest put his hands on the goat and confess all the sins and it was taken away never to be seen again.

Um, I've decided that the last time. it never has to happen again. Your accounts painful forever. They would have, it would have changed how they live. It was real. Now it wasn't like, well, great. After I die, maybe they'll have an effect. No, why are you still bringing, sacrifices. My son died in your place. It's over. It's finished. He said it himself. And so there's this understanding now, if it's come and see you believe in this, you're actually got his family and that it's like come and be like, come and sit at the table like dad's command a place for you. My podcast this week is on friends-giving a place to cut the table. It's like, do you realize when you invite people into your family and your God family, it's a place at God's table? You weren't born with that. God gave you that table somehow. I don't know how you got your table, but that's God's people. That's Dad's. That's Dad's meal. And so I think, I think not understanding the incarnation is part of not understanding the two cousins. Right. That's how it all fits together.

Researcher: **Can you speak a little bit more to that? What theology or biblical theme, or key idea, you mentioned the incarnation, helps to flesh out presence for you guys? Like is the incarnation it? Is that the one that you all really grab onto?**

MP I: I think, I think you see the presence thing is why there was the incarnation, God, Jesus could have I suppose, right? I don't know. He could've just from heaven announced a plan, here's the good news, and we would have heard it globally if he chose to. Right? But he came and he was a among and he took upon flesh and he took every type of pain and temptation upon himself. He experienced everything we've experienced and so in his life. And then death and resurrection, we see the full understanding of, Oh, wait a minute, if the eternal purpose is to fill the world with what God is like, that's why God himself came to be with us, and he lived a certain way that always showed us what dad was like. And so his life, his incarnation is not only a clue, it is the exact fulfillment of the law, of the eternal purpose-that God would fill the world with himself, guided by his spirit in humans and Jesus over and over and over.

Full of the Spirit's power he healed people with every kind of disease. Full of the Spirit's power he proclaimed this to the crowds. Guided by the spirit, Jesus went here and did this, and you're like, Huh? So it's not just like Jesus is the model. He's the fulfillment of what God was always trying to do. But now take that, take that and connect it to identity. If the church is God's family and we really believe it. Like I'm a Kalinowski. Team K. It's a big deal in our family. We're getting ready to eat a boat-load of Polish sausage tomorrow. I was like, it's part of their identity. If the church doesn't see that and get that, then they feel like we are the church when we do something. So our incarnation, that is up to us, you know, what fits my schedule is once a week we do this sort of old school show and talk about God.

But what if we took that old school show and did it in the way Jesus did? Well, that would disperse us lots of meals and everyday life talking about dad and trying to pull everything back to what Dad's like because we're filling the world with his glory. Oh yeah. I don't want that. I didn't sign up for that. And that's problem is that most Christians didn't quote "sign up for the actual life," like they signed up for the "afterlife." That implies that our presence is in that building as the church. We even call the building the church. So bad right? So people say, Oh, you're just being picky with. No. It's like if I call my wife the dog, she's not the dog, she scratches herself so I couldn't get. No, she's not. She's mom. Yeah. You can't call the building the church. It's so bad.

Researcher: **Do you guys try to specifically address those ideas related to presence. And if so, how do you help to train and equip others to see presence a little bit differently?**

MP I: Well, there's presence where you go, right? You go and make. But there's also presence when you open up an invite. So it's kind of two prongs to that. Are we out because we're a missionary. People have part of identity too because we have a spirit which is the sending empowering aspect of God's personality and personhood. We're also missionaries. Jesus said as I was sent so I send you and he breathed on them and said, receive the spirit. Who is the power that Jesus did all of his life with. So part of that missionary spirit is going. So we're out there. We're actually out looking for and trying to be among those that need the glory of God exposed to them: who he is and what he's really like and what's true of that because of Christ. We believe that live in light of that, so that's the going part, but there's also the receiving part.

That's where I think we saw so much of Jesus' time was just in homes and with people and even with people who didn't really like them and generally around meals and hanging out and talking. Sometimes preaching, but mostly not and so I think what we try and help people realize that that living with an open home is living the way that God's lived with you, but also going and making and finding and exposing the opportunity to connect to this family. We had a lot of friends and neighbors here, but none of them has knocked on the door and said, "Could we come over for dinner?" before we knew them. But we build relationships and say, we'd love to have you guys over for dinner or we're doing this thing. Why don't you guys join us for that? And so that's the going part. It's both/and. But there is fear.

People have fear and do to be. They're like, "I don't know what I'd have to do to be seen a certain way in your eyes, so here's my way to manage that: I won't do it with you." But when you go out and you go and you'd be invite people to come with you. That's part of john 8, Jesus said, if you'll walk in my ways, then you'll come to know the truth. So go out and walk in the ways of God with people. They don't have to come to the church building to do that. Walking in the ways that God is not sitting in silence and listened to some texts about him. I can't find that

in Scripture anywhere. You were all walking in the ways of Jesus is living out God's life with and amongst others. And if people will do that with you, they'll come to know the truth that sets them free in every area of life. Not the truth sets you free. Now you get your ticket punched to heaven. Yeah, that's a byproduct of being in Christ.

But can we be in a certain way? Can we walk and live in a certain way that we come to know the truth? About Ah! Generosity works like this! Oh wait a minute. Forgiveness looks and tastes and smells like this, and it's a two way street. It's not just for them, it's for me, and so if you'll walk in my ways, if you will live my life. So there's also the brilliance of Jesus. If you really want to be like me and fill the world with my father's glory, go and make disciples because as you expose them to this life you're also going to be revealing your own unbelief and I'm going to get to speak into that and move you closer to Dad's heart as well. It's so brilliant. You'll never understand the fullness of God's love and your identity, until you start making disciples in community.

You just won't. Just like you never fully understand being a parent until you have kids. But my sister's got kids. I know and you understand an aspect of it, but all of a sudden the day you walked through the door with your first born to go, wow, there's a difference. My job just changed. My attitude just changed. All my bad habits are now have a new light shined on them. It's all just changed. Same thing if you're not making disciples who make disciples in community on God's mission, there's no way to come to maturity and the fullness of his love. There's just not. And then he decided that way too. So it's not just like, well that's an alternate way Caesar. That's a nice thing. I can't see anywhere that Jesus said, listen, if we could spend 30 years sitting in rows together and I can just tell you over and over and over about this stuff, that you'll fill the whole world with his glory. I can't find it. You know, people look at discipleship and even like whole missional living and all that and understanding that like that's like that's the new thing. It's an alternative way, but not if you understand God's eternal purpose and that's why I started there with my first answer, but because it undergirds it all, what is God up to? What he doing? Why were we treated? Why are we here still? Why does my heart still beat today.

Researcher: **Well you have already hit on some of this but we can go into praxis now. This is a twofold question: What have been some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers in your ministry context? And the second question following up to that is, what would you say for the not-yet-believer? What do you think they would say have been some of the most powerful expressions of the church being the church amongst them?**

MP I: A second one first. I think not yet believers. Probably almost across the board I would say they would say you treated me like family and we talked about that a lot on the show as well. Treat people like guests when they come to your home or even your old church building. Treat them like family. What's the difference

between that? Well, I'm not going to reteach that. So treating people like family seems to be, which is at the core of identity, the thing that is most attractive to people and most like my family was Do to Be. Your family is not Do to Be.

So in some ways I feel closer and more safe around you guys that I just met recently comparatively than my own family because that's the performance based and this is not. That's huge. Oh, by the way, that same hugeness is for Christians too. Because most Christians have a: not been discipled, they don't really know and understand their identity and b: they still live Do to Be. Okay. What would you serve for dinner and how would you be and talk throughout the evening if you have a homeless dude over for dinner? Would it be any different if you had your senior pastor over for dinner?

Yeah. So on the first question, from a praxis standpoint, what has been, say again?

Researcher: **Yeah, either the most powerful expression or most influential expression of praxis for believers in your ministry context.**

MP I: It's family on mission? Yes. Same thing. Really it's, it's getting to experience a life of a family on mission that's invited you in that with them and that walks with you in a way and long enough individually enough so you can actually have a family on mission of your own. So when said that discipleship in many ways is a re-parenting of the culture, church culture, not-yet-believing culture. It's a re-parenting, meaning this is how Dad's family works. Well, so I would say in some ways it's the same. Now also though and say well our, our small groups getting together for 20 years and we meet every Thursday night and it hasn't changed us that much. Well, is it Do to Be though? If we studied the sermon notes then we were a good small group and I don't know, I don't know what's going on there.

And I guess the language and identity is not the focus of it, it's knowledge acquisition and then pop cake or pie, so that's different. But sometimes these are very rich family safe environments, but what's missing is the three legged stool of Gospel, community and mission. In other words, If the Gospel, the good news of who God is, that's his identity and how in what he's done and how it speaks into our identity, that's what the Gospel is all about, how we now get to live to fulfill that eternal purpose, is not connected to the mission of now, go help other people live and understand these things and in community, don't try to do it alone. Discipleship is not a one to one thing. If it was Jesus would have done it that way as his primary model. So take any one of the three legs of the stool away, G. C. or M. and you don't get to maturity.

So like what's the greatest thing from a praxis standpoint? Its when you get to life as a family on mission, as community, as an oikos, it has an increasing mature balance of G. C. and M. And let's just play with that a little bit. If you've got strong gospel identity, let's say in the community and you've got the community going on, but you're not on a mission ever exposing it to others and therefore you

can't really move to maturity. And discipleship and fill the wrld with God's glory, It becomes also self focused. Well, let's say you are out on mission and you're doing lots of service and with people like crazy and he loves doing it with this group of people and you're pretty open to others joining in the family, but it's not based on Gospel.

In other words, who God is and his power, his, his, you know, his identity. Then it's based on yours. Your back to a Do to Be thing and it becomes a law and people then vote off and on. I don't want to do that. Why not? Well, because doing that doesn't equal the thing I want: my identity. See who those all tie together? So you can kind of play with that. You need Gospel in community on mission to move to maturity and really get the richness of all of that experience. Just walk through lists, remove one of those. What do we get left with? And it's never the full picture. It's never a full picture of the godhead or God's original plan to fill the world with his glory. So you know, that kind of gives you some sort of analysis tools. There are some diagnostic.

Researcher: **So family on mission, what does that look like for you guys? If you had to break it down day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year. What would that look like on-the-ground so to speak?**

MP I: Yeah. There's no way to brother like that's like saying you break down your family life over the last 30 years. Its a billion things. What it breaks down to it at the "Meta" is do our family and our family rhythms and resources exist for our glory and pleasure or Gods?

So Thanksgiving, Team K is more than ever this year because there's two grandkids at play now, this year more than ever, our family, my grandkids we're so stoked for tomorrow and Friday, every three day, but kind of doing a big schmear of it, you know, and uh, we're so stoked or also really stoked about those other folks who are joining us and what they're going to get to experience, man, because Team K is awesome. There is a lot of openness and a lot of generosity and a lot of fricken laughing and, and freedom. And we're stoked for those people. Some that have been doing it for years and some that are brand new. Like we barely know them and they're being, they're like, yeah, we'll, we'll come and hang with you.

Like awesome, because we know they're going to leave going, man, you guys are awesome. We're going to go, but we, yeah, but you know why? Let us help you understand why: This is a reflection of what God's family's all about. And so if the church was understanding that and families were living on mission this way, looking to expose God and his glory to fill least our little table full of his glory in the world, and maybe that goes out now through other people to their tables, it's more and more of the church understood that was the goal, we'd have a very different church. It would be a very different family. If you were part of a family business that owned a chain of Honda dealerships throughout the northeast and he

didn't know it, you'd probably say, "I never sold a Honda", but your but your cousin who knew that knew of his inheritance has sold thousands of them.

Oh, do I get to you? Because why? Because that's your family business and that's really you. So, oh, we don't know these things. Back to the beginning of your questions. If we did it, we understood them deeply. If we understood our connection from an identity level with the spirit, and so now the spirit actually speaking these things and reminding us through his word, through the spirit directly and through community will then yeah. Then we pick up a very different life pattern and so what is it? You know, I want it to look like that in the ground? it looks open. it looks living for others to God's glory, not living for your sick yourself. We say that Christianity is living life for the sake of others to God's glory so that they would know what he's like. That's, that's really what this family thing is. That was the sin of Israel.

You're going to be my a nation of priests, a royal priesthood set apart to show the world what I'm like. Priests. What are priests? They are intermediaries. They go between. So what's their role? to help you get to this guy and understand it really, really accurately. So I'll build lots of fences and rules and rows and we'll only do it once a week. And that's how it will translate to everyday life. No, No it wont. That, that can be one part of your week and I'm not saying it's a bad part of week, but it certainly is not the whole picture even close.

Interview Transcript: Missional Practitioner II

Researcher: **What are some of the aspects of identity that you believe are central or foundational to the nature of the church?**

MP II: Should be or the way it is right now?

Researcher: **I will let you handle that. You can choose how you answer.**

MP II: I mean, I think, I think from a historical scriptural perspective, some of the things about identity that would be key would be to see ourselves as sons and daughters of God and to see ourselves as agents of God's healing work in the world. To be a blessing to the cultures and the people in the places we are part of. Those would be three things that come to mind. I don't know that that is how the church generally sees itself. If I were to offer a reality check, I think the current, dominant mentality would be: we are the people who have the truth and we're in the "right group" and everybody else who's not with us is this is not right and it's in the "wrong group." So there tends to be an "inside, outside mentality." You know, I joined the right group and we have the right beliefs. To me that's a much more primitive orientation to identity. It would be better to say, "What is the actual content of your identity?," which I think is a child of God, agent of God's kingdom, and called to be a blessing.

Researcher: **Which of those aspects that you just mentioned, have been the most influential on discipleship for your context right now?**

MP II: Yeah, I would say helping people through practices and formation, engagement, helping people really absorb the truth that they are a beloved child of God seems to be huge. You know, "Can I trust the creator of the universe with my whole life?" is a core identity issue about discipleship. And I think the other one as well. I am a child of God called to join in with what God is doing in the world to be an agent of healing and restoration. To pray with my life, "May Your kingdom come and be on earth as it is in heaven." Another way of saying that is a key discipleship goal is to learn to care about all the things that the Creator cares about and to orient your life around a God's agenda.

Researcher: **What sort of false beliefs about identity do you think are most destructive or challenging in San Francisco?**

MP II: As far as the general culture or Christians in particular?

Researcher: **Christians.**

MP II: Yeah. I think for a lot of Christians, they grew up in environments where one of the major false belief was "God is going to help me accomplish the things I want to in life and that God's serves me and that my happiness is God's ultimate goal for me. You know, a spouse, as many children as I choose, to have material prosperity, lack of problems, and good health. And obviously the corrective of that is that God invites us into a life where we discover the fullness of life and our true meaning in our identity and in our experience of God's eternal presence with us. And that's not a guarantee that we don't that everything's always great in our lives. So many people, when they encountered difficulty, the first stresses of their career or something not working out or not finding the partner or not being able to have children or not having the, all the things they hope that they would have, they feel a profound sense of disappointment because God's not delivering to them what they wanted.

Researcher: How do you help train others to begin embracing what you talked about as far as identity? What are some of the things you guys are doing in San Francisco that helps to train others to bring those things into reality?

MP II: I try and help people name the ache that they feel and cultivate more self awareness. So your Christian in my area feels too busy, they feel hurried, and they feel stressed. And my understanding is that, that those are the presenting problems that show that we haven't fully rooted our identity in being beloved children of God. And so if I can get people to kind of talk about that, to say, "Yes, I'm full of stress, worry, anxiety, a sense of hurry, a sense that I should be doing or accomplishing more." We will interrogate that a little bit.

And then the second thing I want to try and do is proclaimed the reality of the kingdom. Jesus has a way of life for us where there is enough time. You don't have to be in a hurry. Imagine living a life that was largely free of worry and anxiety. What would that be like? That's kingdom reality. And then the third thing I want to do is invite them into an experience while we're together that helps that encounter that reality. Often I will invite people into some kind of contemplative prayer experience to help them to do that. And then a fourth thing is that I want to invite them to take on practices in their life like daily or regular habits that help them experience the immediacy of God's care in their lives. So this would be some kind of contemplative prayer practice that helps ground them, in their body in the assurance of being cared for and loved.

The other huge thing is that kingdom identity piece. And so I want to get people in touch with their aches around issues of justice and equality and sometimes a part of that is just getting people exposed to a world that's bigger than themselves. If you only are with people of your same race and class, it's easy to get fixated on the next car, the next great vacation or food experience. But if you can cross cultural boundaries and some income boundaries to realize how big God's heart is for people who are different than me, people who are don't have the same amount of privilege that I have, the same experience. It seems necessary to get at that sort

of expansiveness and then invite people. We're being invited to be as compassionate as God is about the real struggles facing our world. Poverty and mental health issues, human trafficking, and the list goes on and on, and then to invite them into practices that will help them to actually join in what God desires to see healing and restoration happen. And that answers I think another fundamental question that a lot of people asking, "Why am I here? What's the purpose of my life?"

Researcher: **So what are some of the things that you look for to measure that people are beginning to embrace or rethink identity, act upon it, and live it out?**

MP II: If you know my book Practicing the Way of Jesus, I use the Lord's prayer is kind of a frame for looking at what kingdom living looks like. So we actually, in our groups, we'll talk about the picture of what, what a fully formed follower of Jesus looks like: they are deeply secure in who they are as a child of God, they practice God's presence, they invite God into their worries and anxieties and find a source of solace when life throws them a curve ball. They are aligning their time and their resources around God's kingdom. So some practical things about that would be: they've made, they made a conscious connection between the, what they do for their paid work and how it contributes to God's agenda for the world.

They spend time and energy regularly to issues caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick or lonely. Their money is going towards that. Some of their spare time they have space in their life to offer welcome to someone who's of a different race or class or a person who is struggling with issues of poverty or trauma in some way. Those are a few things. I could go on and it probably should like 15 things seemed to be characteristics of a more fully formed person who's living in kingdom reality: gratitude, living with a sense of contentment, voluntary limits to consumption, a person who is deeply committed to reconciled relationships, someone who's given up their giving up resentment and judgment significantly.

Researcher: **What aspect of presence has been most paradigm shifting for discipleship in San Francisco for you guys?**

MP II: Yeah, I think one of the biggest ones early on was I think we had the assumption that we believe the right things about God, that we live better lives than a non-Christian does. And we're the good people. And one of my big shocks when I moved to San Francisco was that I'm not more highly educated than the average person. I'm probably less well educated and less cultured than a lot of my neighbors and to discover that people outside the church often live more whole lives than people inside the church. We don't have the corner on good living. And so for many people in in the bay area, that's often a revelation. I'll give you at the kind of a tangible example of this. I was teaching on spiritual formation at a Baptist church up in Marin county, which is a instead of a very wealthy suburb north of San Francisco. We were talking about like why discipleship so important because it's helping us close the gap between who we want to be and the life Jesus

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calls us to and where we actually live. And she said, I work in Palliative care helping people in their last days and weeks of life. And she said up here in Marine County, a lot of people practice a mindfulness or zen meditation. For Buddhism in the United States, a San Francisco Bay area is kind of a big hub and there's some major meditation centers and she said, my clients who have spent 20, 30 years practicing a form of meditation when they're in their last moments of life, they're peaceful and they put consent to this passage. She said, the self identifying Christians and their families that are my clients very often are freaked out in the last days and moments of life. Both the patient and the family. They're like emotionally flooded, stressed out. And she said, it doesn't make any sense to me because we have a story. Our Christian story says perfect love casts out all fear. There's no fear in love. We get to spend eternity with the creator of the universe. So why? Why does the non Christian enter this passage with more peace than the Christian? And I think it has to do with a lack of, what I would call integrated discipleship. We might know what we should believe, but how you respond to life shows what you actually believe. And I think that dichotomy is sort of a byproduct of what I would call the extremes of western Christianity. That it's what you think in your head and the statements you make that define your Christian faith. Whereas Jesus was from an eastern mind, a Hebraic mind and the early Jesus movement was that culture which was much more holistic. You believe God with your body. You have faith with your whole self. What you do is as important as what you say you believe. As far as presence goes in my context, what we've heard over and over again when we moved here, people would tell us, the people I know who are Christians are just not as nice or kind or good is the average person here. So why would I want to be a Christian? Whatever your faith is, it doesn't seem to be helping you live a good life. You don't care. I'm speaking in extremes here but this is where the watching world is: you don't care about God's creation or the future of the planet. You don't care about immigrants, you don't care about the poor among us. You seem unconcerned about how our politics or policies are impacting people in other parts of the planet, you don't take good care of your body. So why would I want to be like you? You don't handle stresses of life better than other people. So, I'm a little lost in the question but I think this is a major issue of how we show up in our context here in the bay area.

Researcher: **What are some biblical themes or key ideas or theology that's been influential for you personally in, in reshaping or reframing your understanding of presence?**

MP II: I think more of a creation theology. So, the good news of the Gospel starts in Genesis. It doesn't start in Matthew. So we're part of a good creation that God loves and cares for. We're made in God's image and we're made to play an active role in creation. I think kingdom theology has been a key shift. That the gospel of Jesus was about inviting us to join in the presence and activity of God in the world. So we're Jesus located God's presence wasn't a million miles away. He said, the Kingdom of God is within you. So it's God is very close to us right now. And eternity is now. Jesus said eternal life is that they may know you, the one true

God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.   I think also, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father. So not having a dualism between the physical and the spiritual world. Everything is spiritual because God's presence permeates all of life and creation matters. And so I'm invited to be fully awake to the natural world, to culture, to my body, to relationships. It's not living in that binary of there is spiritual and then there is the material, a material reality. It's all part of one whole. The Hebrew term for that would be the Shema. The oneness of God's rule.

Researcher: **What have been some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers in your context? And also not-yet-believers? I would love if you could try to answer both sides there.**

MP II: Yeah. For better or for worse, we've tried to do discipleship in mixed groups with believers and nonbelievers. I would say believers, nonbelievers and skeptical/doubting believers. A lot of people who ended up in San Francisco are on their way to leaving their faith. And so we've, we've spent 15 years trying to help people keep their faith. From my perspective inviting people into a grouping encounter is a really important part of the practice. More relational spaces where people can be honest and authentic is really important. And I think context where we really look at what the teachings of Jesus in particular have to show about inviting us into a radical new way of life, a different consciousness about our lives. Then inviting people to take risks, try on something new.

And this is where I think maybe the church really needs to do some work. You've probably heard this, it's become a bit of a cliché: you don't think your way into a new way of being, sometimes you have to live your way into a new way of thinking. And so that model of "let's get it all figured out in our heads at then we'll act" sometimes you just have to be invited to take on a new practice, informed by scripture and the teachings of Christ and that will start to shape your thinking and your theology. Probably with what's been most exciting and effective for us is to name and they have in their life, look at what Jesus has to say about and that we try to do something together in response to that. Hey, let's go have a meal with our homeless neighbors. Let's sell half our possessions and give the money to the poor and see what happens. this month we're going to each work on letting go of resentment and seek reconciliation with people we've wronged in our lives. Let's try and practice Sabbath and make sure that we have enough rest or each commit to having 10 or 15 minutes in the morning where we're still and we know that God is and do some journaling or some kind of prayer practice that helps get us centered for the day. And in my experience when I invite people into good, whole-person Christian practice there's very good results in people's lives so that they get more connected to their faith. And it's worked even for people who aren't Christians. We will just say, hey, you don't have to be a Christian to be part of this group. We are going to look at how to apply the teachings of Christ to everyday life. You're welcome to join us. You don't have to believe anything in particular, but let's play with this. Let's try on what it Jesus-shaped life might look like. And

we've seen people who were very antagonistic towards faith, come to a point where they identify as Christ followers because they've tried on Jesus way of life is his vision of life and what he teaches about living in the kingdom. And it's helpful. It works.

This is a big idea but I was really shaped by Dallas Willard's teaching on this-- that Jesus was telling us how life actually works. So, when Jesus talks about the kingdom, you can almost substitute for saying reality like this is the nature of reality. And it can be tested out in life. So if you start to live according to Jesus's vision of reality is, you're going to find more peace, more rest, more wholeness, more meaning, more vitality, deeper relationships.

Researcher: **You mentioned opening up space for Christian practice. What do you do to actually facilitate that? What facilitates those spaces for experimentation and for trial and error and for reflection?**

MP II: I historically invite people into retreat Experiences that would be one to three days. and they're not retreats like where I talk for an hour and then there's music and then they take a break and then we come back and I talk another hour. It's more practice and participatory retreats and we try and do them with a mix of what I'll call "inward journey experiences" and also "out in the community." So I send people out to walk around a neighborhood and pray for God's blessing on every person that they see. We're trying to quickly go from introducing a concept to immediately practicing something. I'll talk about lament or silence and solitude. Jesus in the Wilderness and then we'll take an hour and a half to shut off our phones and to listen toGod's voice and see what happens. So that makes it a really rich environment. The retreat itself is an experience. I'm not telling them about what they could experience. I'm saying come experiment with some practices with me. And then the longer form of that is something we've called learning labs and they are four to 10 or 11 week learning journeys where there'll be a certain topic and we'll invite people to sign up and commit to showing up each meeting and taking on homework practices. And I think what makes it work is that we create the expectation very clearly on what we're asking people to do. So when I advertise a retreat or advertised one of these running labs I will tell them, this is going to help you, in this four weeks we're going to learn to let go of our resentments, seek reconciliation with people we've wronged, and set better boundaries in our relationships. And we organize what we do together to help accomplish those goals for people. Anyone who's a, a primary or secondary school teacher knows how to do this. You set learning goals and then you design your activities around those goals. The majority of people, their exposure to church is a weekly gathering, which is generally at a preaching activity and some worship and sometimes a little bit of liturgy around prayer and testimony. Then small groups are often social places where there's more study of scripture or a book and a bit more personal sharing. But my contention is that we need spaces that look more like a karate studios or yoga studios or a cooking classes. Meaning, active spaces where you actually apply the teaching to life, in a supportive

environment together. In every other area of our culture right now this is how learning takes place and how formation takes place. I think one of the reasons why the church is becoming increasingly irrelevant is that we don't deliver results for people. In the same way that if you go to a spin class, you feel differently afterwards; it helps your life. And church should-- we have access to the words of eternal life. Like it should function like a spin class; circuit training kind of thing.

Researcher: **Are there things from a praxis standpoint or from an experimentation standpoint that the typical church needs to stop doing? And if so, what?**

MP II: I think it's more a question of allocating time and staff. How much of the time do we ask people to commit and how much of the budget is going towards things that we know actually form people to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. I think we'd have to interrogate the amount of time and resource that's going into the Sunday gathering and how well it's actually functioning as a discipleship and formation tool. The medium is the message and so if the churches offer to their community is "come listen to a white male talk about the Bible and your life's going to get better," that's not a compelling invitation. I think your average person has at most two to three hours a week to be involved in church activities and Sunday morning takes up the maturity of that and it's not very strategic. Most of the staff hours go to putting on the best event possible. I know tons of church staff members who are like, I really want to be a disciple of Jesus, but the majority of my staff hours are spent doing things that don't seem to have very much to do with actually living out the way of Christ at all. And so, in my role, I'm inviting people into a life that I know I'm not living. And so how does deep transformation happen if even the people who are leading are busy, tired, stressed, and hurried and don't have time to deepen their walk with Christ in the details of life?

But the challenge is that Sunday morning gathering tends to be the place that were resources are collected to fund the work of the church. It's probably not going to go away, but I wonder if we could use it differently. Re-engineer it to say what could we do in this hour or hour and a half that would really help people with their lives and help them to help them experience life with God more fully in the details of life.

Interview Transcript: Missional Practitioner III

Researcher: **So what in what in your mind are some of the aspects of identity that you believe to be central or foundational to the church?**

MP III: I think identity why is ideally we would see ourselves as a countercultural movement, one that's rooted in servanthood and in a radical love. That'd would be the ideal. I don't think that's what's happening currently in North America. I mean, I think our identity is more in, this is cliché but we've recently been known for more than what we're against than what we're for. And I think the healthiest way for it to flip those two things. But yeah, I mean I think if I were going to put it in the tightest phrase that I could --I think our identity is supposed to be as a, as a countercultural movement, radical love and this collection and community of servants looking to, usually through entering through their work with the poor. So that'd be my first slice at it.

Researcher: **So, which of those that you just mentioned, would you say have been the most influential for making disciples in your ministry context?**

MP III: My observation is that people change either through a crisis or through one on one Mentoring relationships at work through serving others. The part that I've seen the most life change is when people have gotten involved in the front lines and have begun to become the kind of people that demonstrate the Gospel and proclaim it. I think, you know, historically the main line churches dot great job of the Social Gospel at demonstrating the Gospel, the Evangelical Churches in a great job of proclaiming it. And I think throughout history, the church is at its best when you're demonstrating and proclaiming it. So for my context, I work with a lot of evangelicals and to see them, you know, begin to see them kind of have that second conversion around demonstrating the gospel of actually reaching out, beginning to serve others who are in need, that's where I've seen the most life change.

Researcher: **I'd be interested to get your thoughts on what false beliefs do you think are most destructive or do you find most challenging for churches in North America?**

MP III: What's working numerically as I look around, the country is inspiring and entertaining. I mean, if you can do those two things, you can grow your church numerically. and that's how they usually grow. It is big. You have to. This is going to sound horrible. Youcan quote me on this. You have to pander to consumerism and peddle certainty. The truth is, the closer we get them to text, the more complicated it is. I think that if you go to any seminary, you go to anything like that, this idea like, "oh, It's all really simple. You just have to do exactly what

says." Man, I believe that. I have a very high view of scripture, but I think a lot of the North American church, the eat people's lives are so hard and confusing and full of like complexity anyway. What most people just want is for you to tell them exactly how it is and then make it really clear and really simple and the idea of having to wrestle through something or to look at them and go and then to go "I don't know. This is one of those parts of scripture that I'm still not totally certain about and I'm praying for the Holy Spirit to give me guidance." That's a bad way to grow a church. I notice that churches that are really growing, the messaging from the front is, "It is absolutely certain. I mean it is black and white." And they're all throwing a killer show on Sunday. They are putting a lot of resources into a attractional model. And I think 20 years ago you asked me, I said, no, that's not going to be the wave of the future because in the future or move away from starbucks and we're going to move more towards mom and pop coffee shops. And the millennials won't want the large deal and I thought that's what was gonna Happen in 20 years ago and that's isn't happening. There are some really cool smaller movements that are popping up and going, but by and large, but large churches are getting bigger and the smaller medium sized ones are dying out.

Researcher: **That's good. How do you know, you mentioned on identity, uh, the churches is this countercultural movement of people who are, you know, basically if I remember correctly, modeling Servant Hood and love. How do you guys, like I said, you could, you could speak through city unite or a particular gathering you're with right now. How do you guys help to train others to basically embrace that? Like is there anything like that you guys are offering on a consistent basis using.**

MP III: We've been using this process that's called faith walking. And it's, it's a lot of the family systems theory stuff combined with material around shame and around learning your own story and your own wounds. I just feel like before you even get people to a place where they're healthy and they're actually serving and loving others in a compelling way, most people have to go through a lot of introspection and self-awareness work to be able to get there. And so I can send you some more stuff on faith walking but it's pretty much a two day retreat and then a six month, once a week, learning community where you're just practicing new ways of engaging people. You're getting clear about what are some of the positive and negative vows that I have in my life and how those impact others and how can I rewrite some of those negative vows? How can I actually practice a new way of being? So that's been the most impactful thing I've seen of training people to be more loving.

Researcher: **If you had to measure that what are you looking for or listening for?**

MP III: I don't really pragmatic level its self awareness. We're looking for like, are they growing in self awareness of your own story and what you're doing and the impact of that is being shown out in their lives as a husband, as a, as a father. We haven't figured out how to put metrics on it yet.

Researcher: **What aspect of presence has been most paradigm shifting for your ministry context?**

MP III: I mean the shift that I'm really encouraged about personally and I see some other churches is starting to actually have a theology of place and I'm seeing that more and more. It's kind of a trend heading back in that direction. For me personally, when I first got into full time vocational ministry and working on different church staffs, my theology of place, it was really, really low and I've just had a personal conversion around that of seeing, both in my own where I live and where I lead. Starting to like really understand the value of knowing the people who God has put in authority in those places. Looking for opportunities to build relational connections with them and to genuinely having like a heart connection to the city that I lead and I live in a and sadly, a new thought for me over the last decade. And I see that happening more and more in churches around the country is like, I think Keller has been important in this and talking about this idea, you need to love where you live and know where you live and lead. I don't know if that fits into your presence category but that's been the biggest shift for me and the thing that I see.

Researcher: **So do you have any sort of like biblical themes or theology or key ideas that surround and help to inform this theology of place?**

MP III: There's the jeremiah stuff around and pray and seek the peace and prosperity of your city. That's been foundational for me. And the context of that obviously-- that's being written from as an exile as a captive in Babylon and he's not talking about Jerusalem. He's talking about the city that they're in right in that moment and so that's been important to me. Acts 17 as Paul is doing is great sermon there on Mars Hill, I think it's 26 and 27 or 27, 28. It just talks about the idea of like you have been placed where you are for a reason and I've placed the people around you for a reason as well. For me, that was one of those game changers where like, "Oh, there's something sacred going on around the place where I reside." And it's been really helpful for me. Those are the first two that come to mind that have really helped me, given me some handles to grab onto when I think about place and just me reengaging and that's been really experiential. It's been like the closer, the more I lean in to getting to know my own city. If you would have asked me 10 years ago, "Hey, name a city council member." I wouldn't say a single person. And thinking about that has been huge for me. So a lot of it's been from personal experience, but it also has been the theological shift as well.

Researcher: **Very cool. So what are some of the indicators that that let you guys know? Are you personally know that people are not only starting to rethink some of these things but also actually acting upon it? Like what are some of those indicators that let you know that people are now rethinking it and starting to change their lives because of it?**

MP III: In my personal church context right now, we're inviting people into very pragmatic targeted opportunities, to serve in our city and to serve the wishes of the people who are in leadership in our city. So when, we see people say yes to that and actually start to reorient their calendars around that, that's the best metric that we have to know something is really happening. Whereas we used to stand up and go, hey, we're going to do this emergency shelter thing. The city has come to us with this need and we're trying to respond to it. We're watching how many people raised their hand and say yes to that. So. Hey Justin, can I take this call back? Perfect.

Researcher: **From your perspective, what have been some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers and then not-yet believers?**

MP III: Good. It's the same answer for both. For me, its my "swan song" right now, that's centered around this idea of literal neighboring. I got into ministry because I, I love seeing people that don't know God come to know God. And after 10 years of being on a church staff, I drifted into a place where I have very few relationships with people that didn't know God. And the idea of literal neighbor is the antidote to the Christian bubble. So I just started to do the proximity thing. I just started to like take these small steps with the people that live around me and it just blew up like this window into a different world. And it was something that I've been craving. I was getting pretty fried and pretty dry spiritually, mostly from just being around Christians all the time. And so, the literal neighboring thing for me, was just the game changer and I've seen it over and over again in the people that we lead. They just, they start taking seriously this idea of like what happens out in their front yard and then they get hurled into these ministry moments way above their head. I mean they're totally true. They're like, what am I doing? I'm like to this person about their marriage and their wife is like moving out and they're like not looking at us going, what did you do to me? What we did is we threw them into a lab to live out all the stuff that we read and talked about the New Testament. And so the conversations in the lobby started to change when we really started to dig in on this. I mean, what we realized is we got our people into a lot of messy situations and beautiful situations, but they weren't prepared. They were going, I've never thought about his addictions. I've never thought about it. Like, I don't know what to do with this. This person seems really a mess with their family or you know, they don't have any balance. All of that stuff came, it came out of, "Hey, I'm going to, I'm going to start connecting with the people that live right around me."

Researcher: **So what is the hang-up for people that don't see that as an outlet for living out their faith?**

MP III: Yeah, I mean it's, it's two things. One, I think we know in our gut, we're like, "oh my goodness, those people always there." It's one thing to go and do the outreach thing at the church. It's another thing to do the downtown rescue mission but we know those people, they're there when I leave, they're there when I come back

home. I think that's the biggest hang up. There's a fear of like, "what can this lead to?" How many of these people are going to be needy? Some of these people, like I really don't have anything in common with. I don't want to be friends with people I don't have things in common with. And that's the biggest hang-up. And then of course the time piece. Those are the two hang ups.

Researcher: **What do you do currently, that's helping people to move into literal neighboring?**

MP III: Jay and I always laugh, like we wrote a book that all it says is like, "Hey, if you're a Christian you should find all the first names of your neighbors." I mean, that's the whole premise of it. It was so simple. And so the, the leadership principle that I learned out of all of this is, if your goal is to start a movement, you should set the bar low, not high. Like if you start movement, set the bar low or something really attainable. That puts people on a trajectory. That has been the biggest "Aha!" moment. So we didn't ask people to like love their neighbors. We just said, hey, would you learn and retain and use their names? So they, all, people's like automatic excuses are like, why I'm not going to do this, a lot of them get destroyed. Everyone wants to advocate their calling to the clergy. Anytime we say something challenging in front of the church, their first thought is like, "how do I get out of this?" The neighboring thing is so concrete and it's like the little grid. It's like, well you can either write down your neighbors' names and you can't. And so you watch people, you realize, you're like, oh no, you're, you're putting something so concrete in front of them and so the, you know, half the people go, "hey, I'm already doing this but I do this at work, and so that gives me out." Or they go, "hey, like you don't know my neighbors, there's just some really unhealthy people." It's so fascinating to watch people try to get out of it. So we are doing some other things around teaching people how to like live at depth with others. I'm like, have you just become the kind of person that like, you're not just sitting around for 10 years with your neighbor, having a beer in the front yard and he never talked about life with God. How do you, how do "D-up" on that? And a lot of that's been around becoming the kind of person that asks decent questions. We're doing some training around that. Nothing that we put in writing yet. We're just really kind of experimenting with it. But that really, I think one of the things I've learned is it takes so much courage as a pastor to say the same simple thing over and over again because everyone wants you to like teach that scripture that they've read ten one hundred times in life and twist it on some new angle so they go, "oh, that was so deep!" And that's fine, I think that's great that people are going to do that. What we really need is people who have the courage to say the same thing over and over again, especially if it's like the thing that Jesus said all the Law hangs on. So what we did is we said, okay, Jesus said, love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. Why have we Christians made up some way of interpreting loving your neighbor so that it doesn't include our actual neighbors? And so we just figured out how to say it in a way that gets people to say, "that is silly." Most people, when you started to break them down, they'll go, "okay, you're right." The key is not dismissing all the other great stuff

they're doing. In Jesus's economy, clearly, the relationships we build at work is loving your neighbor or when you're overseas and you do something on a mission trip, you're loving your neighbor. All those things are loving your neighbor. That's been a real important learning lesson for us: it was just too be really, really clear on that. We're not dismissing all the others things that you're doing. What we are saying is doing all of those things doesn't all sudden like sprinkle magic fairy dust over your actual neighborhood. And all of a sudden Jesus wasn't talking about those people. I should say everything I just said is how I lived most of my life. I mean this is all in the last decade for me. So I'm not like throwing stones and saying, "Man, everybody sucks. How come you haven't figured this out yet?" I'm saying, I've been down this road. I've done all these weird justification things.

Interview Transcript: Missional Practitioner IV

Researcher: **What aspects of identity do you believe are central and foundational to the nature of the church?**

MP IV: Yeah, for me, and it has to do with the missionary nature of the church. I mean, I just think that lays the foundation for everything else. I mean all the other paradigm shift, all the other changes, all the different ways we think of church in the west, I just think all of it flows from a missionary identity. I think we belong to the missionary nature and the missionary character of the church.

Researcher: **So how does that, in your opinion, begin to change things for people?**

MP IV: It changes everything. Two overarching ways is I think it's a paradigm shift both for the individual but then also a paradigm shift for the collective body of Christ. In other words, when we recapture the missionary nature of the church, we begin to see that each and every person individually as a called and sent missionary person. The first thing has to do with- We begin to see that we are a sent missionary person but then collectively we see that we are a sent missionary people. So it changes the way we think of ourselves. Really it changes our identity in a sense. And it certainly changes the corporate Body. The implications of that are immense. I mean, it changes the way we think about our work and how we think about where we live. It changes the way we think of ministry. I think it changes the way we think of discipleship and evangelism. It changes the way we think that the structure of church leadership. Just about everything about missiology and ecclesiology I think is shaped or informed by that missionary identity.

Researcher: **What sort of false beliefs about identity do you think are most destructive or do you find most challenging where you currently serve?**

MP IV: That churches is only a Sunday morning gathering or church is a place where certain things happen and worst of all is understanding the church as a vendor of religious goods and services. We think that we are to provide religious goods and services for Christian consumers. I think that's probably the most damaging. For church planters, it probably has to do with being too Sunday-centric. And I'm not anti-gathering whatsoever. I mean we already a gathered and scattered people. But probably being too "Sunday-centric" and it's probably been to "lead-guy led." That there is one lead dude that's supposed to pull this whole thing off. That's also very harmful.

Researcher: **So how do you currently help train others to rethink what you just mentioned or embrace and apply that missionary identity to themselves, first and foremost, and then also to who they're trying to lead?**

MP IV: Well first, it most cases, if I had the opportunity to just spend some time talking about paradigm shifts and trying to challenge our traditional thinking on church and mission. It's usually just trying to spend some time, like I said, introducing the idea that we may actually need to unlearn and relearn. And usually, if we have time to really lay that out and in a very gracious way. Ninety nine percent of the time people go, yeah, something's not quite right. And there's different ways to go at it. I mean sometimes kind of go at it, just tell people, rethink the nature of the church. But sometimes you can go at it from kind of a cultural shift perspective just to help people see that we live in a very different time and place. And so it's funny, I'll say people kind of enter into this conversation, one of two directions, I call it either a "crisis of influence" or a "crisis of mission."

What I mean by a crisis of influence is that people enter into this whole conversation because often what they know is what used to work isn't working. I hear all the time people say, "Yeah, we did this thing and 200 people would show up but now only 40 show up." And they're not sure why and they certainly aren't sure what to do. They just wonder if this whole missional conversation might have an answer. So they kind of enter into the conversation from a pragmatic, you know, "what used to work doesn't work anymore." And then the other group of people, "crisis of mission," and this is typically, it's a generalization, but it's typically a younger generation, but they enter into the conversation because they know something is not right. They just have kind of a check in their spirit. That this cant be what it's all about. I mean meeting for an hour on Sunday morning, singing three songs, and listen to someone give a lecture- that surely isnt what he had in mind. So because of that, you can kind of go at the topic from a different direction and be a little more of a pragmatic or can be a little more theological, theoretical.

Researcher: **As you're coaching and training, what are some of the things that you look for to try to measure if people are starting to rethink some of the things that you mentioned?**

MP IV: I'd say a couple of things. Some of it is just a "holy discontent" but just people are just, they're just uncomfortable just doing the same thing over and over again. But like much more important than that probably is we actually start to live differently. So they start to have stories about engaging their neighbors or seeing things that they hadn't seen before. The ultimate paradigm shift that starts to take root is that behaviors change. So they actually start thinking and acting like it.

Researcher: **But what aspect of presence has been most paradigm shifting for discipleship and in your ministry context?**

MP IV: I think the first thing is helpful to recognize because most people today, unfortunately they don't live in their church context. We have a lot of people in churches that might drive 30 minutes to the place where there church meets. Well, because of that, I think we actually have to do context work in two places: where they live and then also what the context around where their church meets. And so those can be two very, very different things. For me personally, this is just my bias, but I think the number one topic or issue for people to struggle with, to reflect on, to really help them fully understand presence, is the incarnation. So it's actually one of the key paradigm shifts for me. The first paradigm shift is for the Church is what we talked about a few minutes ago and the other side of the same coin is the incarnational presence or sometimes I will call it incarnational mission.

           The bottom line of that for me is allowing the incarnation to inform our posture toward our context. And unfortunately in most evangelical tribes, we just don't think about the incarnation. I say this all the time in my tribe, which is the Baptist tribe, when we talk about Christology, we almost always just talk about one thing: the cross. Now I'm not diminishing that, we should talk about the cross obviously. But we have to have a more comprehensive and robust Christology that includes the incarnation. Because the incarnation- what more should influence our posture towards our context? What more should influence our understanding of presence than the fact that God took on human flesh and stepped into the muck and mire of us? That ought to be in a sense almost a model or example of how we ought to step into the muck and mire of our context. I just think it's where we have to start. When we talk about presence, before we can get to any practical contextualization or how to learn about our context, we have to seriously think about the theological implications of the incarnation. We just hardly ever talk about the incarnation. The incarnation is like the Christmas story and then that's about it but t very significant.

Researcher: Is there a false belief about presence that you find is most prevalent in, in or most challenging to discipleship?

MP IV: I don't think we get it. I don't think we think about it or reflect on it. So it's almost like not even on our radar and part of it, again, I don't think we've allowed the incarnation, to truly inform our posture and because of that we distance ourselves from it. I shouldn't say sin but sinners. We think we should keep distance from the world. And that's the reason we get away with that is because we haven't allowed the incarnation to influence our posture. We get away with it, which is separate from the world, uh, because we haven't allowed. Now there's boundaries there and barrier that we have to deal with and maybe train on all that. I always say that like. Look, you don't have to swing your door is open to all the crazy stuff that's out there but its crazy just how distanced we are from the world. And again that influences then discipleship and evangelism because if we think we need to be separate and distanced from the world, and our view of evangelism is some kind of unnatural, artificial, four spiritual laws that we to have to share with strangers because we don't have any friends who are lost. So I just think that whole concept

or topic of identity and presence are just enormous. I like to think about them on two sides of the same coin. One side of the coin is the missionary nature church and the other side of the coin is incarnational presence.

Researcher: **What do you think are some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers in your ministry context? And not-yet-believers?**

MP IV: That's a good question. I guess I would initially try to frame it individually and collectively. Individually it's doing life with lost people so they could see that we actually live differently. That we live lives of great sacrifice, radical hospitality, and generosity. But if we're not doing life with people, if we are not in close proximity, and we are no present with them they are not going to see that. So, I think individually, it has to do with = our behaviors and the way we live. And then I guess there would probably be things collectively as a body. Hopefully, there are things that a church collectively does in the city that people see. I mean in any city, there's probably churches that are known for what they do for the city. Unfortunately there's not a lot but there should be. We all see different stories and if I had time to reflect I could probably think of a story from last week. You know, a church instead of building a building, they give money t such and such. There is a church here in town that is very involved in the last decade. They're real involved in this thing, this movement, its called "What is the church?" And it's all about churches working together in the city. So they have lots of different service days. They just kind of team up but it's across denominational lines. So I know there's people who see that and it's like, wow, so churches that are not even the same denomination are coming together. You know, I'll tell you, another example I think it's probably foster care. I mean the church is starting to step up to the plate in foster care. And I know there are some cities where the church is trying to eliminate, you know, every kid in the foster care system. And/or looking to be adopted. So there's things like that kind of collectively we can coordinate.

Researcher: **I'm just curious, are there things, from a praxis standpoint that maybe the church collectively it needs to stop doing? And if so, what are some of those things?**

MP IV: Practically speaking, one of th things we can stop doing is so much stuff for ourselves. I mean that's kind of a silly answer. But years ago I taught at a small a class at a small Mennonite Brethern college for several years. And every year I taught this evangelism class and the very first class I would divide the whiteboard and I would ask them to list every program and activity in their church that was for members. And we make this super long list on the left side of the whiteboard and then after we get that and it would take a long time. I said, okay, now list every program and activity your church has for those outside the church. And every semester there was always one or two people in class that could think of one or two things. Sometimes they might say, oh, well our Sunday school classes or small groups, those are for people outside the church. Then I was like, yeah, well let's talk about that, you know? And then eventually come around to go, no,

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okay. Not really. So maybe I guess it would just be things that we probably need to have a longer term instead of just a one shot, hey, let's do this and feel better about ourselves, you know, we're going to do this outreach event on this Saturday and know next year we'll do it again. Lets just have a longer, a long haul and long runway of a this outreach thing.

Researcher: **What are some of the indicators that you look for when people begin to rethink praxis and also act upon it?**

MP IV: Yeah, well there's a whole slew of like scorecard issues. Different things we count and measure. These are the things I would look for. I don't know that I do look for these because in most cases I work with planters or congregations that are trying to make a shift. I may not like the walk along with them over a long period of time, but, but we do talk about scorecards. I think if we really want to make changes then we need to start counting and measuring differently. So I'll usually frame counting and measuring differently even though we use those two words interchangeably they are actually different. Counting is quantitative and measuring is qualitative. So counting would be, I would say, we need to account "missionary behaviors and activities." There are all kinds of different activities that I think we should actually start counting. To begin to say, "oh well that's important and what gets counted gets repeated. I mean it could be just really a hundred different things. From something as simple as how many meals you share with people outside the church each week to how many hours is the church collectively tutoring kids from school, or how many people have we prayed for outside the church membership, you know, just all kinds of different activity. And then measuring, typically what we are talking about there is are there indicators in the city, having to do with crime or education, or poverty issues, are there things that we can actually measure to see if our involvement in the city is making a difference. So we kind of get a baseline of different indicators today and say, okay a month from now, six months from now, are we making is difference? Does that make sense? I just think scorecard measurements and metrics has to be a part of this whole conversation. We have to start counting differently because right now, typically all we do is we count how many people show up. It sounds snarky but that doesn't give us any indication whatsoever the effect that its having on the community. I mean it just doesn't tell us anything. It just tells us how many people are showing up. So we have to start counting and measuring.

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Interview Transcript: Missional Practitioner V

Researcher: **What in your mind are the central statements or ideas that make up a church's identity?**

MP V: Well, I think you have to think of origin first. I think that in order for a church to declare its identity or how it identifies itself, I think it has to understand its origins and those origins are always tied back to that know we are called and said by a missionary God, and that's why we exist. So the reason that the church exists is because of who God is. So it flips back to God's identity. So, we can't even shape our identity as a church if we don't truly understand a big part of God's identity-- that God is a missionary and he's a sending God, you know. So, that's one of the things that I would say is important in those statements is very important the church understands that we are sent because we exist. You know, it goes back to that old axiom, that God doesn't have a mission for his church. God has a church for his mission. That's identity.

Researcher: **What false beliefs about identity are the most destructive or do you find most challenging in your ministry context?**

MP V: Well, I think, I think a big part of it is what's most destructive is lackadaisical vision and purpose statements that really are more general become kind of more "me-centric" or narcissistic. I think that a lot of churches, their vision and purpose is more narcissistic than they realize-- that they exist more for themselves than they exist for the local community. And so I think that's one of the biggest falsehoods there is that most churches don't understand and are not clear with themselves, they're not clear with their people, and they're not clear with their community-- that we exist here to be a blessing to this community and that the number one reason we exist is local. Because, you know, a lot of churches didn't want to go global. They want to think, you know, think mission and international and Yada Yada Yada. But the people in our neighborhood don't even know who they are. They don't even know who the people in their neighborhood are themselves and so I think that's one of the biggest falsehoods. I don't know if that went too far, but that's my first thoughts.

Researcher: **How do you help train people to embrace what you just mentioned--God being missionary God and sending people on that mission? How do you do that practically?**

MP V: Well, practically the first thing, I think it's the core of disciple making and the core discipleship, I think we have to do a lot of "re-engineering." So it goes back to helping people understand the core of the gospel because I think we have a short-sided gospel. I think we have, I call it, a "dehydrated Gospel" or a

"Shrunken Gospel" because the Gospel in the evangelical world over the last 60 years has become a deal between us and God and how to keep us out of hell. And that's just not the gospel of Jesus preached. Well, if you don't get the gospel right you're not going to get discipling right and if you're not getting discipling right your not getting church right. So I think we got to go way back. And dealing with church planters I experienced this all the time. They want to plant a church. And my whole world is church planting. Okay? But really, I think it's a bad term. You don't plant a church. He plant a seed. You can't plant a garden, you don't plant a garden, you plant seeds. And so most guys, they're starting church services, and they're not starting churches and they're not starting churches because they're not making disciples and they're not making disciples because they don't understand the core of the gospel. And so I think it goes back to you have to be clear with people that your discipling and define the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. Because you can't go back and "re-engineer that into people." If you start the deal off with, "this is a salvation message that's the core of the Gospel, then it becomes a very "me-centric" deal. It's a one on one deal. You can't even read the epistles one-on-one primarily. And so we've made everything very "me-istic" and very narcissistic from those, from those standpoints. And we immediately get ourselves lost in the weeds.

Researcher: **Let's say you're discipling some folks or your training some church planters, what would be some things that you would look for from them to begin measuring if they're starting to rethink some of these things that you're talking about?**

MP V: Yeah. Well, so like for instance, if I talked to a church planter and he says, "I moved to Indianapolis six months ago. I'm planting a church." And I say, okay, so tell me who are you discipling? What are their names? Really? Okay. Larry. Larry Williamson. Okay. Brian Jones. Steve Smith. Okay. So what's the last week with those guys looked like? I want to get really specific because that's the thing -- Jesus invited those 12 to be *with* him the scripture says. Once again, I'm getting back to the seed of the Gospel. I want to know, are you planting the Gospel? Are you developing a core group from that standpoint or is most of your activity "group-ish?" If it's "group-ish," it's, "we've had five information meetings and we've had preview services and da-da-da. No, that tells me your planting a church service. you know, you're not making disciples and planting disciples.

Researcher: **What aspect of presence has been most paradigm-shifting for discipleship in your ministry context?**

MP V: Neighboring. That's been the biggest aspect. That's just changed the way that I trained church planters in fact, to a huge degree. It's as simple as loving your neighbor as yourself and loving your actual neighbor. Brad Brisco and I've written a lot together. Our latest book was about neighboring. We talk about the places you live, work and play, so that's your first, second, third place. So, really just going back and say if you want to plant a church, just start loving the people

within the places that you live, work and play and love them in tangible ways. And so place matters hugely. And its getting church planters to thinking in "micro terms" rather than "macro terms" Because you can cut an apple open and you can count the seeds in an apple, but you cant count the apples in the seed. It's innumerable. But most guys want to think about the apple. No, the seeds are more important than the apple is. As you realize the impact of a seed and you realize the potential, and the seed of the exponential potential, the seed, then you're not going to despise the days of small beginnings. You're going to spend a lot of time on the small stuff and the "micro" of your neighborhood and the places that you hang out and you're going to pour yourself into that rather than pouring yourself into the "macro" so much.

Researcher: **I'm just curious, are there any false beliefs about presence that you find are challenging to discipleship?**

MP V: Oh, well there definitely are. I think that part of it is the, "if we build it, they'll come." If we just create a cool enough situation, then people are going to show up. Well, starbucks is an example of a non-third place, for instance. It's a pseudo thing. So, Howard Schultz's, the whole idea about Starbucks in the beginning when he bought the first Starbucks in Seattle was "we're going to make third places." Well, Starbucks aren't third places. In fact, they've even proven with studies that Starbucks is not a place where you meet people. It's a place where you may set a meeting up to meet someone, but you don't meet new people at Starbucks. Everybody's alone together or people show up there for a meeting.

And so I think that is just kind of a picture of what the falsehood with places can be-- that it's not enough just to show up or just to be there. It's the engagement and the repetition. To constantly going back and going back and going back until you know, and are known in a given place. It seems like there's so many of us just want to do the shortcuts, wanting to do the "microwave thing" and how quick can I do this so I can get to so many people. One of the big falsehoods is that it's a "quick deal" and it's not. Churches that grow quickly from planting stage to hundreds or thousands in a couple of years -- The truth of the matter is most of these churches, and I would say probably 99 percent of those churches have grown because they have gathered other Christians. You know, it's a zero sum game. I mean, we know the numbers of the Evangelical Church. I mean in some reports show the evangelical church loosing in upwards to 50,000 members a month. So you know, we're getting bigger churches and more and more mega churches and I'm not against megachurch and some of my best friends, pastor mega churches, but we're trying to plant "mega" instead of planting "micro" and I think Jesus planted "micro" and he got "mega" out of it. So sorry, I went on a tantrum there.

Researcher: **What are some of the indicators that let you know that people are starting to rethink presence and act upon that?**

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MP V: Yeah, well I think one of the biggest indications is that they start getting their own stories. They start getting their own stories. They get contagious with it. One of the things that we do in our training, we talk a lot about it in the "Next Door As It Is In Heaven" book, is just tons of practical ways to love your neighbor and love your neighborhood in practical ways. And what happens inevitably, I mean, like for instance I'll do a weekend seminar on this stuff and within a month but then definitely months and months after that I get emails, I have conversations with the pastor or leaders of whatever group hosted. And they've got all these stories they can't wait to tell because people go out and they start trying to stuff and start doing it. And so the contagion becomes the stories and the stories become even more addictive and cause people to want to live this stuff out more and more. So when you start hearing stories, like if you're a church planter and you start training up or discipling a handful of people to love their neighbors as ourselves, to live the gospel of the kingdom in to the place that they live, work and play, stories start coming out of that and transformative stories. That's the biggest metric to me. It's not who showed up at the information meeting or how many showed up at our lunch or whatever that the stories are. The metrics to me are the most important early metrics.

Researcher: **What have been some of the most powerful expressions of praxis for believers and not yet believers in your ministry context?**

MP V: Well, the thing that I seen more and more of are people opening their homes up and opening their lives up. A recovery of hospitality has been a big thing. And so, you know, hospitality, that sounds like, oh, well that's kind of Nice. Or Oh yeah, well that's a good thing. Um, yeah. We had to do a little more, throw more parties, you know. But No. I mean hospitality is all throughout the old testament and then it's thoroughly throughout the New Testament. But we just barely even give any thought to it. We think. Oh, well that's, that's nice. Yeah. Hospitality. I'll, I'll get A. I'll put some new flowers on the dining table once a week. Uh, no. Uh, hospitality is a requirement of an elder. You're right, you know, is, must be hospitable, which means the love of strangers. I mean the love of strangers. When I see people, uh, that are being discipled or they're starting to follow Jesus when I see him starting to open up their homes and open up their lives and hospitality and being hospitable as they go about their daily walk, now they're getting it. Now we're getting it. Now we're starting to look like Jesus. You know, Jesus was hospitable. He was not afraid of strangers. And so I think that's the big thing. And then I think from not yet Christians or people that are starting to follow them, it is, is. This is some of the same stuff. In fact, we practiced a lot of this stuff it was amazing because we would have non-Christians, I mean people that just hated the church and couldn't stand evangelicals start being discipled. and they didn't even know there had being discipled because they started following. And that's just pre-conversion discipleship. We started seeing them tag along during a lot of the same practices. And one of the things that I've seen, and you've probably seen this, churches that really go in and start loving their city in tangible ways in mercy stuff and justice stuff. A lot of times when they're really doing that, not-yet-

Christians want to join with them and do it too. So I think that that's some of the things we see.

Researcher: **Are there any sort of false beliefs about praxis that you find challenging or destructive to the "church being the church?"**

MP V: I think it's just good works that are just good works. If you don't add Jesus to it, it's just, it's just good works. It's nice, you know, but the united way can do it too, you know, so you or, or you know, a farm aid or whatever can pull it off. You don't need the Lord. You don't need the Holy Spirit, you know, but it only leads so far. And so this is one of my constant warnings in the missional movement, which I'm a big part of, is that if this doesn't lead back to Jesus clearly and with declaration and proclamation somewhere along the way, then it's just good works. We have to be glorifying the Lord in this and it has to be reflected back to him as, hey, why are we here? Why are we doing this for you? This is who we are because we serve the Lord who sent us to you. So it has to be "Gospel-centric" or it's just nice. It's just nice things, which is great. You know, it's good. But I think it's a real danger, a real falsehood.

Researcher: **Are there things, praxis-wise, that you think maybe the church just in general needs to maybe stop doing?**

MP V: Oh, well, I don't know if I want to say "stop doing," but I would say I'm less of an emphasis on. I think that we over emphasize Sunday morning and preaching. And look, I'm a preacher. It's what I do. It's what I've been doing for 35 years. But we think that that's going to change everything and is it needed, is it an essential? Absolutely. But weekend services and preaching has become the organizing principle of our church and you just don't see in the New Testament that that was the organizing principle of the church. It was the scattering. And that's why Brad and I did these conferences. We called the "Sentralized." The word "Sentralized," we spelled it "s e n t r a l I z e d" rather than "c e n t." So the whole idea was the thing that gathers us together centrally is the fact that we have been sent. So that's why we call it "Sentralized." What we're saying is that is the organizing principle- - We come together for the purpose of being scattered, you know, daily. And so I think the big falsehood that man is that the eggs, 95 percent of the budget of the resource of the time, the energy, the focus, the mental, um, drain is all on pulling off great weekend services.

IRB Approval

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 1, 2018

Justin Wester
IRB Approval 3500.110118: Missional Metamorphosis: How Identity, Presence, and Praxis are Reshaping Disciple Making within a Post-Christian Context

Dear Justin Wester,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

   6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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