

Running head: A FRESH EXPRESSION OF '*AND ARE WE YET ALIVE*'

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Abstract

The paper addresses the decline in membership and overall societal influence of The United Methodist Church. In response to these life-threatening developments, new forms of ministry are emerging within the church. Many of these new ministries are grouped under a program called “*Fresh Expressions*” which began in the Church of England and are effectively being implemented in American Methodism. Storefront churches are discussed, bi-vocational ministers are considered and the concept of the “Third Place” as a form of ministry is introduced. Three focused-interviews are utilized to understand the need and necessity for changes in the way The United Methodist Church approaches ministry. The necessary joining of new places of invitation with acts of worship and discipleship is posited as a faithful model for fulfilling the Church’s mission.

*Keywords: John Wesley, Fresh Expression, Storefront Churches, The United Methodist Church*

## A Fresh Expression of “And Are We Yet Alive?”

### The Problem/The Opportunity

Every year at Annual Conferences of The United Methodist Church, and at many of the interim gatherings, clergy and laity stand to sing the words of the traditional Wesley hymn, “And Are We Yet Alive?” Methodists have been asking that question for centuries and today is no exception. In 2018, the question sounds more like this: Why is The United Methodist Church declining in membership? Why are so many individuals leaving the traditional, established expression of the Church or, in some cases, why are they more interested in pursuing more non-traditional settings of ministry (i.e. storefront churches, starting new churches in non-steeple settings, or even attending church at the local pubs?

The declining United Methodist membership was observed at least as early as the 1960’s and has given rise to many scholarly observations and comments. One of most straightforward and pointed observations was (surprisingly!) done by one of the bishops of The United Methodist Church. In 1986, Bishop Richard Wilke’s published *And Are We Yet Alive*, the essence of which is summarized in his observation, “The United Methodist Church is a church in crisis. Since 1962, the church has been losing influence and membership at a dizzying rate.” Bishop Wilke’s analysis received mixed reaction among church leaders when it was published. In a private conversation regarding the book, another then-active bishop, respected as deeply spiritual among his peers, retorted, “Bishop Wilke is much too pessimistic about the future of our church!” This bishop was not nearly as concerned about the future of The United Methodist Church as was Bishop Wilke.

Perhaps one could argue that the continued existence of The United Methodist Church is evidence for the power and presence of God in its life. How else can it be explained that a failing and poorly run organization has not already collapsed? Especially given that Twenty years after Wilke, three serious analyses of Methodism (Kisker, Lawrence & Yrigoyen, 2008, 2008, 2008) identified the same issues that Wilke recognized two decades before.

Reflecting on the history of The Methodist Church over the last 30 years, all is not dim. At least two times in this recent history, The Methodist Church significantly influenced and affected the major developments in society. The first instance occurred in the 1840’s when the Methodist Episcopal Church split over the issue of slavery. A history professor expressed the

opinion that the separation in the 1840's of the mainline American Protestant churches, the largest of which was The Methodist Episcopal Church, created a climate that rendered the Civil War inevitable. The second major historical influence of our church was its influence on the passage of the XVIII Amendment to The United States Constitution, establishing prohibition as a national law. The issue is not whether prohibition was a good law or not, rather that the influential role of Methodism at the time was causing it to happen.

It is interesting that the major conversation currently before The United Methodist Church centers on the presence in society of homosexual citizens and how our church could respond in ministry to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Allies (LGBTQQIA) persons. Few, if any, on any side of this issue, would claim that the opinion and decisions of The United Methodist Church regarding homosexuality will be significant in the ultimate national resolution of this complex issue. Such is the lack of influence of The United Methodist Church in American society. No one would claim that The United Methodists are any longer "opinion makers" on the national scene. The influence of the church's voice has declined to the point where we are no longer major players in national issues. This is a sharp change from our earlier history.

Robert Schuller speaking to the National Congress of United Methodist Men in 1985, called for the rebirth of mission. He said that very little doubt existed in his mind that The United Methodist Church is a sleeping giant. Stirred into action, it could produce in our time the most sweeping spiritual, social, economic and political changes in the history of the world. "The United Methodist Church has the theology and the organization to literally sweep this country for Jesus Christ. No other denomination has the power, the ability or the freedom to attract the masses of people as does The United Methodist Church; this giant has been lulled to sleep. If this church begins to flaunt what it has and this giant begins to wake up, watch out, for it could literally change this world for Christ" (Wilke, 1986, p. 122). Methodism must think "outside the box" with new approaches to ministry in order to find a way forward.

"Good Numbers" Were a Part of the "Good News"

The Book of Acts in The New Testament discusses the growth of Christianity by references to the number of persons involved as faithful participants. If the positive numbers in Acts are seen as 'good news,' then the negative numbers of our current history are anything but

good news for Methodism. The United Methodist Church started an advertising campaign, *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* to encourage an open-door policy and an increase in church membership. New people visited local congregations, and inasmuch, this campaign was a momentary success. But the campaign was a long-term failure because the local congregations were unprepared for this influx of new persons. In an era of fake news, one might say that this campaign was false advertising. To take some liberties with St. Thomas Aquinas, “New slogans are not intrinsically evil, but their manner of usage may make them so!”

While the majority of laity and clergy agree that there are deep issues threatening The United Methodist Church, few have a suggested way forward. We need a fundamental change in the way in which we do business.

There are certainly external influences to consider. Carter and Warren (2017) observe that in the same way that athletic teams have trouble winning on the road, the Church in The United States of America has lost its “home field advantage.” The basic American culture is now secular, agnostic or overly hostile to any expression of the Christian faith. In earlier years the church operated in a climate that, at worst, was neutral to a Christian witness. One president of a Methodist-related college for many years recounts conversation he had with each of the college chaplains when they were employed at the church-related institution. He told each campus chaplain to think of his or her work not as ministers to a parish of connected Christians but as those working in a “mission field.” In prior history, they may have been able to approach their work with students as parishioners, but currently, as Carter noted we have “lost the home field advantage.” The Pew American Religious Landscape Study (2016) discussed the sharp decline of Christianity and the fact that Americans were becoming less religious and less Christian. These numbers once again address the need for approaches in Methodism to lead the way for new methodologies for ministry in the coming years. The United Methodist Church must implement new forms of ministry or continue to deal with church closings and a decline in membership.

Similarly, Rendle (2011) noted that “In 2008 among the 35,000 congregations in United Methodism in the United States, 10,000 had 35 or fewer in average worship attendance.” (p. 16) Many United Methodist churches are at the point of closing their doors, and a new approach to ministry is desperately needed. The traditional approach to ministry over the years has focused on Sunday school, the eleven o’clock worship hour and occasionally Wednesday evening

fellowship. This approach to ministry has been fairly standard for over the last 100 years. However, this way of doing “church” is no longer effective. We can no longer approach this topic as “if we build it (the church) they will come.” Too much of our life as Christians has focused on the church building which is expensive to build and even more expensive to maintain. A recent study by Krejcir (2007) notes that dating back to the early 1980’s church membership and attendance has been in decline and today “nearly 50% of Americans have no church home” (p. 1). He also noted that by 1900 “there was a ratio of 27 churches per 10,000 people, as compared to the close of the century (2000) where we have 11 churches per 10,000 people in America.” (p. 1). Krejcir (2007) also noted that “Each year over 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity. This translates into the realization that people are leaving the church. From our research, we have found that they are leaving as hurting and wounded victims of some kind of abuse, disillusionment, or just plain neglect.” (p. 1).

The Central Question: Why is the Traditional Church Losing its Appeal?

Raphael Simon once observed, “To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek him the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement.” (Neal, 2017, p. 1) Who wouldn’t be wooed and who wouldn’t want to be a part of this kind of relationship? Indeed, those who encounter God in Jesus Christ are taken aback by God’s love and humbled, awestruck, much the same as was John Wesley at Aldersgate Street when he ‘felt his heart strangely warmed’ and ‘felt that Christ died for even me.’ But one experience does not a life of discipleship make. Romance, as we know, is only part of a lasting relationship. Romance is tested through growing with one another, and ultimately being made one in purpose and mission. Programming to reach new persons for Christ are effective when they are a part of the whole of become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Many leave church because the romance has faded, and the relationship with God never grew, and separation seemed the best option.

Clearly, if the mainline Protestant churches are to achieve their mission (and even perhaps if they are going to survive as viable institutions), a new approach to ministry is needed. Those of us who love and believe in the church cannot expect potential parishioners to show up on our church doorsteps. We must provide new and innovative approaches to ministry. One new concept is the storefront church approach.

## The Growth of the Storefront Church

Historically, American culture has been generally accepting of religion with a variety of religious expressions including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. However, the recent past has seen a pronounced shift in the cultural attitudes toward religion. Diversity within the Christian tradition is quite common nowadays. Methodism, for example, is a broad denomination with a continuum of liberal and conservative perspectives. Amid this diversity, there are significant number of start-up or store-front churches. For example, in a North Carolina city of about 300,000 persons, hardly a week goes by without the opening of a new storefront or start-up church. The two terms describe similar religious efforts but with different histories, memberships, and methodologies. The storefront church movement grew up during the Great Migration and was often tied to the African American culture and history. The start-up churches had their origin in a broader racial and cultural range and were an indication of the established churches failure to migrate to certain economic groups and classes. Travel through rural northern Georgia in today's climate, and you will find that the start-up (sometimes called community church) church is frequent even in rural America. Further research reveals an interesting development in the rise of the "storefront" church movement. The storefront church and the start-up church share a connection in the importance of alternative forms of ministry. Crumbley (2012) defines the "storefront church" as "faith communities such as the Church which emerged as independent congregations and remain unaffiliated with larger denominations and whose spiritual and symbolic content stand in the tradition of the Sanctified Church." (p. 17)

The rise of the storefront church movement can be traced to the mid 1900's during the time of the Great Migration, where many African Americans migrated from the rural south to seek work in the northern part of the United States, primarily in the large cities. Some of the larger existing black congregations such as Olivet Baptist in Chicago reacted to this migration by developing social services programs to assist newcomers. Many migrants, however, felt unwelcome at larger black churches (with middle to upper level parishioners). McRoberts (2003) discussed the relationship and connection between neighborhoods in the inner city and the black urban neighborhood. She observed that "This relationship challenges both scholarship and policy to focus more on the actual behaviors and inclinations of religious institutions in depressed urban neighborhoods." (p. 150). Casillas and Ramirez (2009) noted that "Newly urban congregations

responded by developing home-based and storefront churches that resembled the churches of their hometowns” (p. 1). Storefront and community churches have remained strong influences in black America offering educational and financial resources in addition to religious ministry. The growth of the storefront church movement, although it had its origin in the African American experience during the Great Migration, is not exclusively reserved for the African American church.

These experiences appear to be an early response of Christians to the failure of existing churches to meet the spiritual needs of some marginalized Christians. Hernandez (1999) in her article, “Moving from Cathedral to Storefront Churches” notes that there is a major shift occurring for Latino Catholics who are choosing to convert to Protestantism, specifically Pentecostal and evangelical Christian traditions. It is estimated that 60,000 Latinos transfer loyalties from liturgical to storefront churches each year, many favoring the storefront church environment of intimate ministry to the larger, more formal, cathedral worship structure. According to Hernandez this “May be the most significant shift in religious affiliation since the Reformation.” (p. 216). It is interesting that the traditional and formal structure of the Catholic Church, with its symbolism and rituals, is not as appealing to this population, who are instead opting for the storefront type of worship environment.

Crumbley (2012) in *Saved and Sanctified: The Rise of a Storefront Church in Great Migration Philadelphia*, discussed ethnographic research concerning how a storefront-style church that started above a horse stable made positive strides in religious innovation through this unique approach to ministry. Storefront churches, like this example illustrates, are largely in working class neighborhoods located nearby their likely members. This proximity creates a bond between the church and the overarching community that transcends the traditional model of the local church. One example includes an old established United Methodist Church located in the downtown area of a large metropolitan city. Most of the church members travel to downtown from a variety of locations and neighborhoods throughout the city. As a result, there is limited community connection with the migrants to the northern cities that was found in the large urban churches. These churches were vastly different from the local Baptist church in towns in rural South Carolina. As always, then and now, a church must meet the spiritual needs of those in the community in which it is located (The United Methodist Church, Par 252).

Krieger (2011) notes that “Many of the ministers of storefront churches are not formally educated for the ministry; rather they feel “called to their vocations.” Often they are dual-career clergy with secular day jobs—much like the Apostle Paul working with their hands and wits during weekdays and serving the Lord in the evening and on weekends.” (p. 73)

#### Bi-Vocational Ministers: A Possible Alternative

There is some interest among laity of The United Methodist Church to revise and add to the current structure used by United Methodists to prepare pastors. One retired Elder in The United Methodist Church has expressed interest in a proposal to establish a new bi-vocational category for United Methodist ministers. This category would enable the appointment of ministers to very poor areas that could never afford a “regular” Methodist minister, and to areas where ordained, full-time clergy lack credibility in the community because they are perceived as “out of touch.” As noted later in this paper, one of the failures of our current structure is that a poor area cannot support a pastor. The traditional approach of the Master of Divinity track (Master’s degree obtained in seminary) would still exist but an alternate one-year program (in much more detail than the summer course of study that already exists in The United Methodist Church) would be designed for lay ministers who would not depend on the resources of the church to support their ministry. Reminiscent of the ministry of Saint Paul, these bi-vocational ministers would be provided a sustainable living by their day job and they would minister to their flock as non-paid servants on the nights and weekends.

One issue for Charles Wesley during the Wesleyan revival was the question of how to appropriately support the lay assistants and workers. It was a perplexing and potentially divisive issue between John and Charles (Baker, 1948, p. 84-85). This proposed structure would enable the church to reach out to socially depressed areas where the gospel had yet to be proclaimed. This new approach to ministry is similar to the rise of the storefront church movement that has become popular in recent years.

#### A Modern Example of Choosing Money Over the Poor

John Wesley was interested in spreading the gospel, especially to the poor. It is noteworthy that those “hearing Jesus gladly” were primarily from the poor of Galilee and Judea. The upper classes were more likely to be the enemies of Jesus, even though the disciples were

themselves fairly affluent. In addition, it was the poor who responded to the preaching of John and Charles Wesley and their “uneducated”, generally not rich helpers. Lady Huntington was a friend of the Wesleyan revival, an exception that proves the rule. Interestingly enough Kimbrough (2002) observed “recent sociological and anthropological studies indicate that Jesus attracted all segments of society. I cannot find one of his twelve who was poor. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were well-to-do if not wealthy.” (p. 117). It is important for our church leaders to understand the importance of working with and serving those less fortunate members of God’s kingdom. Hendricks and Hendricks (2015) commented on the “social work” with the poor of John Wesley, the noted evangelist, spiritual leader, and social reformer of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. They argue that Wesley was the first “social worker.”

During a time when preaching from the pulpit was standard, Wesley spent his life on horseback preaching in the city streets. He discussed the importance of interacting on a personal level with individuals in poverty, always placing their spiritual growth as the most important aspect of this interaction. He displayed an openness to interacting with the poor. Wesley says, “If you cannot relieve, do not grieve, the poor; give them soft words, if nothing else; abstain from either sour looks or soft words. Let them be glad to come, even though, they should go empty away. Put yourself in the place of every poor man; and deal with him as you would God should deal with you” (MacArthur, 1936 p. 114) Today, we are called to reach out to others and spread the gospel in many non-traditional places, and we need to adopt a style similar to Wesley’s approach to dealing with the poor, both the economically and spiritually poor.

Hendricks and Hendricks (2015) discussed multiple reasons why John Wesley provided little attention to the Elizabethan Poor Law. One reason noted by Hendricks and Hendricks (2015) for Wesley’s lack of attention to the poor law of 18<sup>th</sup> century England with its mandatory taxation and its cold and distant delivery of relief to the poor was that it did not resonate with Wesley’s “get to know the poor style.” In short, Wesley wanted the rich and the poor to build a relationship –especially, he wanted the rich to get to know the poor. The Elizabethan Poor law’s approach did not support this goal. Building relationship with and among those ‘outside’ the traditional church (and among those within the traditional church, which can no longer be assumed) is essential to the work of the Church.

The reluctance of the Church to reach out to others historically can be seen in the well-known sociological study of economic and class structure of contemporary *Christians, Millhands and Preachers*. This study examined the various levels of mill workers and their connection and the subsequent level of involvement with preachers. An introduction to Pope's (1942) work notes "Certainly the most striking of Pope's findings is the extent to which the millhands were deserted by the preachers. The churches were inextricably bound to mill management by their finances if not by their ideology." (p. xx). This study revealed the interesting overlap between religion and the economy. An argument can be made that today's church is still dealing with this phenomenon. Many churches are tempted to cater to the most financially influential members or those who are vested in the Church. Millennials are the new poor, not because they are 'poor' but because many are burdened by debt or have not grown up in an environment where support of the church is a duty to God and a sign of faithfulness. This is another example of Methodism's inability to minister to the less affluent class. Could this be one issue in the challenges of non-traditional forms of ministry and the lack of interest in meeting individuals where they are in society? Originally, Methodism grew from the poor to rich. We need to learn from our history. This new form of ministry must cross-over and explore religion and the gospel in areas that are more comfortable for conversations to occur.

#### The Word Becoming Flesh has Many Meanings: The Third Place Concept

The structure of the cities of modern civilization has contributed to the challenge faced by the traditional church. In the New Testament most references to the church include references to a community, a collection of people living and working, and especially worshipping together. The "solitary saints" of the Middle Ages [who lived alone in places or even on top of poles came later] are not good examples of the early church. Modern civilization has been structured so that the people who work together often do not worship together. This reality is discussed at length under the concept of the great good place discussed by Ray Oldenburg (1989) in his book, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Handout at the Heart of a Community* needs to be examined. The disappearance of the "Third Place" helps one understand the appeal of the non-traditional religious experience. The Third Place is the social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of the home (first place) and the office (second place). Examples of third places would be environments such as cafes, clubs,

public libraries, or parks. Oldenburg argues that third places are important for civil society, civic engagement, democracy, and establishing feelings of a sense of place and the authors would also add belonging. This “Third Place” approach is important in discovering and creating this approach of cutting edge Christianity. This approach to Christianity proclaims the gospel to individuals unwilling or unable to participate in traditional worship.

This concept manifests in the growth in the storefront church movement and non-traditional approaches to ministry that are springing up on a daily basis. This new form of ministerial outreach requires meeting new and developing Christians in their homes, in their places of gathering and in their culture, and where they live. These “Third Places” are important to connecting the church to the larger society.

This approach is similar to the work of current day social workers who interact with others by working with the person in their natural environment. Zastrow (2017) discusses this understanding of social work encouraging home visits in order to see an individual in “totality” and to get a picture of all aspects of their life and environment. The authors had a conversation with an experienced minister who described how different children were when met in their homes. The typical discussion by social workers of the person in the environment often does not discuss the so called “Third Places.” The modern, urban environment often does not create these special places. Overcoming this problem is one of the challenges of modern witnessing. Carter and Warren (2017) noted that, “As United Methodists we are a connectional church. We believe that disciples of Jesus represent him not only in local churches but also in various forms of ministry outside the church. In this way, the world truly is our parish (p. 15).”

#### Focused Interviews: Understanding the Movement Away from the Traditional Church

Note: In the search to find what works, the authors of this paper participated in in-depth interviews with three individuals who were involved in some way with new approaches to the Christian mission and ministry. These “new ways” each seem to have some level of promise. The purpose of these interviews was to help the authors better understand the phenomenon of the non-traditional church movement and, especially, to provide insight as to why these non-traditional churches seem to be growing while the traditional mainline Protestant churches are losing members.

## Interview One

Dr. Marty Cauley, the Director of Coaching and Content with New Faith Communities of the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Cauley currently oversees 23 projects that have the long-term goal of establishing new churches, both in the traditional and non-traditional structure. Cauley posited reasons why many parishioners are leaning towards more non-traditional forms of the worship experience. (1) Rising interest in the anti-institutionalization approach to ministry. Large institutions, according to Cauley, are definitely “out of favor” and Methodists historically have rejoiced in being a “connectional church”. The connection probably had value as Asbury pushed the church across the Appalachian Mountains. The modern urban (and rural) citizen is not motivated by our connectional nature. The resulting structure has compromised the churches emphasis on outreach ministry. The new anti-institutionalization movement is a positive opportunity for the local church and for new previously unchurched individuals to move away from the barriers that have restricted participation and growth in many aspects of the church. Cauley noted that he has discovered an entrepreneurial spirit alive in many individuals who are forming new churches. Their desire is to form something new, fresh and different. He said that many of the new churches that are being established can begin at the ground level without the weight of a negative history and without certain influential members dominating the conversation. This new start helps this group avoid the pitfalls that many churches experience in which a few outspoken individuals dominate the mission and life of the church.

Cauley also mentioned that in many new forms of ministry startup churches have discovered that initial relationship with others are more important than the worship experience itself. These “new Christians” understand relationships, but they have not yet grown to appreciate the role and importance of worship. Cauley cites the example of a prospective, but inexperienced member, who visits the local church on Sunday morning for 11 a.m. This person is often thrust into the worship experience without developing a relationship with others who are worshipping. Communal worship is a learned experience and not immediately understood or easily practiced by the new Christians. It only comes to be learned and appreciated through a developing relationship with mature Christians. Cauley stresses the importance of “forming the

relationship first” and gradually introducing the concept of salvation and further church involvement (M. Cauley, personal communication, September 10, 2017).

#### Interview Two

The Reverend Luke Edwards, Associate Pastor of Boone United Methodist Church and Pastor of the King Street Church Campus.

Edwards was charged by the church he served to experiment and develop new and creative forms of ministry. The church responded by providing broad investigative opportunities for new forms of ministry.

With an eye and concern toward outreach, Edwards identified a program called Fresh Expressions, a new experimental movement in American Methodism that originated in the Church of England. Worth noting is that 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodism, which originated as a renewal movement within the Church of England, was now providing within the Church of England a new approach to Christian witness. Methodism, as envisioned initially by Wesley, was not intended to separate from the Church of England, Wesley’s personal religious heritage. But the old wine skins could not contain the new wine. The Church of England did not, in general, welcome, the innovative and non-standard approach of the Methodists.

After Wesley’s death, the separation was inevitable. But it is a joy for the authors now to recognize that Fresh Expressions, from “the old church” is bringing new hope to American Methodism. This movement has as its mission, “A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, contextual mission, and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context” (Carter & Warren, 2017, p. 3-4).

The Fresh Expression movement was started by the Church of England in 2004 in response to the Mission Shaped Church Report (2004) as a way to change the decline in church attendance in England. Edwards cited some interesting statistics in reference to church attendance and faith building. He noted that 20% of the United States population attends church at least occasionally, 20% of the United States says they attend but very rarely attend and 20% will go if invited. The remaining 40% would not attend church even if invited. So 40% of the

United States population are not responding to traditional forms of church. In a missional response to these numbers, The Fresh Expressions movement aims to reach those individuals who would never consider coming to a traditional church building.

Edwards' congregation wanted to provide a fresh expression ministry to the individuals in inner city Boone, North Carolina (a college town in the Appalachian Mountains). The church hired Edwards as their new mission's minister to reach individuals who likely would never have attended Boone United Methodist Church. Edwards developed a relationship with Elizabeth, a devout Christian who had become disenchanted with the organized church. The two organized a series of cookouts with individuals who frequented the downtown area of Boone, NC. Over time, various forms of fresh expressions emerged including a bar ministry, a prison ministry and a single mom's group (L. Edwards, personal communication, September 12, 2017).

It appears that the Fresh Expression form of outreach is making a difference in individuals' establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ. In 2013, the Church of England analyzed the impact of the Fresh Expressions experience in the *Report on Strand 3b: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church and Church Plants Begun in the Period 1992-2001*. The report revealed some interesting findings about the success of the movement:

1. Forty percent of those who are now part of the Fresh Expressions of church were previously not at all part of any congregation.
2. Fresh expressions of church have been engaging in young people. On average at the Fresh Expressions form of church, 41% of the attendees are under 16. This is significantly higher than in the inherited church and is a promising beginning (p. 6)

It is important to note that traditional forms of ministry (the traditional church) can coexist with the Third Place meeting environment. Collins (2015) discusses the need for a "mixed economy" which includes the high-steeple, brick and mortar church with an extension ministry that "come alongside but doesn't replace existing congregations" (p. 11).

### Interview Three

The third interviewee, who wished to remain anonymous, was selected because she had been an active member of a start-up church from the beginning of its life. She is an intellectually bright, middle aged, highly motivated, moderately successful professional woman, with a deep interest in spiritual matters. In her life, she experienced a large number of challenging family issues. Her

mother died when she was six years old and she was raised by her father who was a self-described atheist. Around the age of twelve she began attending Baptist and Pentecostal churches. She had a difficult medical issue with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in her early 40's and relocated to Fayetteville, NC while her military-related husband remained in Hawaii. Strictly by chance, she chose to attend a startup church at the local Fire Department and remained with this church through numerous building changes, growth and restructuring. Kirkland (2016) noted, "The primary function of the storefront church is simply to be the church, a community of Christ centered people, where the lost can find peace, shelter and hope." (p. 54). The storefront form of ministry was just what was needed for this woman who was looking for a support network and a stable group in which to interact.

Our interviewee stated that the storefront church approach was more comfortable to her as far as fitting in with others. She noted that the parishioners seemed more like her. Both rich and poor should be called to repentance. Another reason she mentioned for attending a start-up church when compared to a more established church was being able to take part and shape the ministry instead of being thrust into an already existing structure of politics, mainly from old, established, church decision makers. In this way she was an active instead of a passive ministry participant. One interesting idea she mentioned concerned was that purpose of the church was not to entertain parishioners (as opposed to her observations of more established churches) but to increase their relationship to God and their connectedness to others (Anonymous, personal communication, September 13, 2017).

#### A Wesleyan Approach to our Current Dilemma

The life and ministry of John Wesley constitutes a startling and puzzling enigma. He was, by 18<sup>th</sup> century English standards, a faithful and conservative priest. He strived to do things "by the book." This commitment to the established order is demonstrated in many ways but especially in his crude handling of his relationship to Sophie Hopkey, the "love of his young life." As such, John Wesley was one of the least likely persons to travel untried and unapproved new paths. Nevertheless, in spite of his training and his natural inclinations, he became a major innovator when it came to proclaiming the Gospel. This commitment to "whatever works," even if it violated his inclination to the generally approved and expected, is seen in his response to George Whitfield's request to Wesley to replace Whitfield's role as a field preacher. When

Whitfield decided to give up his field preaching to the Kingswood miners to return to his ministry in America, he asked Wesley to continue the preaching in the field. Wesley's description, in his own words, when he accepted Whitfield's challenge was, "I consented to the more vile." Wesley, the traditionalist, soon treated "the world as his parish" by preaching in the places assigned to other Anglican priests. Without the permission of the Bishop, he soon engaged—because he needed help—untrained "helpers and assistants." He soon opened schools and printed material for the poor and finally "like the Bishop he was not" even ordained ministers to administer the Sacraments. In short, this solid "by the book" conservative saw the need and adopted "the means of Grace that worked."

In order for ministry of the Christian community to be more effective in the coming years, the gospel must be taken to the streets instead of expecting individuals to attend traditional worship on Sundays. The marginalized in today's society may be found in all classes and social contexts. The history of the Christian Church is seen clearly in the initial acceptance of the gospel by the marginalized of a society. The ultimate conversion of those in power in church history follows the involvement of the marginalized. The church must be mindful not to 'price itself' or 'institutionalize itself' out of being able to establish churches among the marginalized of society.

There are two examples of this reality that come immediately to mind. The earliest Christians, both the first followers of Jesus as well as those of a generation later those who responded to the missionary ministry of Saint Paul were primarily poor and powerless, though several of the disciples of Jesus, certainly the Zebedee brothers and Matthew were likely wealthy. In fact, some of the earliest converts to Christianity were slaves, the poorest and least powerful persons in the Roman society.

The same pattern followed in the Methodist revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was initially the poor who responded to the Wesley. Perhaps the most obvious example of Wesley's involvement with poor was his interest in the coal miners at Kingswood who were among the poorest and least powerful persons in England. Duraisingh (2010) notes that "Through the life of Jesus of Nazareth, we know that the natural habitat of the God-movement is always among the poor and dispossessed. A mission shaped church knows and is ready to sit at the margins of society." (p.24)

This reality about the Church is another example that history as recorded by men and God's history in the Book of Life are different. In the human version of history, the presence in the church of the rich and powerful (consider the activity of the Emperor Constantine in 325 AD) is evidence of the "progress" of the Church. In history as seen from the perspective of the Book of Life, the presence of the poor and weak, the marginalized, is at least as important as the the greatest among the church.

#### Conclusion: A Fresh Expression for Disciple Making

In Chapter 6 of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice and the Cheshire Cat are looking for a path forward:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"—so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough." (pp. 71-72).

This exchange, unfortunately, resembles recent conversations in The United Methodist Church. Most, if not all, lay and clergy in the denomination, agree that declining membership in the United Methodist Church, fewer worshippers under 40, and weakening identifiable relevance of the church to the everyday society, is a prescription for failure. The sense that "something is wrong" is not new. In fact, one or two, perhaps ten, persons in every modern generation of The United Methodist Church (like Wilke (1986), Kisker (2008) and Yrigoyen (2008)) have been calling attention to this downward turn. And yet, like the billionaire who experiences one or two losses that have minimal effect on her portfolio at-large, the Church has been content to leave the conversation to a few critics and to continue in our blissful state of guaranteed appointments and mortgage-free buildings, until now. Today, the conversation has risen to the level of crisis, and the denomination can no longer relegate it to the few, but the conversation belongs to the whole. Like the prompting question of Thomas who asked, "We don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?" (John 14:5), a host of issues and crises have called the question that demands a response. Where *are* we going?

One thing is for certain: We are sure to go somewhere. Will that somewhere be the place God intends? Will the ‘People called Methodists’ continue to be a force for the building of the Kingdom of God and the transformation of society? Or will the United Methodist Church morph into an organization ineffective for the mission of disciple-making? We are well to remember that God’s intention for the Church is not “to go somewhere” but to go to a land overflowing with milk and honey, a place where people are being added to the numbers daily, a place where justice rolls down like waters and life like an ever-flowing stream, a place where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, a place defined by a carpenter on a mountainside who set forth the characteristics of a way of living called the Kingdom of God, a place that lifts up the name of Jesus as the way, the Truth and the Life.

This is the place where we are going. In fact, this has been the destination of the people of God since God first called Abraham to pack up his family and go, to claim and proclaim the promise and love of God. Recall that Abraham encountered a few unexpected challenges along the journey. The same can be said for Moses, the prophets, David, Paul, even Jesus, the fully divine and fully human Son of God. And each of these leaders, with eyes fixed clearly on where they were going, constantly made conscious decisions about what was expendable and what was essential to God’s people and to the arrival at their destination.

#### Adaptive Leadership: The United Methodist Church’s Newest Buzz-word? Or a Genuine Avenue for Positive Change?

The latest buzz-word among Methodist Church ranks is ‘adaptive leadership.’ The concept itself is not new but has migrated to the Church via the secular business world. Not the first time for such a migration (Collins, & Porras, 1994, Collins, 2001, and Covey, 2004) but this model arrives on the denominational doorstep at a time of robust conversation about matters of change.

Adaptive Leadership is essentially a structure of leadership that was expanded by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky in their 2009 book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. The Adaptive Leadership model is designed “to assist organizations and individuals in dealing with consequential changes in uncertain times when no clear answers are forthcoming. Adaptive leaders identify and deal with systemic change, using techniques that confront the status quo and identify adaptive and

technical challenges” (12-13). Adaptive leadership, according to Heifetz and Linsky, provides the support, skills and understanding needed to expertly distinguish between what is expendable and what is essential. After which certain methods will be used to innovate, ensuring that they will fit together with what is essential. As suggested by the name, the essence of adaptive leadership is to promote adaptability that allows the organization to flourish and take along its best history to help with future successes. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Burton-Edwards (2013) notes that no model of leadership (specifically, Adaptive Leadership) is going to produce constructive results for The United Methodist Church because, in his assessment, Jesus did not come to lead but to transform, to impose the Kingdom of God not through improved leadership skills but through authority. Certainly, Jesus brought the authority of being the Son of God to bear on every situation. Yet, at its core, Jesus’ invitation was to “Come, follow me,” placing Jesus squarely in the position of leader, in relationship with those who accepted his invitation to be “followers” or “disciples.”

Core leadership (the most common building blocks of leadership models) focuses on strategy, action and results. Core leadership sounds much more like a spreadsheet formula for reaching an intended goal rather than an invitation to hope and transformation. When seen as a goal and not a starting point, core leadership propagates the myth that if we just work hard enough and smart enough, figure out trends and generate innovative ideas, we will succeed. In fact, core leadership should be assumed as minimum standard of operation in effective leaders, in business as well as in the Church. But if The United Methodist Church is to be “yet alive” and “to serve the present age,” her leaders must be able to apply skills to a given context (i.e. this present age) to figure out the “how, when and where” of leadership in a given situation. Adaptive Leadership is core leadership at the next level, core leadership interacting with a given context. Inasmuch, the adaptive leadership model can become a kind of hermeneutic to help a new generation of church leaders to understand the servant leadership of Jesus.

Consider, for example, the following tenets of Adaptive Leadership as applied to developing new places for new people in the Church outlined by Bradberry and Greaves (2012):

1. Emotional Intelligence (EI) and situational awareness (SA)—Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that capture our awareness of our own emotions and the emotions of others and how we use this awareness to manage ourselves effectively and form quality relationships. Building

quality relationships is critical to Christianity and to the work of the Church: the relationship of persons and God (through Jesus Christ) and the relation of persons and other persons. Paragraph 213 of The Book of Discipline provides a rubric (and a mandate) for local churches to constantly engage situational awareness and increase emotional intelligence:

Since every congregation is located in a community in some type of transition, every local church is encouraged to study their congregation's potential... This study shall include, but not be limited to: a) unique missional opportunities and needs of the community; b) present ministries of the congregation; c) number of leaders and style of leadership; d) growth potential of the surrounding community; e) fiscal and facility needs; f) distance from other United Methodist churches; g) number and size of churches of other denominations in the community; h) other items that may impact the church's ability to fulfill the mission of the Church as stated in Chapter One, Section I. [to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.]

Raising emotional intelligence and increasing situational awareness requires learning not only what people think but what they feel, both those inside and outside the Church community. These also require discovering 'where the people are' in any given community, and 'why they are there.' Jesus asked the questions of situational awareness and emotional intelligence when he asked: "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?"

2. Organizational justice (OJ) —Organizational justice speaks the truth. Effective, adaptive leaders know how to integrate what people think and feel, what they want to hear, and how they want to hear it (EI and SA) with the facts which makes people feel respected and valued. To bring the conversation of Christian faith to a bar, or a river, or a gym, need not lessen the power of the Gospel, rather such action has the potential to validate the persons who gather in those spaces. It is often easier to hear the truth (even the difficult truth) in your own space.

Reminiscent of "family conversations' at the kitchen table, faith conversations in the Third Place take on a transparency and honesty sometime clouded by the 'shoulds' of the sanctuary. Did

Jesus speak the (difficult) truth to the woman at the well? “You have had five husbands and the one that you have now is not your husband.... This water that you draw will leave you thirsty again, but the water I give will well up to eternal life.” What was the response of the woman to this Truth spoken on her own turf? “Sir, give me that water, that I may not thirst again!”

3. Character —Leaders need not be perfect, only forthcoming. The Biblical story is ripe with example of flawed persons leading God’s people effectively. The Adaptive Leadership model presses the church leader to constantly rely on an integrity that holds beyond the boundaries of boundaries perceived (or portrayed) as holy/sacred space. At the same time, such integrity and character, imparted righteousness one would say, brings the holy to bear on the secular space transforming it, if even for the moment, into a sacred space all its own. Imagine the power of such an image for discipleship, bringing the holy to bear on every part of one’s life, and accountability in every space of one’s life.

4. Development —The moment leaders think they have nothing more to learn and have no obligation to help develop those they lead is the moment they ensure they’ll never know their true potential. (Hunter, 2012). Just as Wesley’s *ordo salutis* described salvation not as a single moment but a journey, as an “expecting to be made perfect in love in this life,” so Christian discipleship is a life-long journey. And the Church, if indeed we ‘are yet alive,’ is a living, growing Body that must continue to listen and learn and help develop those under its care to realize its potential to be instrumental in the transformation of the world.

Adaptive Leadership is a resource for the Church in the current context. Christian scripture provides story after story of God’s people using what is at our disposal for the teaching of God’s truth and the making of disciples. Jesus used loaves and fish and some hungry bellies, we use resources like adaptive leadership. The experience with the loaves and the fish did not immediately solve all of the problems Jesus faced with the disciples! In fact, just after Jesus multiplied scant food into an abundance, the disciples panicked on the water, afraid that they were going to die, forgetting in the moment the recently demonstrated fact that Jesus was stronger than the storm (Bradberry & Greaves, 2012).

Likewise, while adaptive leadership has some tangible help to offer the UMC, it alone will not fix our problems. It is one tool, among many that can help us along this journey. Disciple-making is a journey. Our success as the Church in this generation, like “all who follow Jesus all round the world,” (The United Methodist Church, 558) is yet to be determined.

Adaptive Leadership is one model for leadership, but its potential to be effective for the Church is dependent how willing local churches are to distinguish essential from expendables in order to fulfill the denomination's mission (ergo the Church's mission) to "Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World."

Our success in application of the Adaptive Leadership model (or any model) will be determined by our answers to these questions:

- What is the tangible evidence that we making disciples of Jesus Christ?
- What is the tangible evidence that the disciples the Church is making are transforming the world?
- What is expendable and what is essential in this work of Disciple-making?

The United Methodist Church will end up somewhere. But will that somewhere be the place where God is going? Jesus said it this way: "Narrow is the way that leads to life, and few find it." (Matthew 7:14) A number of models can increase the census of 'the people called Methodists.' Yet, at the end of the day, the numbers become irrelevant, if we are not making disciples. The calling of the Church is to make disciples, or in the words of Charles Wesley, "to serve the present age."

What does it mean to "serve the present age?" It means to bring the Gospel to bear on the hopelessness of a new generation. It means to make disciples. That we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation for the world is essential, a non-negotiable. The where, when and how that disciple-making, we are learning, are expendable, or at least, malleable.

Discipleship is a journey not a quick fix. It is constant adaptive leadership. What are the essentials, what are the expendables, and how do we address the current juncture in our journey in a way that honors the essentials and is willing to dispense with the expendables? These questions alone would make for robust conversation in most local United Methodist congregations and reveal much about how the effectiveness of our disciple-making in the first 200 years of Methodism.

### Fresh Expressions and the Third Place as Invitation

Fresh Expression is viable application of Adaptive Leadership, an effective way of engaging the Third Place that speaks to the how, when and where or disciple-making. Fresh Expression is a tool of evangelism that gathers people around a common secular interest or in

secular place for the purpose of feeling included and welcomed. To say that these kinds of Fresh Expressions are necessary to making disciples just makes sense. Jesus certainly modeled this kind of hospitality, inclusion and evangelism in his life. Consider, for example, the Third Places of the New Testament: the well where Jesus met the Samaritan woman, the wedding where Jesus turned water into wine, the Pharisee's house where the woman anointed Jesus. Still, few in the Church, if any, would classify these spaces as places of worship. They were instead contexts for invitation.

Invitation is an essential. In the words of John Wesley, "Offer them Christ." But invitation is only the beginning. When met with a response, invitation initiates a life-long journey, a "walk," learning, growing in grace, accountability, becoming an agent of the Kingdom of God and the transformation therein. Jesus met potential disciples not at the temple but at the Third Place of the lakeshore. He did not leave, however, leave them there. Jesus issued an invitation, "Come, leave everything you have (the life you have known) and follow me where there is life in abundance." Jesus then led these new 'converts' to places of accountability and sacrifice, of learning and growing. He gave them new eyes through which to see the world and turned their lives upside down. And then he sent them out again, dependent on God and one another, with an economy of tangible recourses, but with the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. Each moment in Jesus' life with the disciples was a teachable moment. Each moment was bathed in the waters of community and the realm of God. Following Jesus, the servant-leader, was life-changing for this band of twelve, and then through these twelve, for the world. What road will take us there?

And are we yet alive? Are we witnessing a life-change in those who are responding to the invitation of gathering such as Fresh Expressions? Are the communities in which Fresh Expression ministries gather experiencing transformation? Are we seeing people not only show up on Sunday morning (or Thursday night or whenever the local church's primary worship gathering happens) but are seeing people 'leave everything' and follow Jesus? Are we witnessing converts integrating into the life of the Church, not of First Church Wherever, but integrating into The Body of Christ all around the world. Are we witnessing persons moving from the initial place of welcome (the Third place, gathered around a common secular interest with like-people) to a place of integration into the transformative message of the gospel, amid the diversity of the Church that includes 'all who follow Jesus all around the world.' Are we witnessing growth in

discipleship, change of worldview, changed lives with hearts so strangely warmed that they do, in fact, care where the Church and the world is going and therefore are committed to finding the way(s) in the current age that will get us there?

Without tangible evidence that people are moving from Fresh Expressions and Third Places to full integration in the worship and service life of the Church, then we've not made disciples, we have made "church people," only this time instead of being blissfully cloistered in a stone sanctuary, they are idyllically cosseted the river, or in a bar. And with 'churched people' but no disciples, these programs will be just that, 'programs' to filed along with so many that have come before, neatly packaged, but now sold at clearance prices.

The Good News?

The good news in the Fresh Expression and Third Place, as models of adaptive leadership, is that they restore the place of invitation to the Church. The purpose of community worship in the context of a Church building is not to be the primary place of invitation. In fact, worship's primary purpose is not invitation, but adoration of God. Discipleship's purpose is formation. Invitation, Adoration, and Formation: when these three components are lived out together in full measure, the Church is a catalyst for the transformation of the world. The lynchpin in this process is invitation. Without invitation, there is no opportunity for response. Without response, there is no worship, and without worship there is no desire for discipleship. As we read in The Message: (Romans 10:14) But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them unless someone is sent to do it?

'To serve the present age' means to find a way of invitation that is effective in the present age. It does not mean to change the mission and message (essentials) of the Church, but to freely adapt evangelism to an ever-changing context to accomplish the Church's mission. The good news is that we are free to change our methods, that Jesus gave us a model of going wherever and whenever (to the ends of the Earth) to 'offer them Christ' along with the Divine promise that everywhere we go, Christ is with us, even unto the end of the age.

Fresh Expression has the potential to bear fruit in the form of a church structure that Collins (2015) describes as a "mixed economy" which includes the high-steeple, brick and mortar church with an extension ministry that "come alongside but doesn't replace existing

congregations” (p. 11). Such ministries, viewed as extensions of the church, are not life-threatening but life giving. And life-giving ministry is the most powerful response to the question, “And are we yet alive?”

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