

LEARNING COMMUNITY

AS A

MISSION STRATEGY

by

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## Foreword: A Parable

*A long time ago, in a land far away, a great king had a dream. His dream was that all the world's peoples would one-day bring their unique gifts to a great celebration. They would become the community of the king. The dream was good.*

*The king risked everything for his dream. The king assigned guardians to help and serve as tenants for the peoples. But these guardians were very old and powerful teachers. They turned against the king. They chose to teach lies. They planned to destroy the king's dream and extinguish the light. They taught that power, possessions, and position were to be desired more than the call to know the king.*

*These giants in the land taught lies, enforcing their ideas and what is to be known. They stand at the high places, declaring, "We will teach the nations."*

*They arrested, expelled, and killed the king's servants. Wells of water were stopped up. Those who listened to the lies gave up the beauty of righteousness to gain power. So the light became darkness and the king's heart was broken. The dream was all but lost.*

*The way was darkened, but the king exposed the ways of those who opposed his dream by shining his brightest light, the light of sacrifice. He showed the height, width, depth, and breadth of his love in death. He showed the power of his love by disarming the guardians and rising to new life. He said, "Go announce my dream and teach all peoples by the light of sacrifice." The king's light was with those who sacrificed to learn in community and serve their world.*

*They settled in communities at the edge of conflict and they dug wells of fresh water. They lived in the face of danger and war. "No gates, no lies, no evil powers will prevail against you", the king told them.*

*These communities were the king's joy. As time passed the communities grew to reflect more and more the character of the king. They wrote hymns and filled libraries with their stories of sacrifice in preparation for the king's dream celebration. Wells of water sustained them as they lived, worked, and learned in community, telling of the king's story, a light to every people.*

*But the guardians would not give up their power. In the West, they wielded the power of elementary principles, to control and divide the peoples. They expelled those in the East and called their teachers heretics. The sword of learning was broken.*

*In the West, some fought with that broken sword and though the light was dim, they prevailed. But a broken sword would not serve in the greater battle of learning the king's ways. New modern communities relied on that broken sword of learning. They began again to announce the king's dream.*

*The guardian powers brought war and pain. Many lost homes and families. Those who knew the king longed for his dream for all peoples and the king called them to reform.*

*The light of sacrifice and learning shined again across land and seas to distant places. New wells were dug. Still the powerful guardian teachers distorted the light. Misjudging identity, learning, culture, community, family, and faith, the people were guided by a dim, sometimes distorted light. They believed lies and wounded the spirits of peoples on every continent.*

*But hope was not lost. New volunteers again formed communities on the edge of conflict saying, "Here am I" and the king summoned them: "Now, through your communities of sacrificial serving and learning, the hidden mystery of my dream is to be made known." A new generation is learning how to portray the king's story for every people. They are unstopping wells and restoring ancient ruins where promises were made to teach the nations. They are re-forging the sword of learning that was broken long ago.*

*By John Henry*

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 3:10

## Introduction

Jesus employed parables, powerful metaphors, to describe the Kingdom of God to a pluralistic generation. Like our own generation, much of that generation had lost its story. Ezekiel employed stories with metaphors of a 'cooking pot' and 'sour grapes' to communicate his message; then he complained to the Lord saying, "They are saying of me, 'isn't he just telling parables?'" (Ezek 20:49 NIV ) Many in this generation, including many in the Church, are blindly accepting the deconstructed meaning of words. Because many have turned from the study of history, they no longer share a "story," and they have underrated the value of learning in community. "The King and the Sword of Learning," a parable I have submitted with this paper, is intended to provide fresh meaning to mission, principles for a new learning community in Madison, Wisconsin, and to stimulate a renewed missional vision for the Church. Jesus, our Master Teacher, has called his followers to gather in communities of learning, not only to "tell the story," but to participate in the continuing story, taking up our cross to portray God's love for the world. This model of ministry, cultivating communities of learning, connecting followers to their global neighbors, suffering together with others, and inviting them on mission with us, is an appropriate missional practice, most especially in university communities, for today's Church and today's world.

Youth With A Mission (YWAM), an international and interdenominational mission I have served with for over twenty years with the aim of encouraging university student mobilization into missionary involvement, is a global community engaged in world evangelization. Loren Cunningham, founder of YWAM, writes of "waves of young people crashing on every continent of the earth." The metaphor of "waves" has worked powerfully to mobilize hundreds of thousands as volunteers in YWAM. Another metaphor, the "grace ticket," often taught by co-founder Darlene Cunningham, represents the grace of God that is available at the time of need in any social context. Such metaphors and stories give meaning, purpose, and identity to our YWAM communities. Similarly, the parables Jesus taught carry meaning, purpose, and identity for the Church on mission. The

“yeast” in Jesus’ parable of the woman working with dough represents the transformational active agent of missional community “working through all” of society.

The parables Jesus taught are more than teaching mechanisms; they draw the hearer into the Gospel Story and offer an eternal value and meaning for life and relationship with God. Modernity attempted to replace the Story with a version of eschatological faith in progress, however Modernity failed in its promise to give meaning. “Modernity was defined by the attempt to live in a universal story without a universal story teller.” (Jensen: 1993) Postmodernity now claims there is no story, and yet, postmoderns hunger for meaning in the story of their lives. It is at a deep level of community that the Church is presented the opportunity to engage the world and invite this generation to participate in the Story.

In the studies I have completed during the past two years with the MAGL, I have explored the various Madison contexts in which I work; the city, the University of Wisconsin, the YWAM community and PHOS House campus ministry, the church where my family and I are members, and the Student Mobilization Centre ministry I founded. In this paper I will discuss learning community as a missional strategy. By identifying my signature themes from our MAGL studies, I will present a strategy of forming community for engagement in the university. This study represents a survey of the means necessary for a new reformation of the Church and of education in the context of university student ministries.

Prophetic engagement of major universities is underway through various study centers and ministries, such as New College-Madison under the direction of Vern Visick. The challenge I see for today is to couple that prophetic engagement to an apostolic initiative forming learning communities and demonstrating practical and sacrificial service to the poor and needy as a mission strategy. The apostolic call to the Church in Madison is to enter the conversation of global issues by forming a community of learning, which will then engage the community of scholars at the University of Wisconsin and mobilize them to participate through serving-learning outreach on mission to the wider world.

To develop a foundation for my assertion that such learning communities engaging the university is an appropriate missional response for the Church today, I will:

- (1) Discuss learning and community and the importance of the modern university, particularly the University of Wisconsin in my context.

- (2) Underscore the life of an obscure reformer with influence on modern education, the university, and the Church.
- (3) Highlight one significant, though largely unknown, historical event in which college students shaped the emergence of a generation of mission leaders.
- (4) Identify how the university is one of the most significant arenas for spiritual struggle.

I will then summarize the major signature themes I have discovered during these two years of study with the MAGL and I will relate those items back to this proposition that the Church should emphasize a learning community as a missional response to a globalized world. In conclusion, I will make a few personal comments regarding the cost of participating in and leading community.

## **University: A Learning Community**

Learning, the kind of learning that can only transpire in vibrant community through service to the needs of neighbors is foundational to the purpose of the Church. The modern university was borne out of such communities and, by design, served to benefit the Church. Pope Innocent 12<sup>th</sup>, 1243 AD said, “Universities are rivers of knowledge that feed and fertilize the universal church.” (Cochrane: 2004) The attitude of the Church toward universities was at one time positive, however many in the Church today overlook the origins of the university. Jesus told his followers to “Go, make disciples,” that is to say, “Go teach students.”

Paul’s testimony of the “school” he ran for a few short years in the lecture hall at Tyrannus shows the mentor teacher role can be extremely effective with a wide area of influence in a relatively short period of time. Though we do not know much about the dynamics of that “school”, we must assume that there was mobilization toward practical application of what was taught. Paul, it may be assumed, mobilized his students to spread far and wide with a living witness of his message. (Clinton 1991:7-2)

The formation of communities of learning was a response to Jesus’ command and core methodology for completing the Great Commission. However, because many church communities have “failed to revisit the theological and biblical underpinnings of our mission,” we have reduced the scope of the Church and the scope of our mission. (Taylor 2001:7) “Crippling omissions,” such as reducing the gospel to proclamation, created Christianity without regard for culture or the nations. (2001:4) The mission for the Church is to make disciples of all nations, including the powerful institution of the university, which will in turn “feed and fertilize” the Church.

### **University of Wisconsin**

Madison, the capitol of Wisconsin, is a city with over two hundred thousand residents and host to over forty thousand University of Wisconsin students. Proud of its progressive thinking and tolerance, Madison powerfully influences state and national politics, philosophy, entertainment, and education. The “Wisconsin Idea” is described as the compelling need to carry “the beneficent influence of the university ... to every home in the state.” (Stark: 1995) With more than four thousand international students from one

hundred and twenty nations, the UW impressively shapes more than Madison; it affects the world. (Bollag: 2004)

Global business is salivating over the millions of potential consumers in India and China. Not surprising, those two nations have been the top two in numbers of foreign students studying in the USA, and the UW has been among the top ten hosts for international students. Since early in the 1970s, the Chinese government has been sending their future leaders to prepare for a consumer focused market economy. (Budde 1997: 44,47) The challenge to the Church in Madison is in recognizing two things. First, the Church must recognize the forces of secular materialism, which attracted these thousands of international students. Second, those called to be “fishers” (Matthew 4:19 NIV) of humankind must respond to the unprecedented opportunity to trawl in a pool of future leaders of nations, particularly two of the largest and the least reached nations of the world.

In Madison, as in most of Western civilization, the gospel has been reduced to information that is communicated in the most efficient way possible. “During the last decades of the 20th century, an unfortunate overemphasis on pragmatic and reductionist thinking,” a significant influence of the modern university, “came to pervade the international Evangelical missionary movement.” (Taylor 2001:4) Utilizing the tools of Modernity, our evangelistic witness is approached as a task, a problem to be solved. We are taught that, if we find the right methods or techniques, we can expect success. This approach “puts a premium on program rather than the formation of a community of disciples.” (Shenk: 62)

The Wisconsin State motto is “Forward,” calling all subjects of the state toward progress. In large part, much of what is called “progress” is defined by the Academy. While “technical reason” guided the first cultivation of embryonic stem cells in a lab at UW, the “reason” provides “means for ends, but offers no guidance for the determination of those ends.” (Tillich 1988:6) “Progress is measured in terms of growth, scientific and technological progress, and the amassing of means.” (O’Brien 2001:16 and Christian 1999) Research on water resources, HIV/AIDS, and global poverty is churning in the university.

The good news is that technology has opened new vistas of communication and broken down centuries old barriers to the gospel. “The Information Age is boundary blind,” O’Brien writes, “There are no unique continental or regional areas identified ex-



clusively as ‘mission fields’.” (O’Brien 2001:24) The world is “flat,” with a whole new platform for collaboration, as Friedman writes:

“.... It is a global, Web-enabled platform for multiple forms of collaboration. This platform enables individuals, groups, companies, and universities anywhere in the world to collaborate -- for the purposes of innovation, production, education, research, entertainment, and, alas, war-making -- like no creative platform ever before. This platform now operates without regard to geography, distance, time, and, in the near future, even language. Going forward, this platform is going to be at the centre of everything. Wealth and power will increasingly accrue to those countries, companies, individuals, universities, and groups who get three basic things right: [1] the infrastructure to connect with this flat-world platform, [2] the education to get more of their people innovating on, working off of, and tapping into this platform, and, finally, [3] the governance to get the best out of this platform and cushion its worst side effects.” (Friedman 2005:205)

Globalization is having a paradoxical effect, connecting people and resources through technology and isolating people in reaction to the enormity of global needs.

### **The Church in Madison**

The Church in the city of Madison, like the Church globally, has been conferred leadership gifts of Ephesians chapter four: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In a brief survey conducted among pastoral staff of the congregation of which I am a member, it was discovered that the dominant ministry gifts are “teachers” among the pastoral staff, “pastors” among the small group leaders, and “helps and hospitality” dominantly among the congregation. It is not my purpose here to analyze the state of the Church in Madison, Wisconsin. However, While the fact that those ministry gifts are perceived “dominant” may call for a more thorough citywide analysis at a future date.

While some churches in Madison are experimenting with alternative models, most are fully operating in the Western Constantine mode of operation handed down in the Western world for nearly fifteen centuries. The Church in Madison’s challenge is to identify and draw strength from those Ephesians Four leadership gifts in congregations, which expect to be led primarily by the pastoral gifting. The challenge is exacerbated by the tendency of these congregations to become consumer orientated and operate with a corporate business organizational model. “The Constantine Church is by definition reactive to and reflective of the surrounding culture. It completely forgets the Church’s own culture-forming and sustaining capabilities...it aligns the Church with power, against those out of power.” (Clapp 1996:39) The business model of leadership, while striving to

attract people and meet needs, can never fully or adequately meet the wants, the desires, even the needs of the people.

Perhaps because the Church in Madison is in a university community where new ideas are considered in a State dedicated to progress and forward thinking, the current flux between Modernity and Postmodernity is having a profound affect on many congregations. Because cultural changes are often not understood, some churchgoers have felt their church has lost its direction. As Clifford Geertz points out, “there is no greater human fear than the loss of a sense of order and meaning.” (Van Engen: 2005) As a result, some Christians have withdrawn from vital church life and mission in one of three ways. First, some have chosen to stay and criticize their congregation and leaders. Second, some have chosen to lower expectations and live as individuals with little involvement or authentic Christian community. Third, some have completely withdrawn by leaving the church and by perhaps seeking another congregation. In each of these ways, the individual believers and oftentimes their families have severed their part in the life of the community, including the path to a revival that is not only for individuals, but for the entire congregation and its influence in the surrounding community. It is the calling of the Church in Madison to bear the message of “the secret of the Lordship of the Crucified” at the University of Wisconsin. (Guder 1998: 88)

## **Emerging Leaders for Reformation and Mission**

Luther, a professor in a university, apparently did not intend to be a reformer. Though reluctant, he understood his work of reform through scholarship, writing, and teaching from the University at Wittenberg to be his cross to bear. “The way of the Christian leader,” Henri Nouwen writes, “is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross.” (Taylor 2001:9) Reformers who labored from their position as scholars in university, such as Luther, Hus, and Wycliffe, present a challenge to today’s Christian leaders to enter the halls of the Academy with similar commitment. Christian professors at the UW may be unwilling, however they and their students may be called to be the leaders in a reformation that is of equal or greater significance for the Church in this generation. In this section, I will highlight the historical role of one Christian leader and the implications of his reforms of education to the Church and mission.

## **John Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education**

The life and works of John Amos Comenius, known as the Father of Modern Education, was of greater consequence than reformed educational method. Much of this Moravian theologian's writings suggest that the intent of this seventeenth-century teacher and pastor was to influence positively the work of world mission. Comenius' vision for universal education, for a worldwide university with many branches across the globe, was a missionary strategy. His life work encouraged cooperation between major cultural and religious blocks of people.

Despite great personal loss, including the death of his wife and two children, Comenius possessed an optimism, which appears to have come from his understanding of the character and purposes of God. He writes: "Focus on Jesus Christ as the Coming One, the Lord of the Future, Christus Renovator." (Louthan 1998:3) As Comenius saw it, education was the best way out of the Thirty Years War, which was tearing apart the political, religious, and social fabric of Europe. His view of the world and apparently his work as an educational reformer was informed by his faith in God's plan. He writes,

Jesus Christ is Lord. He is not only the Savior of souls and the teacher of wisdom, but the king of the Church and of the world. He will reign! What really matters, then, is to live in conformity with his coming kingdom and in this light to shape the alienated world, first within the Church, and then also in society. (1998:2)

Comenius' dream was that "all men would participate in a universal civilization." (1998:34) He pioneered an educational system that promised that all people could acquire the knowledge that led to understanding and peace. He called it "Pansophism," an integrative and holistic system for teaching all areas of knowledge. Comenius was a theologian of hope who believed a new order of society with special devotion to Jesus Christ could be established. He writes of the need to prepare "for generations of those and future times, a simple system of training . . . to qualify youth for the discharge of the important duties of life and fit them for their highest, their eternal calling." (Spinka:47)

Comenius was an "apostle of reconciliation who dreamed of a better future that could be built only by better men." (Spinka: 1967:23) In his final work published in 1668, Comenius writes of his hope for "a utopian church to unite all religions in Christian love through education." The university is important as a teaching institution, but what is essential, Comenius writes, is "learned men in all parts of the world devoted to the ad-

vancement of God's glory." (Laurie 1892:152) It is in his unique vision for the university that Comenius stands out as a true pioneer and apostolic leader in Church history. Not only did he call for universal education, Comenius had vision for his pansophic encyclopaedic college to "be found in every kingdom or large province." (Davies 2002:32-33) His plan was for an international university that would have the same curriculum for training young men and women to embrace all knowledge, scientific and biblical, and teach all peoples of all nations the truth. His pansophic vision was to begin in Christian nations "and go from there to the Muslims, Pagan, and finally the Jews." (2002:33) His apostolic passion is revealed in this paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer in *The Way of Light*:

Through the whole of Europe, of Asia, of Africa, of America, through the Magellanes [the southern parts of the present-day Chile and Argentina], and through all the islands of the sea, may thy kingdom come, may Thy will be done!... raise up men to write Thy purpose in books, but books such as Thou Thyself mayest write in the hearts of men. Make schools to be opened in all parts of the world to nurse Thy children! And do Thou raise up Thine own school in the hearts of all men in the whole world that they may ally themselves together for Thy praise. (2002:34)

History shows that the integrative and holistic system of thinking of Comenius was outstripped by the Cartesian dualistic philosophical system, which may be responsible for many of the worst ills of modern society, individualism, rationalism, and materialism. When Comenius visited René Descartes, the two great men spent several hours together discussing their ideas, but they parted without finding agreement between their systems of thought. Descartes' division between mind and matter was unacceptable to Comenius. Descartes wrote to Comenius, saying: "beyond the things that appertain to philosophy I go not; mine therefore is that only in part, where of yours is the whole." (Louthan 1998:15) Comenius is remembered primarily for his educational reforms, however his memory has been reduced to teaching methodology and not his underlying commitment to the Church and world mission.

This kind of reformer is not only rare in modern times; reformers such as Comenius are largely forgotten. There is one who stands out in more recent history, however. Dutch Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper, followed a course of a reformer from pastor, to businessperson, to owner of a newspaper, to political leader. Kuyper addressed the students and faculty at Princeton University one hundred years ago, saying: "In regenerate man glows the spark, but only in the converted man does the spark burst into a blaze, and that blaze radiates the light from the church in to the world, that God may be glorified." The work of reformers is that of a pilgrim, living ones "entire existence before the

face of God,” Kuyper writes: “Not in the sense that he is marching through the world with which he has no concern, but in the sense that at every step of the long way he must remember his responsibility to that God so full of majesty who awaits him at his journey’s end.”(Kuyper 1931:67) Since the time of Descartes, the dualistic split between the sacred and the secular became so pronounced that the modern university became increasingly secularized and the vision for a thorough reformation gradually dimmed.

### **Student Leadership and Influence**

Where reformers were not present, it has been small communities of faithful college students who have changed the course of the history of the Church. Historically, it has been students with sensitivity to God’s purposes, courage of initiative, and acts of obedience who have mobilized Christians in their generation and sparked missions movements. One particular event in which students gave initiative through their prayers and obedience to God’s summons, the Haystack Prayer Meeting, resulted in the emergence of several generations of missionary volunteers. The Haystack monument at Williams College in the western part of Massachusetts represents an amazing work of God that was birthed at this prayer meeting, led by Samuel Mills. In August 1806, five students at Williams College became concerned about Asia and the need for foreign missionary work. This spontaneous prayer time occurred when Sam and his friends took shelter from a storm in a haystack. They were returning from one of their weekly prayer times, however they apparently sensed that their prayer time was not yet complete. The storm raged as the students bowed in prayer to dedicate themselves to become the answer to their own prayers. Because there were no mission agencies in North America, they appealed to their denomination to form the first North American Mission Board and a few short years later the first missionaries began to stream out of the USA.

These few American students began a movement, which took root in several universities sending hundreds and then thousands of missionary volunteers into foreign mission. Just over one hundred years after the Haystack Prayer Meeting, the Student Volunteer Movement, a massive interdenominational missions mobilization organization, convened the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910. “The evangelization of the world in this generation” was their watchword, however this bold missionary declaration is today “criticized for its alleged confusion of confidence in the gospel with confidence in the expansive power of Western civilization.” The response to such an utterly religious

and exclusive message, particularly this kind of “aggressive imperialism,” is clear; it is “inappropriate for today’s world.” (Middleton 1995: 155) This exciting modern missionary response was the product of its time. To call for a similar response in our day, especially the triumphal, aggressive, and abridged version of the gospel story, would be inappropriate.

Today, however, there are signs of a new movement that is outside the mainstream of the formal church structures. George Barna’s new book, *Revolution* may be a prophetic foretelling of a “massive shaking and change that are rumbling underground - waiting to be unleashed on the Western Church.” (Strom 2005) Barna’s latest book is about the twenty-three million ‘revolutionaries’ who are forging a vibrant Christian lifestyle, often totally outside the usual church-on-Sunday system. “Whether you want to or not, you will have to take a stand in regard to the ‘revolution’. It is on track to become the most significant recalibration of the American Christian body in more than a century...” (Barna 2005) “As someone who has moved amongst “Out-of-church” Christians now for almost twenty years, I have found the two most damaging aspects of this movement to be rampant individualism, and the lack of actual direction towards true New Testament Christianity.” (Strom 2005) Of the seven hundred, and seven million revival-type believers around the world today, “hundreds of millions of these Christians are simply not associated with the institutional churches at all. They meet in homes. They meet underground. They meet in caves...” (Rutz 2005) What these revolutionaries appear to long for is community on mission.

The current shift in culture is also affecting adult believers with families, many who “feel divided between private interests (church, spirituality, etc.) and public concerns (economics, politics, environment, etc.)” (McAlister 2001:368) This is the result of this tendency during the period of Modernity to split life between the inner spiritual and outer secular arenas. To engage this growing population of disaffiliated (or multiple affiliated) believers, Christian leaders in the Madison area should encourage the formation of new communities. These communities should make special efforts to address the “split” in concert with a new mission focus engaging the students and faculty at the University of Wisconsin. To fail to do so will likely result in a greater distance between the Church and the world, and despite the numbers of revolutionaries, the result would be a diminishing of the numbers and influence of the Church in Madison. However, several questions re-

main. How shall we address the “split” or dualism of the Modern age? What kind of struggle might this present for a community in the modern university setting? How best should we form communities of learning?

## **Learning Worldview, Culture, and Warfare**

If the Church will emphasize learning communities as a missional response to our globalized world, congregations will find themselves engaged in the highest and most ancient arenas of spiritual struggle. We can learn from the example of our predecessors, reformers, missionaries, and evangelists. We must also learn how much our worldview and our culture affect our understanding of the gospel story. Comenius set out “to accomplish the means of disenthraling the world from the meshes of false principles in the affairs of religion and state,” and to compile “suitable educational works.” (Louthan 1998:47) Newbigin instructs the Christian community to “indwell the story.” (Newbigin 1989: 38) If we will discern our context sufficiently to disengage from its powerful influence, and if we allow the gospel story to shape the way we understand the world we live in, then we can humbly engage the world as witnesses of the gospel message.

### **The Gospel Story**

It’s amazing the lengths God goes to in order to teach his principles of generosity, that this good news is to be shared universally. That God’s people, families and individuals, must often go through incredible testing is not a judgment against God’s character; it is representative of the lengths God will go to in order to teach his ways, show his heart, and give his good gifts. It is representative of how much God’s heart is broken, how he waits and longs for relationship with us. As C.S. Lewis writes, “Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.” (Chalke 2003:57) God hides from us because he is merciful. As Wolterstorff writes, “God’s sorrow is his splendor.” This explains Exodus 33. God is hiding his suffering caused by his love; he knew we could not bear to see a face wrung with such infinite pain and live. This gospel story, the story of the Cross of Christ, is the only sufficient means to change the human character with all its self-protective, self-absorbed, and self-serving motives. Only when our hearts are laid bare before the cross do we see our great need, choose full admission of guilt, and find grace to help. “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?” (Romans 2:4)

God continues to show his kindness by involving us in His-Story portraying his message of forgiveness to the world. This is our current struggle. “God wants all to be



saved,” René Padilla writes, however “when the gospel is manipulated in order to make it easier for all to be Christians...the foundation is laid ...to have an unfaithful church.” (Saracco 2001:363) Jesus’ parables of seeds, fields, vineyards, yeast, and houses are hints at his message of transformation, implying prepared hearts, great cost, faithfulness, and establishment with influence in society. However the gospel message during Modern times has employed metaphors such as rescue boats and life rafts, which powerfully influence the Church with a message of disengagement from society “and the things of earth...grow strangely dim.”

### **Discerning Worldview and Culture**

Dualism is the “greatest internal obstacle to revitalizing the Church’s sense of mission and commitment,” especially its mission in the university community. (Budde 1997:6) “The worldview of the West is shaped since the 16th century by Cartesian dualism that divides the cosmos into two realities – the supernatural world...and the natural material world of humans, plants, animals, and matter.” (Hiebert 2001:169) This split has resulted in a greater distance between the Church and the world.

Stephen Toulmin writes, “Over the centuries, the gospel has proven remarkably adaptable...It has been able to enter into a variety of particular worldviews in diverse cultures, to be shaped to some extent by these worldviews and yet bring new direction and expression to them.” (Toulmin 1992: 115) While that may be true, the gospel message in modern society has been “reduced to a matter of individual belief and conduct.”

(Newbigin 1989: 188) To engage the secular university, we need to disengage from the spirit of individualism and grapple with the meaning of Koinonia, “the communal reality of holy living, mutual support, and sacrificial service.” (Guder 1998: 145)

This dualism has left the university community with no epistemological base on which to build. Therefore the secularist grasps for a utopian future in which tolerance is the ideal, however that ‘tolerance’ does not apply to those who have a particular faith in Christ. Since September 11, 2001, the UW has created opportunities for dialog with the world of Islam. The vision of Mohammed contains the implication of violent Islamic expansionism; non-Moslem territories are Dar Ul-Harb, or the “Sea of War.” From the Maghreb to Pakistan, the jihad, properly translated as “struggle,” for a new world order is underway. The secularist may fail to recognize the conflict is more than modern, economic, political, or ideological. The Church must know that “we cannot seek harmony by

revitalizing the truth claims of religions. We (*must*) commit to be agents of reconciliation” (Taylor 2001:19) in the midst of a spiritual war with amazing biblical promise:

“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria (*modern day Iraq*). The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.” (Isa. 19:23)

Today’s cultural mosaic is much like the cultural milieu of the first-century church. The world to which Jesus came was three major cultures, the Jewish, Greek, and the Roman, with many subcultures. While the resident population of Madison and the surrounding area is not as ethnically diverse, the University of Wisconsin’s forty thousand students and faculty from over one-hundred nations bring with them an ethnic diversity with pluralistic ideas, which powerfully influence that religious and cultural diversity. One definition of culture is “all learned behavior.” What we have been taught includes spiritual teachings. Lesslie Newbigin could see his culture as few could see it. He didn’t simply identify with culture. He understood the need to understand our story and the story of our culture, while at the same time understand that we should not be led by the teachings of our culture. If we are not free from our culture’s teaching, we will bring our distortions with us when we preach the gospel.

Our society exalts the importance of the individual. The gospel story has been forced out of the public sphere to become merely a private matter addressing a personal need, so that in much of the Church today “we find narcissism and individualism masquerading as personal salvation.” (Watson: 180) Many American Evangelicals have “long been interested in the Gnostic type of religion, the tendency to believe and act as if faith and salvation were essentially private, acultural, and ahistoric.” (Clapp 1996:34) The Evangelical Church reinforces this with the proper concern that every individual come to know Christ. However, the emphasis on individual faith hinders Christian congregations in the West from seeing the broader Body of Christ and their role in it. Christians today lack much of the theological resources necessary for today’s post-Christian, pluralist society. A church congregation must not simply be “a gathering of well-meaning individuals who have entered into a social contract to meet their privately defined self-interest.” (Guder 1998: 159).

The New Testament has little to say about organization for local congregations, though it does speak of the attitude of believers and leaders as they gather for worship, the appointment of special ministries, and how they are to relate. Like elders of a local congregation, those “sent” to apostolic service are called to “set an example” (1 Tim. 4:12). However, the apostolic call is to extend the message of the gospel to “regions beyond” (2 Cor. 10:16) the context of the local congregation. For our discussion, the New Testament outlines how Christian workers “sent” are to relate to the local congregations. Those sent out to preach the Gospel were directly related to their home fellowship, however their accountability and equipping seems to be redirected to their personal relationships in the apostolic band, the mission, such as Paul and his company. Several of those who traveled with Paul were later established as leaders in local congregations. It would appear that Paul was following Jesus’ model of discipleship, equipping and transformation, “follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mt. 4:19)

### **Spiritual Formation for Spiritual Battle**

Willard writes, “The process of inward renovation starts from the stark vision of life in the kingdom of God.” (2002:89) One reason God sends his people onto the mission field is not only for the people to whom God sends, but also for the one he sends. Spiritual formation takes place in every heart. However, what is needed is the renovation and, as Willard writes, “later, transformation of the inner life.” (Willard 2002:19) Willard points to the problem of man; that “renovation of the heart is an inescapable human problem with no human solution.” (2002:20) Willard defines spiritual formation for the Christian as the “Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.” (2002:22) For Christ-followers in Madison to discern their mission to the surrounding culture, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic university, and the wider world, we need to “learn how to distinguish the Christian message from the operative assumptions, values, and pursuits of our host society.” (Shenk: 2005)

Spiritual formation and discipleship is the work of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the ministry gifts of the Church and in the process of the work of ministry. Those with the spiritual gift of teacher may be prepared to ask deep questions, first ask themselves, then as they teach others. From my experience leading and interviewing student to over twenty countries, probing questions of worldview and culture are best asked in the

context of cross-cultural outreach. We might ask: “How does my gender, family, ethnicity, nationality, language, career, hobbies, commitments, education, friendships, property, and reputation influence me?” The Church will gain effectiveness in mission as it participates in a deep and ruthless examination of our culture and its influence on us. We should consciously expect to draw near to God as we intentionally reach out across cultural barriers as witnesses of His sovereign rule in all things. If we go through this process, then we can go back into our culture or another culture and have authority to speak with clarity through the freedom found only in Christ and not come under the teachings of culture.

To gain freedom from distorted cultural teachings, we should engage in such radical spiritual formation as did Paul. He writes, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” (Phil. 3:7) Paul understood the gospel more clearly than any of the apostles who were with Jesus for three years. Though he was a Pharisee of Pharisees, he was free from cultural bondage. Paul’s greatest contribution is his revelations, which clarified the Church’s call to worldwide mission, the gospel for the Gentiles. Paul’s background of scholarship, nationality, and religious identity was useful for his ability to teach, however they were hindrances to his ability to see Jesus Christ. Distorted teaching had a strong grip on his mind. These distortions filtered reality so much that when he looked at Jesus he did not see the Messiah. Paul spent ten years in “ruthless examination of what he had been taught in order to become free” of distortion. (Bloomer 2004) His letters help to make us effective as ministers across cultural barriers, local and global. To gain freedom from Western culture, we will need a similar ruthless examination of our culture and its ideas.

The elementary principles Paul often mentioned in his letters are powerfully influential and foundational ideas. (Newbigin: 1989) These basic ideas are deep-seated and necessary, though dangerous. Paul referred to the law as the “custodian” or “guardian.” (Galatians 4:8-9) Then he asks why, after you have known God, would you go back to be slaves of the elementary principles? (Col.2: 8,20) Elementary principles, ‘stoichaea’ in Greek, may be used for good or for evil to influence our thinking, divide people, or unite us on a false basis. Jesus taught a parable about a rich landowner who appointed tenants and went away on a journey. It’s unclear, however there appears to be similarity between the tenants Jesus refers to and Paul’s reference to the guardians. This will require further study, however it may be that these guardians or tenants are the “Sons of God” who ap-

pear before the Lord. (Job 1:6 NIV) The elementary principles or building blocks of culture, it may be reasoned, are taught and reinforced by these custodians of culture. We should also recognize that those Sons of God, originally appointed for good purposes, have taken cultures captive. Though God has sent messengers into his vineyard, “some of them they beat, others they killed.” Finally God sent his son. “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” (Mk. 12:6-8 NIV)

Understanding the level of spiritual conflict over cultures and the powerful spiritual forces, which have “blinded the minds...so that they cannot see the light of the gospel,” will help us appreciate the importance of a missional learning community in the modern university setting. (2 Cor. 4:4 NIV) It is vital to the life and mission of the Church in culture to oppose these powerful forces holding people and cultures captive. Learning and being taught requires a spiritually submissive posture; it requires a “bowing down” to a teacher. If the Church does not recognize this principle, it will ignore the spiritual forces and allow the surrounding culture to become captive. The university is the modern institution with global influence wherein destructive ideologies such as individualism, rationalism, communism, materialism, secularism, pluralism, and narcissism are upheld by the teaching of elementary principles through the agency of powerful forces.

The message of the cross is “a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,” Paul writes. (1 Cor. 1:23 NIV) Had the “rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor 2:8 NIV) Certainly those “rulers” were more than the Jews or the Romans in power at the time; Paul is referring to the guardians, tenants, or spiritual forces of darkness. For our learning community to have sufficient impact opposing the forces of darkness in the university setting, we will require the same weapons of warfare Paul employed. Paul writes,

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5 NIV)

This spiritual warfare is primarily the work of spiritual formation and transformation in the thought life of an individual, a group, and with expanding influence on the wider world. This conduct of the members of this community is an outworking of the

character of its members. Because this missional community is engaging powerful forces with global influence, prayers from many congregations must bolster it. Paul continues,

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many. Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand. (2 Cor. 10:10-13 NIV)

It is through community life and practices, including the task of writing and scholarship that is meaningful, that this missionary band in the university setting will revive the story and the meaning of the cross. These practices will help define our missional community and purpose on campus. The cross is not exclusive; it is radically inclusive. "It is the place where all are guilty and all are forgiven." (Middleton 1995: 151) Our learning community must not simply be "a gathering of well-meaning individuals who have entered into a social contract to meet their privately defined self-interest." (Guder 1998: 159) Our community must be careful to learn to re-tool our questions to the right questions: "What is the meaning and goal of human history?" rather than, "Who is going to be saved?" We must discover for ourselves, first and foremost, the meaning of the biblical community and the missional church. In so doing, we will "discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning." (Bellah 1996: 84)

As we become a community of the cross, we begin to discern our points of dissent from the dominant culture. (Guder 1998: 127) Newbigin calls for a new Enlightenment, the unmasking of the powers, "the opening up of the underlying assumptions of a secular society, the asking of the unasked questions, the probing of unrecognized presuppositions." (Newbigin 1989: 220) If we fail to do these things, we will leave the "principalities and powers of the world (*and the power of the university*) unchallenged." If we do these things, we will begin to expose the cultural idols and proclaim in their place the one true God.

A community of the cross boldly proclaims the Truth of God's story. Its members will share in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus invited us to take up our cross and follow. We can expect that, because we are different from the dominant culture, we will be hated. Our community should identify with the early church and those believers in places where

the culture is truly hostile to the gospel, such as China. Jesus calls us to identify with them and rejoice at the privilege of being persecuted. “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Mt 5:10) If we are to have authentic missional engagement, we should expect no less and respond with no less.

In Jane Vella’s book “Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach—the Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults” she powerfully articulates a new paradigm in adult teaching methodology. College students are adults, however much of the teaching-learning approach, even at the under-graduate level of university, is pedagogical, designed to teach children. Because adults should have more control over their learning, the role of the teacher for adults is more a facilitator and a coach. Because the clearest difference between the young learner and the adult learner is experience, the role of the teacher of adults is to set the direction and methods with emphasis on incorporating the expectations and experiences of the adult learners.

At the 1902 Toronto convention of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), Harlan Beach gave an address titled: “The Five Great Aims of the Ideal College.” They are:

1. To up build noble character. “Students may forget, but professors must be of the mind that rises above the curriculum to find their ideal work in the molding of symmetrical and strong characters.”
2. To foster the development of the mind. “What do you think? Is it to reap in the fields of knowledge or to sharpen your sickle?”
3. To stand for the extension of helpful knowledge. (Beach said this is too often regarded as the sole object. To be “helpful,” it must serve the wider world with practical results.)
4. To aid its students in arriving at wise decisions as to their personal investment in life. “It should not be simply to gain a degree.”
5. The university is the place of impartation of vision. “If there is any place in the world where young people ought to gain a great conception of the world and of his relation to it, it certainly should be places of higher learning.” (Beach 1902: 177-124)

The best learning experiences are in the context of relationships, especially those experiences and relationships that are at the same time unfamiliar and familiar. In my experience, college students learn best when taken out of their familiar culture to serve and learn in a context that challenges their expectations and their worldview. The unfamiliar surroundings of a cross-cultural serving-learning experience provide a context for deep questioning of worldview and culture. Students exhibit rapid personal growth when

placed in a situation where they are challenged to work together sharing their skills and training by serving the poor and needy. Adult learning and spiritual transformation may be most meaningful and effective when participants are on cross-cultural teams serving integrative field projects. Long-term community development field projects in developing nations not only serve the poor and needy, they serve as “laboratories” for spiritual formation curriculum development as well as cross-disciplinary field project leadership development.

Adult education principles and practices ‘fit’ with Robert Clinton’s Leadership Emergence Theory mostly in the way the learning process is a function of the life experiences of the participant. God uses ‘process items’, those events, people, circumstances, and special interventions, inner-life lessons, to indicate the potential of a leader. Both adult education and leadership emergence theory encourage active participation utilizing several different methods according to the expectations and experiences of the adult learner/emerging leader. Both adult education and leadership emergence theory emphasize flexibility and practical service to fit where the learner/leader is currently developing. The most essential element of field-based learning community is the authentic ministry of Christ that must be the foundational intent and the fruit of the project.



## **Cultivating A Missional Learning Community**

A vital learning community, as is described herein, is a powerful witness of the Kingdom of God in the university setting. While it is not being called a church, it is a vital expression of the Church in the Madison area with the strategy to engage the university community. This kind of community of learning and leadership equipping will ultimately bring transformation to an ever-widening community, even the university itself. Jesus asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Luke 13:20-21) To cultivate a learning community as a mission strategy to the University of Wisconsin, ministry and leadership gifts of the Church in Madison are required. The work of the Church is the formation of missional community. This learning community requires more than the pastoral gifting in leadership. God’s gifts of apostles, the “sent ones,” and prophets are vital to the leadership of the Church, especially in the formation of a community of believers (1 Cor 12:28) and the process of forging new territory in mission. (Eph. 2:20) Leadership according to Dr. Van Engen,

“is the corporate event whereby the people of God move forward in mission in the world as they live out their vision of God’s call and will for them stimulated by ‘leader/catalysts’ and mobilized by the Holy Spirit in response to what God is doing in their midst and in their context of mission in the world.”

Identifying, encouraging, and commissioning leadership gifts at the formative stage of the development of this learning community is vital to the fulfillment of its mission in the university context. The work of those pioneers of a missional learning community will begin with ministry to individuals, restoring identity and purpose, especially through the serving-learning cross-cultural team outreaches explained earlier. The ministry work will continue as the community forms in the university setting and begins to engage that community with dialogue. And finally, the work of the leaders of this learning community will be to portray the good news of God’s Kingdom through a new Evangelist Paradigm.

### **Restoring Identity and Purpose**

There is a lingering sense among postmodern students that they have lost their identity and their purpose. They may graduate with focused clarity on their individual

field of studies, but they have no sense of their contribution to the future. “Hopelessness is the very definition of postmodernism.” (Jensen: 1993) In the Torah, God’s instructions to his people were “addressed as much to the life of the nation as to that of the individual. It is as much about law and order, hygiene, economics, social welfare, and politics as it is about personal morals.” (Newbiggin 1989: 200) Christian community requires more than voluntary association, it is “a new collaborative order of interdependence, shared responsibility, mutual instruction, and commonality.” (Guder 1998: 146)

Reaffirming Augustine’s *Credo Ut Intelliga*, “I believe in order than I may understand,” puts priority on belief. Paul’s revelation that we are “saved by grace through faith” and “not of works” places priority on grace before human efforts have any value. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians continues, “For we are his workmanship,” verifying that our works will have value when grace is made the priority; we have purpose. Finally, “God’s Word has priority over intellectual freedom.” (Kirk 2001:120) The core theme of the Gospels and discipleship training is at the cross where identity is restored to “His image.” At the cross, the call to engage the world and give up on modern hopes; the only hope is in “self-giving love.” (Volf 1996:25-28)

Inclusive welcome, a foundational value for this learning community, will lead seekers to discover that we are guided by something more ultimate, more than individual salvation or membership in an exclusive religious group. We portray God’s continuing story through our community life and practices as we seek common ground and serve real human needs. Partnering as a living witness of God’s love for all people and cultures on international projects and through various local projects is an appropriate portrayal of the gospel story to those in the university community. In doing so, we restore identity and purpose in the lives of participants in our learning community.

Though projects may have nominal short-term results, we can show that we are living with a hope that comes from something much greater than the immediate success of the projects. Vern Visick, Director of New College, explains how unbelievers on his team and Sri Lankans observing their tsunami relief house building projects, “You may or may not want to acknowledge the God who inspires sacrificial service, but there is still a witness there.” Those we are in partnership with “discover that we have resources for coping with failure, defeat, humiliation, because we understand human history from this

side of the resurrection of the crucified Lord... It is the presence of these realities which prompts the questions and begins the dialogue.” (Newbigin 1989: 181)

### **The Role of Dialogue**

Dialogue literally means “the word between us.” One of Jane Vella’s principles of learning is that the teacher and the student can learn from each other and from God. Our community of learning must be one where questions are welcome and encouraged. Students have questions about God, however too often various church groups have repelled honest seekers with answers to questions they are not asking and anti-intellectual responses to questions they are asking. One philosophy graduate, a follower of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, asked Elaine, a YWAM campus ministry leader at the UW, the purpose of life. “He is not a resident, but he likes coming to the house. He knows we are Christians, but he does not believe. Feeling accepted in an experiential way helps him answer his intellectual questions,” Yan said. The environment of the campus is one where everything is questioned, broken down, and critically examined. This presents a challenge when teaching spiritual realities and practices. For example, students question the practice of hearing the voice of God. “Any suggestion of real, immediate relations between inner consciousness and external events (have become) a sign of ignorance or even fraud.” (Kaiser: 106)

We are a witness of God’s radical inclusion, with horizontal welcome and engagement with our neighbors, and the exclusivity of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, with vertical devotion to Christ and His global purpose. When we live “different from the world, inviting questions, challenging assumptions, and demonstrating a life not of the world,” we promote true dialogue as a learning community. (Guder 1998: 117) Our most effective witness is when God’s people are indwelling his-story, telling and re-contextualizing the unfolding story. Jesus is not merely the ‘object’ of our attention, even our worship. We are called to ‘dwell’ in him, even in His suffering. He is the body of which we are a part. We are called to abide in Christ as a living witness, not as individuals, allowing our story to be truly enveloped in God’s story, in community. This, I believe, is a missional community.

The forces of secularization and pluralism have increasingly marginalized the influence of the Church. The secular university, designed for the individual consumer of education, can be a profoundly isolating institution in which students, if they are honest,

will admit they are “lost.” “The Western post-Enlightenment understanding of the human person centers on the autonomy of the individual who is free to make or to break relationships at will.” (Newbiggin 1989: 188) Consequently, the university has employed bureaucratic, dehumanizing, and isolating powers. However, due to changes in technology and education, Peter Drucker characterizes today’s shift to the postmodern as a “transition from a world tightly managed by rational bureaucracies to a world that is more open and dynamic.” (Van Gelder 1996: 124) This openness provides new opportunity for missional engagement in the university setting.

To be an effective witness in this setting, our learning community at the University of Wisconsin should “learn how to distinguish the Christian message from the operative assumptions, values, and pursuits of our host society.” (Shenk: 2005) It is basic to a missional approach in ministry to understand the forces challenging community life in the university setting; it is equally important to recognize the opportunities present in the postmodern shift. Exploring how the biblical story relates to community will help us see how our learning community may find dialogue with the surrounding university.

In the biblical story, God reveals his will to create a space of welcome for those who would explore relationship with Him. That space is God’s missional strategy revealed in the story of God’s people. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of “welcome” as the heart of witness: “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mt. 9:37) This “welcome” was established in the Old Testament in the stone and mortar, the physical space, of the outer court of the Temple at Jerusalem. We find this place of welcome in operation, albeit not without human misunderstanding, on several occasions in the scriptures, including the story of the Ethiopian eunuch who came to worship. (Acts 8:27 NIV)

In these postmodern times, there is a wide gap in the public sphere; it is in this opening where we find opportunity for witness. Those who protest say, “Truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp.” To find dialog in this context, we need to understand how to find common ground in common grace while presenting the special grace of God to the broader campus community; this is the ‘sacred space’ of the postmodern. Finding common ground through common grace requires acknowledging God’s good gifts in whatever circumstance. Sadly, this is often not appreciated in modern witness and community practices. “There is something deeply repulsive in the attitude, sometimes

found among Christians, which makes only grudging acknowledgement of the faith, the godliness, and the nobility to be found in the lives of non-Christians.” (Newbigin 1989: 180) We find common ground as we seek shared commitment, through voluntary service, in the affairs of the university. In so doing,

“...the context for true dialogue is provided. As we work together with people of other commitments, we shall discover the places where our ways must separate. Here is where real dialogue may begin. It is a real dialogue about real issues. It is not just a sharing of religious experiences, though it may include this.” (Newbigin 1989: 181)

The message of special grace is the message of Calvary compelling us to tell the story and announce the truth that this world, which God made and loves, is in rebellion against him.

### **A Paradigm for the Evangelist**

Dr. Charles Van Engen’s article, “The Religious Encounter in the New Millennium” outlines the “Evangelist Paradigm” providing a way for Christians to approach persons of other faiths in a manner that is “faith particularist, culturally pluralist and ecclesiologically inclusivist.” (Van Engen: 2000) Avoiding the confusion that results when equating faith and culture, Van Engen points to a fresh vision for a gospel that is centered in Jesus Christ. This kind of theological reflection, drawing from the multicultural and global church in this new millennium, can provide understanding for a missional response that is simultaneously local and global. This Evangelist Paradigm is “absolutist about a personal faith relationship. However, it is at the same time relativist about faith in terms of the shape this takes in church and cultures.” (Van Engen: 2005)

Too often churches and campus ministries in the United States fail to see their mission as a community to the wider world. They may have a sense of participation in that mission through a committee, a financial commitment, and the sending of some of its members to a foreign field. However, this vision of mission is insufficient. If the Temple, as Jesus said, was to be a “House of Prayer for All Nations” and the Israelites were to be a “Light to the Gentiles”, how can we not fully embrace this vision for the nations that surround us? Certainly Philip embraced this call and the Holy Spirit swept him up from the local, mostly homogeneous multitudes, and placed him in front of a single Ethiopian man to extend the message across cultural and geographic boundaries. Local mission today is just as cross-cultural as it was in the first century. Local mission is to be done sim-

ultaneous with global mission; there is no priority one over the other. One influences and informs the other. For the Church in Madison to develop this kind of multi-tiered mission vision and participation, it will require new levels of partnership in the local and global context.

## **Being the Church on Mission**

The best theologians of history were missionaries, a fact often overlooked by academicians. Historically, the Church has sought a theological basis of missions and not the missiological basis for theology. Missions is more than something the Church does; it is not something the Church does as they can afford it, when they have time, or as a special event. Biblically, mission is the founding and central purpose of the Church, the very reason for the Church's existence. Our learning community members must recognize that they are the Church on mission in the university setting; the notion that this learning community is somehow less than the Church must be confronted with a more complete Biblical understanding. Participants need to experience a full conversion, including a conversion to the Church and a conversion to the Great Commission. Spiritual formation and discipleship must facilitate a complete conversion to Christ, as well as the secondary conversion to the Church and the tertiary conversion to global mission. Biblical motivation follows biblical revelation; best fostered through practical participation, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and the Church's ministry gifts, in local and global mission.

To create community in the university setting and with the emerging generation, we need to develop common bonds in common spaces. Every member must appreciate the necessity to dialogue with other faiths by creating space for conversation. The design of the Court of the Gentiles is our template; it was intended for dialogue with the nations. The Court of the Gentiles was neither private, nor public. This space may be compared to what Van Engen calls "third spaces." In third spaces we may have dialogue as a "light to the Gentiles." By clearly identifying that which is "holy," we reaffirm the sacred spaces in the midst of our community. By intentionally creating "third spaces," the members of our community at the University of Wisconsin will re-learn how to engage their world.

Through dialogue and a willingness to explore theological questions with thoughtfulness and a "generous orthodoxy," as Brian McLaren states it, we will find common ground, shared commitment, and a vital community offering loving service to our local and global neighbors. This new missional community in the university setting can begin to expand our cultural framework, and experiment with new ministry methods and models, particularly engaging those issues that resonate with this generation. We need to en-

gage the emerging generation with open-ended questions about what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus Christ, what we are here for, and most importantly, “What is Church?”

### **What is Church?**

Those who come to faith in Christ need to be converted to the Church. They need to learn that the Church, including their own congregation, is not perfect. Participation in this learning community will not detract members from membership and participation with a local congregation, rather participation in this learning community will enhance their life, their part in the global Church community, and their mission to the strategic mission field of the university. This conversion and commitment to the Church is of profound significance to reaching this generation, “as profound a conversion as our conversion to Jesus.” (MC 502 Lecture 10: 2005) Understanding this need for conversion calls for an individual and corporate response to Christ to love our neighbors and forgive any wrong that has been done to us, intentionally or unintentionally, and offers greater meaningfulness for learning community mission. As we deepen our relationships, our understanding of the scriptures, and our responsiveness to God’s will, our learning community will ultimately serve the Church in Madison to respond to God’s call to engage the world as a “light to the Gentiles.”

The understanding of “local church” is often misunderstood and therefore responsible for diminishing missional engagement of the world and society, most especially the university. Perhaps the term “congregation” should replace “local church” and “Church,” with a capital “C,” should always refer to the broadest understanding of the Body of Christ to remind the people that it is not a bounded-set, but a “centered-set” with the Lord Jesus at the center. (Hiebert 1994:) Jesus draws all people to Himself, no matter how or where they worship, and He then sends those who have received grace out to the world as messengers. A new paradigm for mission may require a revival of a very different kind; it may require a revival of humility on the part of Church leaders in the city with an open-handed leadership style that releases people to go be the Church, to be a learning community on mission in today’s pluralistic society.

This learning community on mission in the university will not be unlike Paul’s missionary band engaging the cities in Asia. Members of our learning community will have accountability to leaders of their church congregation. However, as representatives



from many churches, our community will also have accountability to “all the churches.” (Rom. 16:4,16; 2 Cor. 8:18, 11:28; Gal. 1:2; 2 Th 1:4) Paul’s concern about those who individually “follow” one apostolic leader’s teaching over another is answered in his appeal for cooperation among these inter-congregational ministries: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” (1 Cor. 3:6) Missionaries are conferred authority by the Scriptures to instruct and “command.” (2 Cor. 3:4, 1 Cor. 7:17) The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) concerned more than the two churches, Antioch and Jerusalem, and its results were of instruction and blessing to many other assemblies. It may be that, just as Paul and his missionary band engaging the Gentiles had influence on the Church, this learning community will have similar influence helping the Church discern its mission in today’s globalized world.

The New Testament encourages spiritual fellowship and voluntary cooperation among the assemblies. Apostolic ministries play an important role in this cooperation. It appears it is the role of those “sent” into apostolic ministries is to exhort, encourage, and instruct local congregations not to “use your freedom to indulge in the sinful nature,” (Gal. 5:13) including the failure to love. Those in mission communities, such as our learning community, are called to exhort the Body of Christ to cooperate with other congregations and witness to the wider world. This understanding places a great responsibility on our learning community, to develop responsiveness and cooperation among the various Madison area congregations in which we are members.

### **Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria**

The vision of mission expressed in Acts 1:8 is for all nations and all peoples. To embrace the “all” will require this community to constantly depend on the Holy Spirit, without whom we will simply not have sufficient resources for the task. Our mission to the “all” is the multi-ethnic and multi-national University of Wisconsin at Madison and the many groupings of people that become our friends as we embrace our call to the ends of the earth. Our community practice is not only local, but global mobilization of our community creating partnerships for a new generation of missionary volunteers. Cross-cultural mission will be central to the purpose of our learning community as we exercise the ministry gift of hospitality to internationals in Madison and at the University of Wisconsin. The forty-one thousand students at the UW offer natural bridges to the ends of the earth through the nearly four thousand international students. Providing hospitality and

inviting students at the University of Wisconsin, especially internationals, to participate in our learning community through meals, discussion groups, and field outreaches, is very influential and strategic cross-cultural ministry.

Just as the widows of the Hellenistic Jews were being neglected in the first century multi-cultural church (Acts 6), the majority culture of the Church in Madison may also overlook the minority cultures in our local context. Early Church leaders were very wise; they appointed deacons. Hospitality is a vital gift of the Spirit. These first deacons, exercising the ministry gift of helps and hospitality, were more than overseers of food. They were in charge of the cross-cultural dynamic of the Church. All their names were Greek. In addition to being “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,” they were local missionaries. Families opening their homes to students will counteract globalization’s isolating effect. This is a clear example of how our community can and will engage in cross-cultural ministry in the university setting.

## CONCLUSION

Reflective analysis of the major themes of the required courses of the MAGL has revealed how strongly these themes have influenced my life and ministry. I recognize how the various courses have shaped my life and ministry and the direction I am receiving from the Lord Jesus. ML 581 and ML 582 have focused my overall understanding of this expensive and arduous task of pursuing an education in the midst of a very full and busy life in ministry. Robert Clinton and Shelly Trebesch's courses, ML 523 and ML 530 have connected my story to God's continuing story of preparing his people for works of service. Sherwood Lingenfelter's course ML 537 has provided tools for appreciating culture and difference, especially in my own context in ministry. The elective course ST 511, Orientation to Theological Studies, has renewed and affirmed my sense of calling as a missionary to the Academy, especially through my studies of John Amos Comenius. Van Engen's course, MC 502 Becoming A Missional Church, has helped me think through my role and relationship with the global Church and the local congregations I relate to. Finally, both MC 502 and MP 520 focused my thinking about how a community may be intentional as a missionary strategy engaging the university, and particularly the University of Wisconsin.

The signature themes I have discovered during these two years of study have shaped this integrative paper and deepened my sense of identity and purpose as a missionary with Youth With A Mission with a call to the university. My call is a missionary call to change, not just a student here and there, but the university itself. "The university is a clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world." (Malik 1992) This vision for a learning community is a mission strategy. The community will serve as a catalyst for the purpose of reformation of the Church in Madison and transformation of the university community. The missional vision of learning in community and through service is appropriate as a witness to the modern university community at the UW.

## **Formation of Community**

This learning community will provide a flexible approach to mission in the university setting, utilizing the combined resources of the university community, various Christian ministries, and humanitarian relief and development agencies. This learning community will serve the Church in Madison by providing an example of a valid missionary engagement in our context through the leadership of “thoughtful and grounded practitioners and visionaries” (Taylor 2001:7)

“If missions in the Western context do not consciously shift to a more holistic theology and practice, then I cannot see how we can reach people. Practical models and demonstrated community are essentials in the post-modern era. The churches need resources to be able to move back and forth between Scripture and culture as they frame redemptive agendas. Few tools or models seem readily available to the Western church.” (McAlister 2001:371)

This new community will not replace existing ministries. It will build connections between these different ministries including churches, families, professionals/professors, and student organizations. It will provide sufficient flexibility to connect students, faculty, families, business and church leaders in the university community from many cultures and nations. For example, families may appropriately host university students, because “God sets the lonely in families” and students need role models for marriage and family. However, families do not have much context or place from which to engage students. Therefore there is a need for this community, connecting various groups, resources, and projects for the purpose of witness in the university with the intentional formation of deeper, more focused community through serving-learning projects and discipleship and leadership equipping.

The YWAM campus house on the UW campus has been operating for nearly ten years. House members have participated on short-term mission projects in the local setting and on global outreach. Those who live in the house have chosen to live differently as members of an intentional Christian community on campus. However, this community can make an even more powerful witness when they choose to respond to two dominant cultural forces, secularization and pluralism. “This is an important task...to discern what are those key points to be different from the evil of the world.” (Guder 1998: 127) By intentionally responding to secularization and pluralism in our shared life, we can portray to the postmodern university community the meaning of the cross of Christ.

## **Personal Observations**

As I live and work in a community, I must admit I have certain reservations. I have been aware of self-protective mechanisms in my own life for several years. I see the cost of walking in relationship with broken people. I also see both the fruit and the cost of being abandoned to Christ in community with people who are also abandoned to Christ. The measure of the collective abandonment to Jesus in community will be the measure of the effectiveness of our witness in the university and to the world. Though my ministry team has exciting visions, I see areas of breakdown in communications and trust hindering the fulfillment of those visions. “How rare to find a group that consistently functions well for the good it envisions. In fact, the group usually exhibits the divided hearts and lives of its members even more strikingly than does the individual alone.” (Willard 2002: 30)

This study is helping point out more clearly my need to once again be bonded in community, a commitment I have kept at a personally manageable level for many years. It may appear I have been in community, however I have managed my involvement for the purpose of protecting myself from hurt. “In our arrogance,” Dr. Lingenfelter says, “we limit options to those we know, and opt for choices we believe are secure rather than to take the risks that obedience to God demands.” My “risk” is to once again choose the life of obedience to the call of Christ to form a vital community on mission to the university.

At one time I gave myself to a community, which later broke down and self-destructed within a year after my wife and I were “sent” with the blessing and support of that group to pioneer a new work. We were hurt very deeply and our community and that ministry experienced a hostile takeover by another ministry. Our mission lost a valuable training center property, but more importantly we lost very dear friends to an aberrant vision of revival. My “home” and community was lost. Those friends rejected us deeply. My wife and I were rejected to such an extent that our names were listed on the top of the lawsuit against our mission. “And rejection, no matter how old one is, is a sword thrust to the soul...” (Willard 2002: 36) Since then, I have failed to renew that level of commitment to community. As a newborn Christian, I desperately needed community and God provided it in my pastor, his family, and through them, my home sending church. As a

young Christian, I found deep and meaningful community in that YWAM community, which later self-destructed.

This deep hurt from many years ago is now coming to the forefront of my life and ministry as I consider my calling and leadership as a missionary to the university. God, by his grace, is first calling me to a place of deeper healing; God is renovating my heart. I find it interesting how the pain and suffering of the Israelites in slavery gave them their distinct identity. Perhaps, as I speak of the pain from loss of community and the level of commitment once enjoyed, I will find grace to help me trust again to participate with God in the creation a new community. This will not be easy. Willard explains that the Israelites did not merely receive their inheritance, a “land flowing with milk and honey... it still had to be conquered by careful, persistent, and intelligent human action, over a long period of time.” (Willard: 42) Ultimately, Jesus is my Master Teacher and Chief Disciple. I can trust him to create this community, even as he is transforming me. I can trust him to make me a vital part of a community.

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