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Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ

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DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR AN INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY
AT THE WEBB CHAPEL CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

L. Bert Alexander

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Doctor of Ministry

Dean of the Graduate School

Date

Thesis Committee

Chair

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ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the results of a project to promote the development of an incarnational ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ. This intervention employed a team of Webb Chapel opinion leaders representative of various subgroups of the congregation. In the fall of 2008, this group met for eight sessions to discuss the self-emptying practices of Jesus and the need for his followers to emulate those self-emptying practices in their individual lives. Through interaction in the eight sessions, the group developed a model by which self-emptying practices could be implemented at Webb Chapel. Evaluation of the project illuminated the following principles: (1) Jesus revealed the supreme example of self-emptying when he took on humanity and became flesh for a time. (2) Jesus chose to empty himself of the desires that drive man to be independent from God. (3) Self-emptying is something that the disciples of Jesus can do and are called to do as well. (4) Self-emptying places God at the center of one's heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the need at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ¹ in Farmer's Branch, Texas, for an intervention to facilitate the development of a model for an incarnational ministry. The project involves the development of this model for incarnational ministry from a selected group of Webb Chapel members representing various subgroups of the congregation. Chapter 1 introduces the project with a brief description of the project title, a brief history of Webb Chapel to the present, and a clarification of the problem, purpose, definitions and delimitations. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the project's theological framework, and chapter 3 describes the methodology of the project, giving an overview of the format, team participant selection, sessions and a project evaluation. Chapter 4 contains the results and Chapter 5 is a discussion of the evaluations of the project.

Title of Project

This project, entitled "Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ," seeks to develop this model by cultivating a deeper desire within the team members to become the living body of Jesus in this world. "Incarnational ministry" refers to the self-emptying of Jesus expressed in Philippians 2. To possess the mind of Christ is more than an intellectual endeavor; it is a way of life.

¹ Herein after labeled Webb Chapel.

The project focuses on exposing the incarnational ministry team to the concepts of the self-emptying practices of Jesus in order to develop a model by which self-emptying practices can be adopted at Webb Chapel.

Ministry Context

Webb Chapel, an older congregation in Farmers Branch, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, was established in 1956 at its current location. The church achieved its pinnacle in numerical growth during the latter two decades of the twentieth century and then began a trend of negative or stagnant growth. Older Caucasians comprise most of the current membership, but new growth seems to be coming from younger Latinos who have moved into the area. Webb Chapel is currently searching for its identity, not only within the community but also within the congregation itself.

A Mission-Minded Narrative

Some of the charter members have worshiped with this congregation for over half a century. The current auditorium, originally built in 1966, was remodeled in 2002. The construction of the original auditorium coincided with the establishment of the Mission Forum, with its emphasis on domestic and foreign missions. This annual Mission Forum, which brought Christians interested in missions and missionary support together in order to place missionaries in the field, became the event by which Webb Chapel was known for decades throughout the Churches of Christ.

Webb Chapel possesses a rich history of missional involvement. For over thirty years the congregation has supported Tony Coffey as a missionary in Dublin. Thaddaeus Bruno has received support for almost twenty years. In addition, Webb Chapel has been

actively involved for many years with establishing and nurturing the Cape May Courthouse Church in New Jersey. The church's ongoing involvement with the Continent of Great Cities missionaries includes the recent provision of teaching facilities for a team beginning its work in Brazil. Local mission efforts as well as ventures throughout the United States and in Mexico leave little doubt that Webb Chapel's passion for missional ministry and missional activity continue to define the congregation, just as they have for decades.

For the first three decades of its existence, the church experienced a positive growth pattern. In the late nineties, Webb Chapel arrived at a crossroad regarding whether to stay in its current location or to move into the growing suburbs to the north. The decision was made to stay at the present location and to "reach out to the local community." (However, many of the decision makers who advocated staying in the same location have retired or are no longer members at Webb Chapel.)

The local community has changed demographically from a middle-class Caucasian neighborhood to a working-class Latino neighborhood, and many of the Caucasian members have moved on to other congregations. The 2000 census noted that the zip code 75234, where the church facility is located, consisted of 65 percent Caucasian and almost 30 percent Latino population. However, Turner High School, located in the same zip code as Webb Chapel, was over 62 percent Latino in 2000, and 65 percent of the Caucasian population was over sixty-five years of age.² Webb Chapel is

² United States Census Records provide a snapshot of Webb Chapel's local community. Changing demographics have altered the community makeup surrounding Webb Chapel, and previously successful efforts at reaching the community no longer achieve the same effects. Raw demographical data require close study to determine

becoming representative of the community. We are an older Caucasian church that is becoming more Latino. At present, younger Latino families provide the only real numerical growth within the congregation.

In June of 2000 Webb Chapel employed me as the education and involvement minister. That fall we held an evangelistic campaign in which we went into the neighborhood, knocking on doors, meeting our neighbors, and inviting them to engage in a study of the Bible. This week-long event underlined the fact that Webb Chapel was not sufficiently equipped to meet the current needs of its neighbors in a changing community. Many of our neighbors could not speak English, and since the majority of our members could not speak Spanish, the resulting impasse caused by our inability to communicate with them produced intense frustration.

Because of the difficulties exposed by the fall campaign, Webb Chapel hired Henry Roncancio as a cross-cultural minister in 2001. His Colombian background makes him an excellent bilingual communicator. We scheduled another door-knocking campaign in the spring of 2001, with Henry serving as the coordinator, but the results were little better than the previous campaign.

By this time Webb Chapel was losing members on a steady basis. Many people left because they lived in suburbs further north and sought other church possibilities closer to home. Others left because they were not satisfied with a Webb Chapel that was becoming smaller and more ethnically diverse. From 2000 to 2005, Webb Chapel's attendance at Sunday morning worship services decreased from approximately seven hundred to approximately four hundred. These departures produced a ripple effect

possible changes in culture, which in turn necessitate different approaches for reaching the community.

throughout the church as we lost not only financial resources but manpower to fill ministry positions. Unhappy members wanted someone to blame, but no individual or group ultimately bore responsibility for the decrease in membership.

In February of 2003, Dr. Charles Siburt from Abilene Christian University conducted a weekend seminar at Webb Chapel on church development. Siburt's valuable findings and recommendations probably lay close to the heart of the actual issues being experienced by Webb Chapel. Unfortunately, some members anticipated a program or a method that would attract new Caucasian members or convince current Caucasian members not to leave, and the exodus from Webb Chapel continued.

Currently the eldership is searching for a program that will either bring in new members or send our members into the community to evangelize the neighbors. Yet I believe we need not a program, a system, or even a plan to mobilize Webb Chapel's members for local evangelization. What we need is a model based upon the self-emptying example of Jesus, empowered to change the hearts of the members and to help them become more incarnational—more like Jesus Christ.

The Problem

The challenge Webb Chapel faces is probably not unique. As a church that is growing older, Webb Chapel must redefine itself or face the real possibility of numerical decline or extinction. Based upon George Bullard's research on the life cycle of churches, Webb Chapel is past its prime and heading through "empty nest" towards "retirement."³ I

³ See the series by George Bullard, "Congregational Passages," edited by the *National Consultant for Denominational Transformation, Southern Baptist Convention* [August, 1996-June 1998], unnumbered pages. Bullard's series on the life cycle and stages of congregational development likens the life of a church to the life of a human

contend that the exodus of members is not the cause of the problem; rather it is the result. The underlying problem, spiritual in nature, reveals the church's need to create a new vision, one that uses the self-emptying example of Jesus and that will cause the congregation to see itself in a different light.

Webb Chapel promotes itself as a congregation which is "...Serving God, Seeking the Lost, and Loving One Another."⁴ Although we have spoken privately in elder/staff meetings of Webb Chapel as "one congregation speaking two languages," our actions belie our stated purpose, and we are often in actuality "two congregations which meet in the same building consecutively on the same day." Schwarz describes two dissimilar organisms living together in a mutually beneficial way as *symbiosis*.⁵ Webb

being, including the birth of the congregation, its infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, maturity, empty nest, retirement, old age, and ultimately its death. Bullard presents four organizing principles that define the current stage of a congregation: vision, inclusion, programs and management. These principles determine the direction of the congregation, and when all are gone, the church dies. Bullard adamantly asserts that a congregation may be redefined at any stage, including old age, but the retooling comes at a cost that is often greater than the congregation is willing to pay. Many times congregations desperate for renewal or new growth are willing to change their paradigm for a period of time, yet soon reverted to their old patterns and lose any gains they might have achieved.

⁴ This phrase is found on the cover of the weekly bulletin and on the church letterhead.

⁵ Charles Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 74. Symbiosis is the intimate living together of two dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship. Schwarz goes on to say that two negative models stand in contrast to his principle: competition and monoculture. Competition assumes "dissimilar organisms," just as symbiosis does, but these organisms harm rather than help one another. Monoculture has lost the variety of species, and one type of organism dominates. This eliminates the competition, but it also takes away the symbiotic interdependence of different species. A competitive model, as undesirable as it might be, is a tremendous improvement on the obtuseness, monotony, and ineffectiveness of monopolism, in which unity is forced and competition is squelched.

Chapel has difficulty creating a symbiotic multi-cultural church. The lack of self-emptying practices has led to a bimodal congregational setting that does not foster harmony or a spirit of cooperation within the two cultures of the congregation.

Maybe the more conservative, older Anglo membership feels disinterest or possibly even fear concerning the concept of an incarnational ministry. I foresee a major paradigm shift for many and fear that some might be unwilling to change their theological perspectives even slightly. However, I believe the concept of self-emptying practices and having the mind of Christ to be absolutely biblical and doctrinal as well. I also believe that most of the members at Webb Chapel embrace the concept of *kenosis* (self-emptying) on the intellectual level. Perhaps they are not totally committed to *kenosis* as a lifestyle, yet they accept that Jesus emptied himself and became a man during his ministry. A spiritual synapses—or simply a spiritual disconnection—hinders many in the congregation from being emptied of self and being used in ministry for Jesus and his church. This project addresses the problem created by the lack of a model for an incarnational ministry within the local community of the Webb Chapel Church of Christ.

The Purpose

The intent of this project was to develop a model that articulates an incarnational ministry to better reveal the self-emptying example of Jesus to the membership at Webb Chapel. The incarnational ministry team used reflection on biblical passages, specifically from Philippians 2:5-11, exercises in introspection and self-emptying, and assignments outside the sessions in order to encourage the team members to engage other members at Webb Chapel and community neighbors. I served as a facilitator rather than as a leader or

teacher, thereby expediting a team effort to develop the model heuristically rather than simply telescoping my beliefs and agenda upon the incarnational ministry team.

Assumptions

The issues of race, culture and ethnicity that divide the nation also invade our local congregations, particularly in North Dallas and its suburbs. While this phenomenon may be normal for our national culture, it should be foreign to the body of Christ.

However, at Webb Chapel, planning activities to engage both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members generally creates a level of unrest or resistance.

Older Caucasian members, reticent about worshipping with Latino members, are even more resistant to going into the community to become part of their lives.

Conversely, many Latino members feel uncomfortable in an English-speaking worship assembly and prefer to remain separate as well. This tendency towards polarities provides few meaningful opportunities for dialogue between the two cultures and makes Webb Chapel two separate churches meeting in one location.

In order to become a missional church, Webb Chapel must jettison its mentality of isolationism. The congregation must seek to engage the local community and join Jesus in his work in the neighborhood. Webb Chapel can no longer expect to grow numerically without this engagement, and I believe that self-emptying practices must be implemented in order to develop the servant attitude of Jesus.

Definitions

Cross-cultural ministry. A ministry that incorporates, combines, and sometimes even creates a new paradigm for the integration of multiple cultures in a permeable

manner. Cross-cultural churches generally experience difficulties in collapsing the polarities of the distinct cultures into a workable homogeneous relationship in which each entity values the culture of the other without losing the distinctiveness of self. The body of Christ must be able to nurture the diversity of the distinct cultures in order to grow and mature.

Missional. The concept of missionality in a church focuses attention on what the church *is*—a community created by the Spirit—and the unique nature, or essence, that gives it a unique identity. This term should not be confused with the concept of trying to reclaim the priority of missions in regard to the church's various activities; such a misunderstanding continues the effort to define a congregation primarily by what it *does*.⁶

Delimitations

This project focuses on developing a model for an incarnational ministry with the model-building team and does not involve the entire congregation of the Webb Chapel Church of Christ. The leadership (eldership) approved the project, though without knowledge of its intricacies. A full report of the findings will be presented to the leadership after the completion of the project and thesis.

The model used in this project was developed and intended for application within the Webb Chapel Church of Christ. While many aspects of the model could prove valuable in other congregational settings, each ministry setting is unique, therefore the model team consists of members of Webb Chapel, and their focus and the resulting model are unique to Webb Chapel.

⁶ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 16-17.

Conclusion

In order to become a missional church, Webb Chapel must jettison its mentality of isolationism. The congregation must seek to engage the local community and join Jesus in his work in the neighborhood. Webb Chapel can no longer expect to grow numerically without this engagement, and I believe that self-emptying practices must be implemented in order to develop the servant attitude of Jesus.

Chapter 2 provides the theological rationale for incarnational ministry at Webb Chapel. In Philippians 2:5-11 Paul urges the Philippian church to have the same mind as Christ and to be emptied of self in order to be a servant like Jesus. Chapter 2 explores *kenosis*, the self-emptying process, discusses what it entails, and gives examples of these practices found in the Gospels and the letters of Paul. The chapter concludes by considering ways in which the self-emptying practices of Jesus can be imitated and replicated in the modern church.

CHAPTER TWO
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Kenotic Christology could be a means of creating a different theological paradigm and in turn a completely radical change in the corporate worldview of the church, both on a local and global scale. Kenosis is rarely discussed in a church setting such as an adult Bible class or from the pulpit. This lack of exposure leads to the misunderstandings and benign ignorance many believers have about the subject. Most Christians are not opposed to the concept of the self-emptying of Jesus; they simply do not understand the ramifications of the concept. If Christians better understood the true meaning of kenosis and the powerful effects it could have on the individual and body of faith, there would be a much greater desire to emulate the self-emptying practices of Jesus Christ.

The term *kenosis* comes from Philippians 2:7, which quotes a hymn that says “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-7 NRSV;). A similar idea appears in 2 Corinthians 8:9, which says that Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to emulate his lifestyle. This seems to have been interpreted by many in my fellowship as following his commands as found in the scriptures, and generally living a quiet, sober lifestyle that does not make many ripples in the local community. However, Jesus caused ripples! He upset the teachers of the law, the governmental leaders and almost all others of any social or political position. What we have been taught is that following Jesus is a lifestyle that is different from that of the world in ways that are both great and small. Yet what has not been taught with as much vigor is that Christians, disciples, followers of Jesus, not only must follow Jesus, they must be like him. In order to emulate Jesus, I must be willing to be emptied of self and all that this emptying entails. To be emptied of self is to lose independence. Terminal patients are dependent upon others because of medical conditions and procedures that limit or prohibit their ability to do certain things for themselves. When Jesus was emptied of self, he gave up the desires that drive all humans such as power, control, fame and wealth. Even as life is much more than the avoidance of pain, Christianity is more than statement of faith, it is the conscience effort to emulate the life and actions of Jesus the Savior.

The assurance in Hebrews that Jesus was tempted suggests another aspect of his self-emptying: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested, as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15 NRSV). While I am not maintaining that Jesus was emptied of his deity in a significant manner, I do contend that the emptying of humanity presented Jesus with a unique set of circumstances for temptation. Satan tends to place the greatest areas of temptation where one is most vulnerable. Some would suggest that Jesus’ prayer to the

Father before the world existed (John 17:5) suggests that the Incarnation involved a giving up of some aspect of divine glory;¹ however, for the purposes of this project, I intend to concentrate more on the emptying of his humanity rather than the emptying of his divinity.

All of God's children are created in his image, and this *Imago Dei* aspect leads his people in their desire to be like him. Since Jesus did not see his equality with God as something to exploit, his followers should emulate his example of self-emptying. Surrendering the desire to conquer, possess, or exploit allows us to be like Jesus. However, this proposal runs counter with most cultures, especially those of North America and Europe. I propose that in many of our churches, *kenosis* is misunderstood: it is generally something that the rank and file of Christians in our tradition have neither studied nor heard a great deal. The ignorance about emptying self is much greater than I would have imagined before entering this project, and until Christians are enlightened about the need for self-emptying, one could expect the overall spiritual growth of the church to be stunted. I desire, by this project, to develop a model that encourages Christians to be emptied of self and filled with Jesus.

The self-emptying of Jesus in Philippians 2 points to the existence of the Son of God as part of the triune Godhead that preceded the creation of the universe. Jesus' commitment to give up his position with the Father clearly indicates his willingness to pay the ultimate sacrifice for the redemption of humankind. Humanity, by nature, attempts to gain possessions through almost any means. Since the beginning of time,

¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, "A Kenotic Christological Method for Understanding the Divine Attributes," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 151.

humanity has been plagued with the capacity and willingness to subjugate, exploit, and even enslave others in order to satisfy the sins of narcissism and greed. Jesus took a different path: instead of acquiring more and more, he gave his human desires away and lived a life of self-emptying service rather than one of power and control. As Coakley maintains, the rhetoric of *kenosis* has not simply constituted the all-too-familiar exhortation to women to submit to lives of self-destructive subordination, nor can it be discarded solely as a compensatory reaction to “the male problem.”² I am not advocating that *kenosis* is something that is done by only women, or only by those in some form of religious office, or even related to one’s race or culture. *Kenosis* is not related to one’s sex or role in life; *kenosis* is a life-style that needs to be emphasized for all Christians regardless of sex, culture, intelligence, or standing in the community.

In this thesis I explore what *kenosis* means theologically as well as practically in the church, considering, for example, how *kenosis* is demonstrated by Jesus in Mark and how Paul interprets in Philippians the self-emptying practices of Jesus. How should kenotic Christology frame the modern church? What are practical forms of *kenosis* that can be performed today?

Kenotic Expressions of Christology in Philippians

The word *kenosis* does not appear as a noun in the New Testament at all, and the entire debate about “self-emptying” goes back to an isolated appearance of the verb

² Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 4. Coakley maintains that *kenosis* is necessary for the modern Christian in order to combat the coercive power of society and culture. Christians must develop vulnerability or self-effacement in order to personify the self-emptying practices exhibited by Jesus. As Jesus was willing to be emptied of his divinity, we must be willing to be emptied of the power and control that we seek in our lives.

kenoo [I empty] in Philippians 2:7³ As a key theme in many aspects of human life, *kenosis* involves not just letting go or giving up, but being prepared to do so in creative ways for a positive purpose in tune with the nature of God. Thus when given theological grounding, *kenosis* defines a joyous, kind, and loving attitude that is willing to give up selfish desires and make sacrifices on behalf of others for the common good and the glory of God, doing this in a generous and creative way, all the while avoiding the pitfall of pride and being guided and inspired by the love of God and the gift of grace.⁴

Philippians 2:5-11 praises several key characteristics of the Son of God. For example, the Son always existed with God: the Son was not a created being. The Son is equal to the Father because he is God incarnate or God in the flesh (John 1:1-14; Col 1:15-20). Though the Son is God, he became a man in order to fulfill God's plan of salvation for all people. The Son did not just have the appearance of being a man; he actually became human to identify with humanity. He voluntarily laid aside his divine rights and privileges out of love for his Father. The Son died on the cross for the sins of humanity in order that eternal death would not be the fate of humanity. God glorified the Son because of his obedience, and God raised his Son to his original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as our Lord and judge.

The "emptying" of verse 7 exists on the same level as the "humbling" of verse 8. "Emptying" does not imply the divestiture of some clearly defined set of divine characteristics otherwise uniquely shared with the Father, for Christ did not cling to his

³ Ibid. 5.

⁴ George F. R. Ellis, "Kenosis as a Unifying Theme for Life and Cosmology," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 107-8.

equality with the Father but voluntarily set it aside for a time to become human. Jesus' emptying provides not just a blueprint for human moral response but a revelation of the humility of the divine nature.⁵

There are those who believe that Son of God was divested of any of his divinity other than what was absolutely necessary in order to exist as a man. For example, the Son had to have his omnipresence altered in some fashion in order to be human because it is impossible for individual humanity to be in two places at the same time. God is not a configuration of component parts that can be added or subtracted or changed; God's attributes are simply who he is, the very essence of his being. God is love, not simply an action of loving; therefore he loves. God is righteous, not simply the possessor of righteous acts; thus he always acts righteously. God does what he does because he is what he is. If God divested himself of one of his attributes, he would no longer be what he is. He would cease to be God.

Coakley arrives at four possibilities for the *kenosis* question of Philippians 2. First, she considers the possibility of a temporary relinquishment of divine powers, which belong to Jesus by right. Second, she discusses the idea that Jesus only pretends to relinquish his powers while actually retaining all of them. Or perhaps, she suggests, Jesus chooses never to have certain powers that are false and worldly and might be construed as divine. Finally, she reflects on the notion that Jesus is revealing divine power to be intrinsically humble rather than grasping.⁶

⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

Of the four possibilities, I believe that the third one is best defended by the Scriptures and most in line with the true nature of God: Jesus chooses not to get caught up in the struggles for power and control that dictate so much of the way we humans live our lives. This “ethical view” of the self-emptying of Jesus is not just as a blueprint for a perfect human moral response, but as revelatory of the “humility” of the divine nature.⁷ Jesus displays the self-giving which comprises the essence of divinity. He reveals his plan for his disciples or followers to be examples of what is expected by those who would call on his name. Moule finds the emptying to refer not to the pre-existence of Christ, nor to his incarnation, but rather to his human example of humility and non-grasping nature, attributes that Moule casts as the distinctively divine characteristics of Christ.⁸ Under this interpretation, Jesus’ emptying involves no compensatory loss of divine powers because his example shows us that divinity is humble rather than powerful. Again, Christians need not be concerned about the emptying being related only to his divinity. His divinity was intact during his incarnational mission on earth and the Son of God freely gave up and jettisoned those things that seem to innately drive all of humanity.

His way to the cross involves the revelation of an unchanging, but consistently humble divinity. While Coakley would contend that Jesus, in his ethical example, promotes values quite different from those of worldly power, the total subjugation of the Son to the Father leaves the Son willingly under the control of the Father. Thus patriarchy

⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁸ C. F. D. Moule, “Further Reflections on Philippians 2:5-11,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 264-65.

is not emptied out; Christ himself is emptied out.⁹ Following this line of thinking, if Jesus was emptied in order to honor and obey his Father, why would Christians not want to be emptied of self in order to honor and obey their Savior? Christians reenact the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through baptism by immersion. The metaphor is striking because the one being baptized is “buried” in the water only to “rise” to a new life in the same way that Jesus was buried in the tomb to be resurrected from death. The difference is that the Christian does not really die but dies symbolically, whereas, all Christians have it within their power to be emptied of the humanity of which Jesus was emptied. Many Christians approach the concept of self-emptying in the same manner as the rich young man in Mark 10:17-23. When one sees what is actually expected to be emptied in relation to what one sees as positive attributes that he brings to the Lord, then, as the rich young man, the would-be follower simply turns and walks away because there is too much that needs to be sacrificed for the Lord.

The expression *heauton ekenosen*, “he emptied himself,” is found nowhere else in Greek, and its grammatical harshness may point to an underlying Semitic original. In Isaiah 53:12, “he poured out himself to death” implies the surrender of life, not the *kenosis* of the incarnation. This exegesis removes the verse from the theology of the incarnation and concentrates all attention upon the cross as the price Jesus paid in obedience to the divine will for the redemption of man. It may well be that the hymn speaks of Jesus’ acceptance of *doulos* (slave) for simpler reasons: first, to establish his

⁹ Coakley, 10. Coakley’s interpretation of the self-emptying practices of Jesus has him being emptied of any of the power and control that every human seeks. Jesus repeats over and over that he is “about his Father’s business” during his ministry. Jesus jettisons all human desire for personal power and control and is the example for his followers as well.

role as one of Israel's righteous sufferers, called "God's servants"; second, to mark out Jesus as having no rights or privileges and thus to underscore his decision to "give himself away"; and third, to set up an antithesis with what God gives by grace—the rank and name of "Lord."¹⁰

It seems plausible to conclude that the *kenosis* relies not upon a getting, nor a surrendering, but upon a giving. It involves neither the acquisition of divine attributes nor the setting aside of divine attributes, nor yet an exchange of divine characteristics coupled with the taking up of human qualities in their place. Rather, it involves Jesus sacrificially giving himself, the divine one, to humanity as a servant. Jesus "empties" himself upon humanity, assuming the form of a servant and becoming the *theanthropos*, "the God-man."¹¹

Finally, Paul makes it clear that Jesus expects his disciples to exhibit the same self-emptying practices that he shows throughout his earthly ministry. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Jesus tells Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness (NRSV;)." The contrast of terms is striking. Moses serves as the prime example of divine power being made perfect in the weakness of the human revelatory mediator (see Exodus 3:1-15:21). God bypasses Moses' inability to speak effectually in public by speaking to the children of Israel through Aaron, the brother of Moses. Again we see the power of God to work through the weaknesses of his children. Paul's

¹⁰Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 105-6.

¹¹Daniel T. Knapp, "The Self-Humiliation of Jesus Christ and Christ-Like Living: A Study of Philippians 2:6-11," *Evangelical Journal* 14-15 (1996-1997): 89.

weakness engenders practically no stigma, and Christ's power is made perfect in the apostle's weakness.¹²

Kenotic Expressions of Christology in the Gospel of Mark

Because of his attempts to reveal in Jesus, who is one and the same, two radically different characteristics—the human and the divine—Mark's gospel offers an authentic Christology. While Mark does not directly use dual-nature language, he does use two seemingly contradictory kinds of language with regard to Jesus: the language of suffering and powerlessness and the language of omnipotence, or power. Jesus is simultaneously the Son of God, who possesses divine power, and a victimized human being who is abandoned on the cross. In Mark, Jesus is on the side of both God and man. The Christological question has always been this: since he is on the side of God, in what way can he possibly be on our side? In Philippians 2 and in Mark, the answer is given in terms of *kenosis*. The gospel of Mark relates an account of the unprecedented and incomprehensible incarnate and kenotic love of God.¹³

Some interpreters see Mark as the opponent of a triumphalist movement within the early church, a movement that emphasized a theology of glory and a “divine man Christology.”¹⁴ Mark attacked the *theologia gloriae* with a more Christological *theologia*

¹² James M. Scott, *New International Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 230.

¹³ Lucien Richard, *Christ, the Self-Emptying of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 69.

¹⁴ William Lane, “*Theos Aner* Christology and the Gospel of Mark,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard Longenecker and Merrill Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 145.

cruces. Mark concerns himself with correcting a false Christology, and his gospel serves as a Christological theology, documenting the relation of Jesus to God and to his followers.¹⁵

An authentic Christology must affirm that Jesus' life is simultaneously characterized by power (divinity that comes to expression in miracles) and by powerlessness (such as that made apparent in the passion narratives). The gospel of Mark serves as a narrative Christology,¹⁶ affirming both aspects of Jesus' life: power and powerlessness. Yet the gospel narrative does not present a simple juxtaposition of two conflicting Christologies. At the center of Mark's story stands a theology of Jesus' suffering and death that recalls the kenotic theme of Philippians 2. Mark employs the parable form as an expression of the kenotic vision, since parable offers a view of reality in which expectations are reversed. He makes of his gospel a parable about God's kenotic love for us shown in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

God's power in the gospels can be understood only in terms of powerlessness, its apparent opposite. The Son of God possesses the power to renounce his power. According to Mark, God's power gives Jesus the freedom to become powerless and submit to death. Dorothy Lee-Pollard sees in this paradox that "the divine power by

¹⁵ Richard, 62.

¹⁶ On narrative in Mark see Robert Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," in *Perspectives on Mark's Gospel*, ed. Norman Petersen, *Semeia* 16 (1979), 57-95; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986). Narrative Christology is fundamentally open-ended Christology capable of further additions and interpretations. As narrative it is open-ended to paradox; it can live within ambiguity.

which Jesus in the Gospel heals and liberates others is the same power by which he is able to renounce power to save his own life.”¹⁷

Such a dichotomy is at best confusing to many and at worst simply misunderstood. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, it had to do with a revelation of his divine power, but Jesus would answer with Scripture and another example of the emptying of self.

Mark immediately introduces Jesus as God’s agent, chosen to establish God’s sovereignty upon earth. Through the Spirit, Jesus is declared to be God’s beloved Son, and that same Spirit accompanies him on his mission (1:9-15). This mission begins with power: miracles of healing and exorcism. In keeping with the miracle tradition, the Gospel of Mark affirms God’s omnipotence and Jesus’ share in this omnipotence: “Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41). This narrative reflects no rejection of power.¹⁸ Yet Mark’s plainest expression of Christology emerges not in the miracle, but in the suffering tradition.

Mark most clearly states his Christology in two key sections of his gospel: the incident at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-10:45) and the passion narrative (14-15). The first section introduces a threefold repeated pattern: a passion prediction, the disciples’ misunderstanding, and corrective teaching that addresses this misunderstanding of the authentic nature of Jesus’ mission. The Christological climax comes in 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for

¹⁷ Dorothy Lee-Pollard, “Powerlessness as Power: A Key to Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987): 185.

¹⁸ Sharon Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 23.

many.” This passage cannot be over-emphasized for the modern church. If Jesus’ mission was to serve, and if his followers desire to emulate him, then they must serve as well. It seems that service for many has to be either something that requires little effort or something that will be noticed by the masses. I am thankful for the response from Webb Chapel regarding back-to-school supplies for a neighborhood elementary school. We were able to provide the supplies for under-privileged children for a year, and that is admirable. Yet it is difficult for the church to see the need to work with the children in after-school tutoring or other activities that require time rather than money. We want immediate gratification for our service instead of realizing that our efforts will pay dividends in the future.

While Mark presents Jesus as a servant, the disciples must be servants also. In this section Mark sets forth as disciples those called to follow Jesus. The disciples and Jesus are shown as being “on the way” (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17). At the end of the journey—a journey toward suffering—lies Jerusalem, where Jesus will be crucified. The teaching about Christology deeply intertwines with teaching about discipleship, and the disciples are invited to follow Jesus’ “way” (which Mark depicts as the way of the cross), to shed their “Christological blindness” and to discover the authentic nature of Jesus’ mission. For Mark, discipleship is intimately bound up with Christology.¹⁹

Scenes in which the disciples argue heatedly about what Jesus has revealed concerning the journey of discipleship follow each of the three passion predictions in Mark’s gospel. Mark’s account of the disciples’ responses enables Jesus to elaborate on the reality of service and its correlative powerlessness. Mark emphasizes the

¹⁹ Richard, 64.

powerlessness of those who have little or no power of their own and God's special relationship with them. Their vulnerability makes them especially open to receive God's kingdom.

Discipleship in Mark demands relinquishing human power and resources. Paradoxically, it involves the losing of one's life in order to save it (8:34). The community of disciples is to measure power in terms of servanthood and willingness to suffer for the Kingdom of God. While Mark speaks in various ways of the powerlessness of the disciples, the dominant image is that of cross-bearing, as found in 8:34. Cross-bearing serves as the greatest symbol of relinquished power because to bear the cross is to suffer shame and rejection. Mark, in his Christology, comprehends power in terms of a servanthood exemplified by Jesus' own servanthood; it demands self-denial.

Renunciation of property and possessions demonstrates the clearest indication of authentic discipleship for Mark. Possessions in this world always indicate power. In chapter 10 Mark tells the rich young man to dispossess himself of material goods. Luke Timothy Johnson writes of the relationship between power and possessions:

Possessions do not merely express the inner condition of a man's heart; they are also capable of expressing relations between persons and the play of power between persons. When all the aspects are brought together, power appears as reality which underpins them all. Possessions are a sign of power.²⁰

The passion narrative dramatically displays the theological and Christological issues of power and powerlessness. The narratives make evident Jesus' own experience of powerlessness, and Jesus, rather than the disciples, becomes the focus of concentration. In the garden of Gethsemane, he expresses deep anguish and indicates that

²⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation Series 39 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977): 221.

his grief is enough to kill him. The garden leaves no escape from choice: to exercise power or to give up power, to avail himself of his divinity or submit to his humanity. While “everything is possible for God,” for Jesus there is no escape from this agony of mind and spirit. Mark employs explicit language of suffering in 14:33 when Jesus “began to be distressed and agitated.” This phrase evokes horror and distress.

The theme of the death of Jesus dominates the gospel of Mark. Jesus pleads for what he knows cannot be granted. “Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (14:36). Yet Jesus dies on the cross not as a hero but as a victim. He is “to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him” (9:31); on the cross, Jesus experiences the abandonment of God.

Mark’s description makes clear that Jesus’ suffering exceeds that of physical pain. The cross marks his defeat by the forces of evil and his abandonment by his Father. Jesus suffers the absence of God and is “delivered up,” not merely into the hands of the Jewish-Roman power structure, but beyond that into demonic darkness and God-forsakenness. God’s noninterference at the cross, his abandoning Jesus in the hour of his greatest need, constitutes the ultimate depth of Jesus’ suffering.²¹

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (15:34), an obvious quotation from Psalm 22, influences the entire narrative. In the psalm, the religious man experiences suffering as abandonment by God, but in his suffering and in the agony of death, he finds that God saves him and brings him into new life. For the psalmist concludes:

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
Before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,

²¹ Richard, 66.

And I shall live for him.
 Posterity will serve him;
 Future generations will be told about the Lord,
 And proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn
 He has done it! (Ps 22:29-31 NRSV)

Consequently, Jesus' words represent in themselves not a cry of despair but a prayer confident of an answer, one that hopes for the coming of God's Kingdom.

The Markan crucifixion account provides crucial Christological identification (15:32) through the centurion's confession of Jesus as the Son of God. The confession serves as the climactic point of the crucifixion scene. The major role Christology plays in the crucifixion story and in the gospels as a whole attests to the centrality of such Christological identification to understanding the place of suffering in Jesus' experience of powerlessness.²²

In the context of the passion, Mark makes it clear that we can truly see Jesus as the Son of God only if we understand that Jesus shows himself to be such in his passion and death. To be truly God's Son is to be dedicated unconditionally to God's purpose—even to death. The title "Son of God" receives its definitive and correct meaning in the centurion's confession (15:39). The centurion, in contrast to others in the drama, proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God, not because he has witnessed one of Jesus' miraculous feats, but because he sees how Jesus dies. The only person on the scene (at the cross) with real power—at least in the eyes of the world—reinforces Jesus' Christological status, not because he is awed by Jesus' power, but because Jesus dies a

²² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 193-96.

suffering and powerless death. The confession of faith is not made by a pious Jew or a disciple of Jesus, but by a Gentile Roman centurion.

In his gospel Mark subordinates the resurrection to the crucifixion. Like Paul, Mark stresses the crucified character of the risen Jesus. Mark gives an astonishingly stark account of the resurrection: female disciples find an angelic being in the empty tomb and are overcome with trembling, “and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (16:8). Thus the evangelist ends his gospel not with an account of Jesus’ appearance at his resurrection but with the starkness of the passion. Unless rooted in the cross, the resurrection does not carry in itself a soteriological significance. Mark’s is the gospel of “Jesus’ absence,” and above all the gospel of the earthly Jesus recollected and of the hope-filled expectation of the coming heavenly son of man, the expectant awaiting of his exaltation, which will usher in the eschatological kingdom, the rule of God. Mark’s anti-triumphalist Christology puts at the center the rejected Jesus of Nazareth.²³

The essence of Mark’s applied Christology can be found in his unique emphasis on the relationship of Jesus to his disciples. The communal life of Jesus’ followers reflects the truth about Jesus: Christology is not possible without discipleship, and authentic discipleship is the key to understanding. Mark’s Christology is bound not only to the cross, but also to discipleship, the basic essential of kenotic Christology. For this fundamental reason Mark’s Christology is fully kenotic; Christology and discipleship in Mark form one topic in the same way humanity and divinity do. With Mark it is never a question of one or the other because Jesus’ identity is revealed through and in the identity

²³ E. Shillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 421.

of the Christ. Jesus is shown on the night of his betrayal as getting up from the meal and taking a towel and basin of water and systematically washing the feet of each disciple, including the one who was about to betray him.

Mark presents the death of Jesus as an eschatological event wherein Jesus fulfills the role of the suffering servant in Isaiah. The mission of the servant is to establish justice in the whole earth and to extend God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Therefore when Jesus' suffering embraces the suffering of the disciples, who are to take up their individual crosses and follow him, Mark shows the way of discipleship to be the way of the suffering servant. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34). We are not called to undergo Jesus' death merely as a form of imitation. Violent death itself has no value, but such a death may be suffered at the hands of the powers of this world in order to witness to the truth of Jesus and the gospels (8:35).

Mark's gospel, at once radical and intensely personal, demands action; our response must always be at the level of confrontation, of choice, of enactment. The decision to follow Jesus lies in the act of following him, and his way is paradoxical because its power is the way of the cross, the way of powerlessness. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Jesus' primary service is his self-sacrifice. In the ultimate renunciation of power, Jesus opened the way of salvation to all.

Since the coexistence of power and powerlessness is most intensely realized not (as one might expect) in the resurrection, but in the crucifixion, the Christological significance of the cross lies in the power to renounce power; only through God's power

is Jesus able to accept powerlessness and face the necessity of the cross. God is present not in the human institution of power but in those places where human beings experience powerlessness as an oppressive and life-denying force. Therefore, the powerlessness experienced by Jesus does not equate with defeat, for that very powerlessness establishes and strengthens the Kingdom. In Mark's paradoxical "presence in absence," we see the powerlessness that usually indicates the absence of God revealed as the actual presence of God.

Philippians 2 and the gospel of Mark establish a paradox that must permeate all Christian life. Salvation and well-being are attained not by conquest, not by domination of the other, not by exploitation, but by self-effacement and self-giving love. This paradoxical process ultimately leads to self-realization. The coming of the Kingdom is realized through the self-actualization of the other person. Real authority and real power lie in compassionate, persuasive love, in choosing weakness instead of strength. The crucifixion story in Mark dramatizes the mysterious paradox of authentic Christian existence: "power comes to its full strength in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Kenosis of the Body of Christ: The Church

The church is only the church when it exists for others. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must not underestimate the importance of human example which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus.²⁴

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 2nd ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 203-4.

Paul's appeal in Philippians 2:5-11 demonstrates that the community understands love only insofar as it adopts the "mind of Christ" referred to in verse 5. Just as Jesus exchanges the form of God for the form of a slave, Christian transformation occurs when the community also looks to the interests of others, identifying with the Christ who gave himself for others.²⁵

From the moment of birth, people urge others to meet their needs. Babies cry until their parents come to feed or change them. Toddlers misbehave until their Dad stops playing with their little brothers and gives full attention to them. Later, siblings often demand privileges in at least equal proportion to, and preferably in greater amounts than, their brothers and sisters. Adults often seek the highest paying jobs, the most comfortable homes, the most prestigious cars, the most extravagant vacations possible and go to considerable trouble to achieve these ends. What begins as survival instinct quickly becomes an expression of fallen human nature. Living successfully in community with other people requires restraint of this nature in numerous ways. Many of the rules laid down in a well-functioning family and many of the laws in any larger society attempt to restrain and channel the human desire to dominate others. The drive is so strong and so universal that the community that does not effectively accomplish this task of restraint self-destructs.

The incarnation of Christ Jesus represents the antithesis of this human drive to dominate. Despite his access to all the privilege and power to which his identity with God entitles him, and although he could exploit that privilege and power to dominate his creatures, Jesus considers his deity an opportunity for service and obedience. The

²⁵ James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry According To Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 152.

difficult part of all this for the modern believer is that Paul does not leave this description of Christ's astounding refusal to dominate in the realm of abstract speculation. Instead, he advises the church at Philippi—and through them the church of today—to follow Christ's example. This counsel requires that the church and the believer adopt an incarnational demeanor.

However, such an adoption proves extremely difficult in modern Western societies. These societies often attach great—sometimes ultimate—value to wealth, glamour, power, and prestige, and the accepted ways of achieving these ends often involve dominance over others. With our minds assaulted by the abusive use of power day after day, it becomes easy for us and the churches we represent to deem it acceptable to dominate others in order to achieve our ends. For example, advocates of the “prosperity gospel” promote the acquisition of health and wealth through giving money to God. But are the same utilitarian principles at work in some church-building campaigns? Are these campaigns genuine efforts to see the gospel advance, or are they ways of enhancing the prestige and comfort of our own people?

Paul uses the splendor of Christ to demonstrate the consistency of humility and selflessness with spiritual dignity. In this sense, the Christ hymn provides an inspirational basis for the whole epistle. Paul writes to encourage the Philippians to stand firm for the faith of the gospel, to inspire in them complete dedication to the will of Christ.²⁶ To behave like Jesus would heal the wounds of the Church at Philippi. It could endure

²⁶ G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 97.

suffering, conquer opposition and overcome divisiveness by following Jesus' example of self-emptying in humility, obedience, love and selflessness.²⁷

However, Philippians 2 deals not only with how the church as a group can best adopt the character of its Savior, but also with how individual church members act toward one another. In fact, the question of individual behavior prompts Paul to write the passage in the first place. In our mutual relations, Paul says that the hallmark of our lives should be giving rather than getting, servicing rather than being served, obedience rather than dominance (2:3-4). Most often this distinctive choice is a matter not of deciding whether to build a new church building or of designing an evangelism strategy, but of acting in loving ways, hour by hour, toward parents, spouses, children, coworkers, friends, and fellow church members. In the hundreds of ways in which our lives touch the lives of others every week, Paul says, we are to have the attitude of Christ Jesus.

Jesus' kenotic existence created a new alternative community, a kenotic church.²⁸ The word church literally means "a community that has been called out," and to be called out means to be "missioned or commissioned." The church does not exist for its own sake: its mission called the church into being. We must not envisage a "first moment" in which the church comes into being, followed by a "second moment" in which the church decides to be the instrument of the divine will. God's salvific will originates and consummates mission, constantly moving the church across cultural boundaries and national frontiers. This fundamental conviction regarding the salvific will of God remains

²⁷ Knapp, 94.

²⁸ Richard, 180.

the most urgent challenge to the contemporary church.²⁹ All claims of exclusivity and triumphalism eventually will be brought face to face with this universal vision of God. Such a view requires of us a dynamic and developmental view of world history. God moves humanity forward, and his salvific will is progressive, inclusive in nature: not Israel alone, not the church itself, but all nations are caught up in and comprehended by God's salvific will. The ultimate word is not death, but life; the final action not frustration, but fulfillment.

In a world encompassing such evident evil and omnipresent suffering, a fundamental question arises: Does God make a difference? The Christian answer must be affirmative, that in and through the person of Jesus, the difference God makes is revealed. What difference does Jesus Christ make? He inspires discipleship that can be fully understood only within the perspective of a kenotic Christology.

In the ultimate *kenosis*, God chooses to be present in the world and present through us. Within a Christian context the question about discipleship raises at the same time a question about the church, for the church is a community constituted by disciples. Discipleship in the church has as its foundation not an idea or a principle but a person, Jesus Christ. In the gospels Jesus has compassion for the marginal people; he labors in their midst as a servant. Jesus does not exert his power but humbly calls the dispossessed to full personhood in the kingdom of God, where they are no longer "non-persons" but God's beloved and privileged people.

The ministry of the church must be understood in the light of the self-sacrifice of Jesus and of his compassionate ministry to the marginalized and the oppressed. In his

²⁹ Ibid., 181.

ministry Jesus makes it clear that anyone who would follow him is called to live as he does; self-giving for the sake of others constitutes the way of discipleship. A communal dimension and a complete restructuring of all personal relationships characterize the kenotic ministry of Christ's church. We have to treat people differently because we have been treated differently by Jesus.

A kenotic ecclesiology does not preclude structure, order, or authority. While none of these entities necessarily is defined by power, most frequently they do involve power. In a kenotic church, power—usually understood as the capacity to influence someone prior to or apart from the exercise of freedom—becomes a dominant issue. Because power and powerlessness exist as dimensions of relationships, they constitute a part of the unavoidable complexity of human relations. Power as physical force is clearly distinct from power as spiritual force, and power that limits human freedom must surely be understood differently from that which elicits consent. Power that involves physical force often coerces and abuses another's freedom. Yet even when God-given and legitimate, power should “be gradually modified and absorbed by love. It should be used to bring about its own abrogation, though this is only absolutely possible eschatologically.”³⁰ God's power enables us to relinquish power. God can empower even the rich and powerful to sacrifice wealth and power in the service of the poor.

Power is relational; therefore the greater the power the greater the relationality. Relational power costs, for such power often involves suffering. In the Christian tradition the cross serves as an exact symbol of the price paid in suffering, and the proper symbol of relational power is the suffering servant. Every true Christian reality passes through

³⁰ Karl Rahner, “The Theology of Power,” *Theological Investigations* 4 (New York: Seabury, 1974), 391-409.

the crucible of kenotic love; therefore, authority and power must necessarily do so as well.

The church's power must be characterized by *kenosis*. Hierarchical power seeks mastery, even domination. It implies that power consists of something within the individual person that causes changes in others. Hierarchy demands unilateral, not relational power. But a kenotic church manifests a transformation of hierarchical power into relational power.

Our contemporary situation requires that the church travel light and live off the land. In this metaphor for kenotic church, that of "pilgrimage," the church is called to minister "on the road." In the gospels, both Mark and Luke use "road" (*hodos*) language to define Jesus' salvific mission. In a world where many people are physically and spiritually homeless, the pilgrimage metaphor best describes the purpose of the church. In addition, a kenotic church should be characterized as a place of pilgrimage:

Places of pilgrimage are, as a rule, more hospitable to the strange and the stranger than institutions entrenched in one particular community. In a place of pilgrimage, pilgrims of all races and social strata leave behind their particular cultural milieu; they become a new community on the way. *Communitas* is the opposite pole to the institutional life of the church.³¹

A kenotic church is always an apophatic church, always anti-establishment, always offering an alternative vision, always on the road to Jerusalem.

Conclusion

This chapter establishes the theological foundation for incarnational ministry as being essential to the Christian and the church. The kenotic Christology of Jesus, found

³¹ Christopher Moody, *Eccentric Ministry* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1987), 132.

implicitly throughout the Gospel narratives and Paul's use of Jesus' self-emptying example should serve as a model for the modern Christian to be emptied and to take on the role of a servant as well. The next chapter introduces the methodological practices used with the incarnational ministry team and explores the team's interaction with each other. I explain the triangulation procedure that involves the team as insiders, my involvement based upon my field notes, and the opinions of an outside expert as he evaluates the project.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intent of this project was to develop a model that articulates an incarnational ministry to better reveal the self-emptying example of Jesus to the membership at Webb Chapel. This chapter describes the methods used to create the model. Many at Webb Chapel hope and pray that the congregation might be transformed into the likeness of Jesus by the emptying of self. Chapter 3 provides the details and the methodology of the intervention.

Format

This project engaged a select incarnational ministry team made up of Webb Chapel members who reflect the church's diversity and ethnicity. The team participated in self-emptying practices during and after the sessions and developed a model of an incarnational ministry that exhibits the self-emptying practices of Jesus. Through exposure to appreciative inquiry,¹ a narrative-based practice involving paradigmatic

¹ Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 23. Branson draws heavily on the work of David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Communications, Inc., 1999). Those who practice appreciative inquiry follow five "generic processes" that clarify the movements yet allow for personal freedom: choosing the positive as the focus of inquiry, inquiring into stories of life-giving forces, locating themes that appear in the stories and selecting topics for further inquiry, creating shared images for a preferred future, and finding

change, the incarnational ministry team participated in processes that allowed the team to create a new paradigm through cooperation with each other. Appreciative inquiry assumes that all organizations have significant life forces and that these forces are available in stories and imaginations. By discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new approach that has the most important links to the past and the most helpful images of the future. The incarnational ministry team looked into the past at Webb Chapel and learned from both successes and failures in order to determine what is already being done well. At that point I encouraged the team to improve on the old model and develop a new model through dialogue and time spent asking appreciative questions in a positive way.

Three individuals serving as the key informants² selected the incarnational ministry team: Henry Roncancio, Hai Cao, and I. All team participants were selected from the membership role at Webb Chapel by a consensus of the key informants. Once we agreed upon the makeup of the team, I personally contacted each individual with an invitation to participate. Potential members of the team were informed of the time

innovative ways to create that future. As I attempted to articulate the model, I encouraged the team to use inquiry and imagination.

² Jack McKillip, *Need Analysis: Tools for the Human Services and Education* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1980). Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Coping with Growth: Community Needs Assessment Techniques* [Corvallis, OR: Western Rural Development Center, July-August, 1982]. The key informant technique is a method of obtaining information from a community resident who is in a position to know the community as a whole or a particular portion one is interested in. Gathering key informants to provide a situation analysis helps identify issues. This approach requires the careful identification of a select group of leaders or experts and provides for structured contact with these informants, usually through direct interviews or a focus group. Key informants should have particular knowledge about the issues, be able to express their thoughts, and a balanced perspective on the topic, and exhibit common sense.

commitments—involving their presence at the meetings and participation in activities both inside and outside the sessions—as well as the need for a covenant.

Ministry Participants

We selected eleven individuals from the active membership at Webb Chapel who reflect the diversity of the church in ethnicity, culture, gender, and age. Consequently, the team embodied the appearance of the congregation as a whole: Caucasian members worked with Latino members; males worked with females; and younger and older members worked together in order to represent a team concept. The team represented a cross-section of actively involved lay members and those who desire Webb Chapel to become more incarnational. The incarnational ministry team included the following members: Bert Alexander, Hai Cao, Henry Ronacacio, David Day, Greg Hargis, Antonio Acosta, Ron Dunn, Barbara Caballero, Bondey Mays, Jan Mays, and Ermilio Obiedo.

Project Sessions

Eight one-hour sessions occurred weekly on Sunday afternoons in the church library at four o'clock, beginning August 31 and ending October 19. Each session built upon the previous session in order to develop a model of an incarnational ministry. During the sessions we explored the theological perspectives of Chapter 2, specifically the mind of Christ and the *kenosis*, or self-emptying, practices of Jesus.

Session 1, entitled “Tell Me Something Good about Webb Chapel,” began on August 31 with a welcome to the team members and a brief orientation to the concept of the incarnational ministry team. This and every other session began with *lectio divina* in which we spent time reading and being led by the word of God. All sessions used the

same scriptural reference, Philippians 2:5-11, and we looked at it from different perspectives. We provided each of the team members with a schedule of the sessions, and we encouraged them to sign a commitment to the team for the duration of the sessions. I described my role as a facilitator rather than as a leader or teacher. After answering general questions about the scope of our task, we entered into the assignment of the day. A butcher-paper chart laid out on the table was divided into different sections representing the decades of the existence of Webb Chapel. I encouraged team members to write major events that had taken place in each decade; then, using markers of different colors, they voted upon the three most important events of each decade on the congregational time line.³ During and after the process, the participants discussed how those events contributed to the group personality of Webb Chapel. Each team member's assignment for the next week was to think of a time when they had felt that Webb Chapel was involved in the community and ask themselves the following questions: Who was involved? What happened? What was your personal involvement? How did you feel? Could that event be duplicated? Could it be made even better?

The incarnational model ministry team learned its purpose in the first session. The findings of the entire team needed to represent the varying viewpoints of the team members and their backgrounds. It was important for information to come from all team members and not just from the facilitator or a minority of team members. Self-emptying

³ This method is adapted from Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 209-10. The congregational time line served as a "group memory of Webb Chapel's history," a historical rendering of the life of the congregation as recalled by its members. The goal of the exercise was to understand how congregational members situate both themselves within that history and their congregation within a broader context.

was a new concept for some of the team and we looked forward to the next session for more information.

Session 2, entitled “Incarnational Ministry and Webb Chapel: Is There Any Need for Change?” was held on September 7. We began with *lectio divina* and as we discussed the passage from Philippians 2:5-11, I engaged the team in a discussion of what it means to be emptied of self as Jesus was. After a short period reviewing the time line from the previous week, we discussed the questions that were assigned for week 2 and moved on to define and describe an incarnational ministry as set forth in Chapter 2. Once the team understood the terminology and concept, we discussed whether they believed that the definition of an incarnational ministry fairly described Webb Chapel currently. Where the description fit, the members were asked to give examples; where it did not, I asked them to describe what was lacking. We built on the foundation of the previous week regarding the successes of Webb Chapel’s past and looked more closely to see if the congregation’s current conduct exemplifies the self-emptying practices of Jesus. The outside assignment involved each team member in surveying at least two Webb Chapel members who were not participating on the incarnational ministry team regarding what it means to be self-emptying like Jesus, and what impediments hinder them from doing so.

The incarnational ministry model team came away from this session with a better understanding regarding the nature of Jesus as divine and human at the same time. They came to realize that Webb Chapel was lacking in an understanding of the incarnational nature of Jesus. By using Ron MacGregor as an example, they better understood what it meant to be self-emptying.

Session 3, “Embodying Self-Emptying Practices at Webb Chapel,” began on September 14 with *lectio divina* from Philippians 2:5-11. After reflecting on the session from the previous week we discussed our surveys of other Webb Chapel members regarding their own self-emptying practices. I probed deeper into the self-emptying practices of Jesus, asking such questions as the following:

- What did he give up?
- What did he retain?
- What efforts were required to give everything away?
- How did his efforts affect the disciples?
- How did they affect the literary audience (Paul’s readers)?
- What would self-emptying look like today?
- What influence would self-emptying have on an unbelieving world?
- What influence would it have on the community of believers at Webb Chapel?
- What influence would it have on the neighborhood?
- In what ways could Webb Chapel be emptied for the sake of the neighborhood?
- When have you been emptied, and what was the effect on you and those around you?
- Have you ever done something for someone anonymously in order to meet a need without getting credit for it?

After much discussion, I assigned the team to perform a random act of kindness in the following week, preferably for someone they did not know, to look for ways to serve

others during the week without being served in return. I admonished them to be gracious with those who served them, but to look for ways to serve others.

Building on the understanding of the self-emptying nature of Jesus, the model team explored in greater detail how self-emptying practices could affect the individual and how individuals could affect the corporate identity of the local congregation. Self-emptying would cause individuals to change their perspective regarding many of the driving forces in mankind such as the desire to subjugate, the desire to acquire large amounts of wealth and the desire for fame.

On September 21 we opened session 4, “*Theologia Gloria or Theologia Crucis?*” with *lectio divina* using Philippians 2:5-11. We then explored the self-emptying practices of the New Testament other than those used by Jesus, such as those of Paul, John the Baptist, Timothy and Epaphroditus. We investigated the difference between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross as two major worldviews. Jesus exhibited the theology of the cross through his willingness to spend his life for others: he did not seek personal fame or glory, but gave everything he had to help people. The theology of glory, sometimes called triumphalism, seeks fame, power, wealth and anything that pampers or betters self. Individuals most often exemplify the theology of glory, but it can be the driving force behind entire nations. Triumphalism declares that those who are strongest rule—and deserve to rule because they are the strongest. Despite a sense of fair play, the rules generally tilt toward the stronger, richer, and more influential. In an effort to understand our own worldview and congregational context, we considered two questions: Is our nation influenced by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory? Is Webb Chapel influenced by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory? For the weekly

assignment, I instructed the team members to look at their individual lives and consider how they had been influenced by the theology of glory, then to widen the context and consider how the theology of the cross would change the theological paradigm of the church at Webb Chapel. What changes did the team members foresee for the future of Webb Chapel if self-emptying practices were employed? Would such practices include teaching English as a Second Language classes? Maybe it would include mentoring children in local public schools? How about teaching parenting classes for the local community or hosting job fairs or health fairs?

Building on the concepts of self-emptying in session 3, the team began to realize that self-emptying could be as simple as giving up the fear of rejection or stepping outside one's comfort zone to minister to the needs of others. The team learned that in regard to spiritual development, being precedes doing.

Session 5, entitled "The Changing Profile of Global Christianity and Its Effect on North Dallas and Webb Chapel," was held on September 28. The session began with our *lectio divina* and our continued study of Philippians 2:5-11. We reviewed the previous week's assignment and discussed the findings of the team regarding their personal views of the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. We then moved on to explore how Christianity had changed in the past century and specifically how it had changed in North America and the United States. Christianity dominated the religious landscape for much of the first two hundred years of America's existence; however, Christianity has been losing adherents in the past two to three decades, and we discussed possible reasons for the paradigm shift. At one point, North America was sending missionaries to all points of the world, but now third world nations generally represent the fastest growing regions of

belief. Following an analysis of how the “Bible Belt” alone has changed in our lifetime, the team engaged in an exercise of asset mapping.⁴ We attempted to look objectively at Webb Chapel’s strengths and inventory those strengths by asking, how do the strengths mesh with each other? Are there strengths that need more support in order to become vital to the congregation? Our goal was to discover subsets where strengths overlap and determine how those strengths can best be used in ministry. I asked the team to spend the following week using the information from the asset mapping exercise to work on other possibilities for strengthening ongoing ministries and developing new ministries. In order for this assignment to succeed, each member had to view the goal of asset mapping through the lenses of personal self-emptying and of corporate self-emptying by the congregation.

As the team members used the asset mapping exercise, they developed a better understanding that there were more tools available at Webb Chapel than they had originally believed. Asset mapping allowed the team to think creatively and consider potential collaborative efforts by individuals and ministries that had not been considered before the session. Asset mapping is a positive way of considering the strengths and potential of current and future ministries.

On October 5, in session 6, we explored “Discipleship in a Strange New World” by considering how changes in the theological landscape have transformed the paradigm

⁴ Luther Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), n.p. Snow developed an asset-building process that enables groups to experience a corporate sharing of qualities and talents in order to determine the strengths of the group. Groups are encouraged to recognize their assets, connect the dots that link the assets together, and brainstorm actions that can get things done. They then “vote with their feet” by making an instant work plan allowing participants to choose the action they would most like to take part in.

for the church. After the *Lectio Divina*, we discussed the team's findings regarding the inventory of Webb Chapel's strengths and how self-emptying practices would affect or alter those strengths in the future. Responses mentioned by multiple members were considered for an action plan. We then moved on to discuss discipleship and methods used in discipleship. While I had anticipated that most would consider "door-knocking" to be the most effective method of making disciples, I doubted if any were using this on a regular basis, and I further doubted if any were comfortable with its use. In order to stress that discipleship takes place through relationships and the most effective model has to be relational, I questioned the team regarding who their neighbors were—their names, their children's names, whether they had ever been invited by the team member for a meal or helped in an emergency. Had the team members ever offered to do something for a neighbor with no intention of being paid back or returned a favor in kind? To encourage just such behavior, I asked each team member to perform another random act of kindness for someone, preferably someone they did not know, and to try to do it without letting anyone knowing who had done it. If at all possible, they were to engage their families in this act of kindness and discuss it with them. The goal was to see what the response might be from the recipient.

The team learned that discipleship is not a matter of confronting a stranger with theological questions regarding their relationship with God. Real discipleship is to be self-emptying and developing relationships with neighbors, co-workers, and even family members in order to lead them to an understanding of the need to have Jesus in their lives. Discipleship is a process and not an event in time.

Session 7, entitled “Self-Emptying to Outsiders,” was held on October 12 and dealt with the cognitive dissonance between the cultures of the Webb Chapel community. We began the session with *lectio divina*, and then discussed our findings regarding discipleship, including those involving the random acts of kindness done in the past week. The discussion that followed centered on the similarities and differences between Webb Chapel and the community in which it is located. We used a “debit/ credit” accounting method to place similarities on one side of the ledger and differences on the other. I stressed that our local cultural differences in no way supersede the cultural differences in the first century church. However, I believe we have to be more intentional about bridging the gap between cultures, and self-emptying practices seem to provide a starting point. I assigned the team, in the following week, to volunteer their services in any number of areas, perhaps spending time at the retirement center next door to the church, volunteering at the local elementary school (or at a school in their neighborhood), or offering to paint house numbers on curbs in the Webb Chapel neighborhood.

The model team discussed whether self-emptying made one more appreciative or resentful? The consensus was that it made one more appreciative, but it cannot make an individual both appreciative and resentful at the same time. One of the members challenged the group to attempt to change the current paradigm at Webb Chapel and to be representatives leading the way to a new paradigm in which members were valued because they were children of God, not discounted because of their cultural background.

On October 19 we held our final session, session 8, entitled “Webb Chapel: Toward Becoming an Incarnational Church.” We followed the format of *lectio divina* and discussed the session from the previous week. I encouraged the team to reflect upon the

past two months and discuss what we had learned. This session was an attempt at allowing the team members to contribute formally to the model building process.

My field notes, though valuable, represented only my interpretation of the team's involvement and understanding of the project. However, the interview process, in the form of a written questionnaire,⁵ provided valuable information to confirm or contradict my suppositions concerning the team's understanding of the process. All the questions concerned the effects of the model on the individual and the supposed effects upon Webb Chapel, its guests, and the community surrounding it. The first question—How do you see self-emptying practices as a model for you to be more like Jesus?—was intended to be noncontroversial and to engage the team members in a dialogue regarding the model.⁶ I then broadened the scope of the questioning to include the effects of the model on Webb Chapel: What specific self-emptying practices does the model propose for the Webb Chapel congregation? Finally, I questioned the model team regarding their opinions of how the self-emptying practices would affect the community and guests who visit Webb Chapel. The questionnaire probed deeper into the various aspects of the effectiveness of the model.⁷ The final interview was the means by which the model team members were able to express their individual thoughts in writing. This allowed me to use their thoughts, views and ideas to incorporate a construction of the model heuristically. Without their

⁵ I developed the questionnaire using guidelines suggested by Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education and Social Science*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 119-32. See also Patton, 111-12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-21.

⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 79-81.

involvement with the questionnaire, I would not have had any hard evidence of their views other than my own interpretation of what might have been said during the model sessions.

I encouraged the model team members to write their responses on the questionnaire. After the session was completed, I coded the results of the questionnaires in a manner similar to my field notes. I was pleased that most of the responses supported the findings in my field notes.

The incarnational ministry team included a cross-section of actively involved members of the Webb Chapel congregation. Interestingly, the majority of the team had been unfamiliar with the concept of self-emptying. One team member responded, “The idea of self-emptying practices was foreign to me when we began. That Jesus gave something up had not occurred to me in the same sense that we are to give up something for others.” The self-emptying model identifies the smaller values needed to become more like Jesus. Members of the team expressed thankfulness for the experience, writing:

It has awakened a renewed desire in me to show hospitality, generosity and care for others.

It will deepen my faith and understanding of Christ’s mission.

This experience has made me aware of my own motives, and has helped me see how I am living for self in so many ways, even though I think I am living for God.

The model has made me think of self less and others more.

Personally, I can see myself feeling more comfortable reaching out to people in this way, because if they reject me, they are actually rejecting Jesus.

Team members began to realize that Jesus had emptied himself of his humanity rather than his deity and that they could emulate Jesus by self-emptying their humanity as well. “If I truly empty myself of my humanity [carnal nature] as Jesus did, then I will model Him. I will never achieve complete humility, but I will be better equipped to run the race.” Self-emptying practices include the removal of pride, fear of failure, desire to

rule over others, and desire to have, own, and manipulate things and people. When these and other similar qualities are removed from the equation, emulating Jesus becomes much easier.

As the team moved from personal to corporate considerations, the new discovery of self-emptying practices did not fit as well. Due to traditions and old habits, the team did not believe that self-emptying practices would develop as readily for the entire body as they did on an individual basis. When asked, “What specific self-emptying practices does the model propose for the Webb Chapel congregation?” the team recorded a wide variety of responses. One participant wrote, “The reduction of self-esteem, criticism, arrogance, resentment and other human frailties that impede our progress toward true love for each other must be emptied.” Other members saw the need for the entire congregation to develop a “servant mentality” and to “serve others where their needs are.” Obviously, the spirit of a servant provides the bedrock for self-emptying practices for individuals and congregations alike.

One team member focused on the importance of attitude in self-emptying practices. He thought that it would be impossible for the entire congregation to adopt self-emptying practices; however, he suggested, it would take only ten percent of Webb Chapel’s becoming more self-emptying to have a profound effect on the entire congregation. One team member saw a need for the congregation to be emptied of preconceived cultural and doctrinal ideas.

The team seemed unanimous in believing the model could lead Webb Chapel into becoming the presence of Jesus in the community, but divided as to whether the model would be accepted by a majority of the members at Webb Chapel. Basically, the

team envisioned the model as a positive tool for the church's engagement of its community but expressed reticence regarding whether Webb Chapel would actually accept the model. One team member stated, "We first have to buy into the belief that church is about being the presence of Jesus in our local community, and then we need to empty ourselves of the desire to be us, so Jesus can be seen through us." Another member noted that the effect of the model can be felt only individually and that the call to be the presence of Jesus in the world is individual rather than corporate.

As the effects of self-emptying practices create a profound change in individual Christians, those individuals can then change the paradigm of a local congregation. I questioned the incarnational ministry model team regarding the differences a congregation with self-emptying practices could have on the community and those who visited worship services and activities. Members responded:

The community would see that we truly care for them as they are—physically, mentally and spiritually.

Some in the community will reject us, yet others will be profoundly attracted and will become committed Christians.

The community will see and feel the love of Jesus.

I think the community would see Webb Chapel in a different light.

If guests and visitors in the community see a selfless, serving body at Webb Chapel, they will want to be a part of it.

Thus the team expressed a consensus that self-emptying practices could make a noticeable impact upon the community. The team appreciated the use of the questionnaire; it was a tangible method for them to voice their opinions and help formulate the incarnational model. After compiling the data from the questionnaire, I proceeded to the evaluation process. Their views helped me bolster my opinion of the validity of the model and I was able to have it evaluated by my elders and an outside expert as well.

Methods of Evaluation

I chose to employ a qualitative approach⁸ to evaluating this project as opposed to quantitative methods, which argue for objectivity and detachment from human contextual engagement. The qualitative method I chose emphasizes the researcher as participant-observer and is well suited for a project intended to provide ministerial leadership from within a human system and relational construct. The qualitative approach appears to better utilize insider information with what is and what is not verbalized to outsiders.⁹

I included three perspectives by which to assess the data: an intervention facilitator (me), the eldership at Webb Chapel (insiders), and an independent expert (outsider) who reflected upon our findings as a team. This triangulation method provided three unique perspectives to the project. Insiders are represented by the eldership of the Webb Chapel Church. Ultimately, the eldership has final determination regarding the implementation of the model at Webb Chapel. Outsider input came from Stephen Austin, who has experience in working with developing incarnational ministry models. He was selected because of a project-thesis he wrote while working on his doctoral degree at Abilene Christian University a few years earlier. I provided the facilitator's viewpoint from notes taken during the discussion sessions with the assistance of the incarnational ministry team. Thus the use of the triangulation procedure approached the problem of a lack of self-emptying practices from three different points of view, each of which were unique.

⁸ Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 7-9. This approach incorporates three kinds of data collection: interviews, observations, and written documents.

⁹ Ibid, 161-63.

Field Notes

I selected a participant observer to take notes during the sessions and incorporated those notes into the project.¹⁰ I coached this person to record all major themes, the dialogue, and as much as possible of the minor themes. I encouraged the participant observer to be especially aware of how each week's dialogue built upon the previous week's session. In the first session the team was introduced to the concept of kenosis (self-emptying), and thereafter the participant observer looked for comments and dialogue in all sessions that pertained to the first or previous session. I did not ask the participant observer to editorialize, but simply to record what happened during each session, both verbally and non-verbally.

The field notes represent my record of the meetings. The incarnational ministry team is represented by their participation in the sessions (as recorded by the participant observer) and completion of the weekly project assignments. After we finished with the sessions, the independent expert rendered his opinion upon the validity of the project. The eldership response is represented by their reaction to the presentation made by representatives of the incarnational model ministry team during an elders meeting on December 3, 2008.

Since the notes from each session needed to be as detailed and descriptive as possible, after each session I read the notes of the participant observer and then typed full descriptive notes to be used as a record of each session and as a data set to interpret the

¹⁰ Sharon B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*.

evolving effects of the sessions on the incarnational ministry team. I also included my own observations of the sessions.

As I collected the notes of the participant observer and my own notes, I looked for emerging themes and a maturing understanding among the team members of self-emptying practices. While it was almost impossible not to skew the data, I attempted to be aware of the Hawthorne Effect¹¹ and note any possible biases that might occur. I realized that the incarnational model team members are members at Webb Chapel and wanted me to succeed in my project. Personal biases aside, I really strove to conduct the project in a forthright manner, above the tainting of favoritism, and without attempting to skew the findings to my benefit or to the perceived benefit of the Webb Chapel congregation. Within the field notes, I attempted to incorporate my personal reactions and involvement to monitor better how my influence affected the dynamics of the group.¹²

After recording my notes, I followed a coding protocol¹³ to search for themes and groupings of information, then developed a list of topics and recurring themes and

¹¹ See Envision Software, Inc., “TheHawthorne Effect—Mayo Studies Motivation,” www.envisionsoftware.com/articles/Hawthorne_Effect.html. “The Hawthorne Studies were conducted from 1927 to 1932 at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois, where Professor Elton Mayo examined productivity and work conditions. Elton Mayo started these experiments by examining the physical and environmental influences of the workplace and later, moved into the psychological aspects. The Hawthorne Effect can be summarized as ‘Individual behaviors may be altered because they know they are being studied.’ Mayo’s experiments showed an increase in worker productivity was produced by the psychological stimulus of being singled out, involved and made to feel important. In other words, the act of measurement itself impacts the results of the measurement.”

¹² Merriam, 98.

¹³ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 153-59.

highlighted repetitive terminology. I looked in particular for topics and themes that were covered in Chapter 2. Specifically, as I went over my notes, I sought clues to how the group saw *kenosis*, which of the practices seemed most important, and how the sessions were affecting the participants both in and out of the sessions.

Eldership

The eldership of the Webb Chapel congregation provided the unique perspective of evaluating the model as insiders. Their role was to receive the model, evaluate it regarding its feasibility, its pertinence to the work of the church at Webb Chapel, and whether or not it should be implemented. I did not supply the elders with a particular protocol for evaluating the model. I relied upon the experience and expertise of the eldership to assess the usefulness of the model for the Webb Chapel congregation. The elders are capable of discerning the strengths and weaknesses of the model and are able to evaluate how appropriate the model is for our current use and how readily the model could be implemented. The model was to be presented to the eldership by members of the incarnational model ministry team during a regularly scheduled elders meeting. The eldership was supposed to take the model and become familiar with it personally in order to question its validity in a subsequent meeting of the model team and elders. For convenience, the model was presented in a brief documented proposal so the individual elders could evaluate the most important definitions and action items of the model. The proposed date for the presentation was December 3, 2008.

Independent Expert

The results of the findings were sent to an independent expert, Stephen Austin, formerly of the Impact Church in Houston, for a critique from the outside. Austin is an ideal expert because he did his project/thesis on a related topic in 2005 and that information is still quite fresh on his mind. I expected him to be open and honest in his assessment of the incarnational ministry model and to provide a critique by which I could gauge the effectiveness of the model. His observations were vital to the validity of the model as his opinions represent one-third of its triangulated assessment tool.

Conclusion

The methodology described in this chapter was intended to help us envision an answer to the problem at Webb Chapel that stems from a lack of the kind of self-emptying practices demonstrated by the example of Jesus Christ. While Webb Chapel has long held a reputation for being self-emptying in regard to missions abroad, those practices need to be renewed for the mission of the Lord in Webb Chapel's own neighborhood. It is my hope for this project that through developing self-emptying practices by reflection on the mind of Christ, Webb Chapel may become the presence of Christ in its community. By incorporating the qualitative approach of methodological triangulation, I hoped to ensure both the helpfulness and the validity of the model that developed.

I attempted to prove in chapter 2 that *kenosis*, as demonstrated by Jesus, must be emulated by his believers. While *kenosis* took on a divine aspect with Jesus, it is something in which all humans can also participate. Through the methodology of chapter 3, I sought to produce a model that is not only helpful and valid, but also self-emptying in nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The incarnational ministry team used the project sessions as a vehicle for discussing the self-emptying practices of Jesus. Individual team members gained from the project sessions a renewed zeal to emulate the attitude of Jesus as described in Philippians 2:5-11. Self-emptying practices, closely related to spiritual disciplines, are learned and refined by repetition, and those who practice them must commit to making the practices a way of life rather than something that might be interesting to experience for a while. Components used in developing the model for an incarnational ministry in the individual team members' lives included the practice of *lectio divina*, discussion during the sessions, and assignments for the upcoming week.

The team produced for the congregation at Webb Chapel a summary statement entitled "Recommendations for Promoting Self-Emptying Practices at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ." This document was presented during an eldership meeting in December of 2008 and scheduled for further discussion in early 2009. Although some of the eldership seemed to view the concept of self-emptying as too individual in nature to produce an overall congregational change of paradigm, the elders did exhibit some interest in the project and asked to hear more about how such practices could be nurtured at Webb Chapel. For this model to have a lasting effect, those who have been through the model development will need to reproduce the experience again and again for those interested in its implementation. The fact that the model team was made up of some of

the best opinion leaders within the congregation underscores the need for patience in introducing it to those outside the model team. The model, included as appendix C, reflects the findings and recommendations of the incarnational ministry model team.

Field Notes

In order to gather field notes over each session, I employed Laura Bell, a member at Webb Chapel and a legal secretary with the city of Carrollton, Texas, to record everything that was said. The sessions were held in the church library with the incarnational ministry team sat at a large rectangular table, and Laura sat at the librarian's desk taking notes. She did not participate in the model team discussions and, for all practical purposes, was invisible to the team. Using her almost-verbatim notes, I could easily review all input either to confirm or deny my initial impressions of an individual session. I paid close attention to the physical setting of the room, the interaction of the model members, and verbal and non-verbal cues.¹ After each session, I reviewed and edited² my notes, making them more descriptive³ of what had happened in the sessions. These edited notes of Laura's notes along with my recollection of the meetings became my personal data base for use in interpreting the effects of the project upon the incarnational ministry model team. The notes taken by Laura served as reminders of conversations during the incarnational ministry model team meetings and helped me to fulfill my role as the insider in the triangulation process.

¹ Ammerman, et al., 199-201. See also Merriam, 147-50.

² Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2006), 148.

³ Patton, 92.

As I edited my notes, I followed a coding protocol to search for themes, related ideas, and categories of common information.⁴ I searched through the notes from each session and attempted to reduce the information to certain patterns, categories, or themes. I then developed a list of topics and themes from the repetitive data, color-coded those topics and themes that found their origin in chapter 2, and searched for similarities among the various themes and topics. During this process, I focused on discerning the level of understanding of the model team regarding self-emptying practices, which self-emptying practices they deemed as the most important, how their vision of self-emptying practices mirrored or differed from my own, and whether the entire concept of self-emptying practices represented to the participants anything more than an intellectual exercise. The results of the coding protocol are listed in appendix E and discussed below.

The Self-Emptying Nature of Jesus

The incarnational ministry model team began each session with *lectio divina*, an in-depth devotional study of Philippians 2:5-11. We read this passage from different translations of the Bible and spent the first part of each session discussing different aspects of the concept of self-emptying and Paul's directive to his readers to have the mind of Christ. I was not sure how the team would react to using the same Scripture week after week, but the response was quite positive as the model team began to understand that Jesus emptied himself of his pride and selfish will. The self-emptying process did not stem from an inability to use his divine powers; rather, it represented a conscious decision to give up the desires that drive all mankind. Not only in the three temptations he faced after he had fasted for forty days, but in all his life, Jesus set a constant goal to

⁴ Cresswell, 153-59.

act differently from the ways mankind had always acted. He emptied himself of human desires and, in doing so, became the perfect example for his disciples to emulate.

Self-Emptying as an Alternative for Humanity

By the third session, one of the team members stated that he believed that Jesus emptied himself of his humanity rather than his divinity and in doing so, Jesus calls us to imitate him in the self-emptying process. The team developed this concept and someone later stated that we must imitate Jesus in the emptying of his humanity because it is impossible for us to be emptied of divinity. Since Jesus provides the prototype for mankind's self-emptying, his example became the backbone of all discussions from the first session to the last.

The team approached the concept of self-emptying as being the greatest sacrifice one can give to God or to mankind. In Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied to the question of which was the greatest commandment of the Law by saying, “‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (NRSV). To empty oneself to God or to mankind is the supreme sacrifice of love.

During one of the sessions, I asked the team to name an individual we all know who represents self-emptying and humility. Almost half the group named a former elder at Webb Chapel who retired and moved away last year. This man exhibited humility by always putting others ahead of self. He maintained a positive self-worth without any noticeable signs of an ego.

As a reflection question in session 3, I asked the team to name specific ways in which Webb Chapel as a congregation has emptied itself and to name individual incidents they had witnessed self-emptying from someone at Webb Chapel. Unfortunately, an awkward silence from the team indicated that no one had a ready example or answer. I believe this response indicates the paradigm currently in practice at Webb Chapel. We are a “doing” congregation rather than a “being” congregation. Unless a tangible action is involved, most of the members do not see their brother in a “faithful” relationship with the Lord. After all, they could be emptied of self and be quite faithful to God without overt acts to validate their faith; self-emptying practices summon believers to be actively involved in God’s will at times but simply to abide in his will at other times.

Twice I asked the team to do random acts of kindness and to get to know their neighbors as part of their assignments outside of class. The team reacted quite positively to both assignments, and one member even suggested that for a random act of kindness to be effective, no one should know who was responsible for its inception. Exercises such as these caused the team members to do things they knew they should do, but normally did not do. One team member bought fast-food breakfast for his co-workers during an inventory at work. He saw a lady picking up trash while he was at a traffic signal and offered her a burrito. She took it thinking it was trash, but was startled by his generosity!

Themes of Self-Emptying for Webb Chapel

As a means of involving the incarnational ministry team, the first assignment involved filling in a timeline with major events from Webb Chapel’s history. While none of the members of the incarnational ministry model team were charter members of Webb

Chapel, one of the team members has been a member there for over twenty-five years. Almost all the highlights concerned building new structures, sending out missionaries or missionary teams, and hosting the Mission Forum for over thirty-five years.⁵ Other than new construction to the auditorium, nothing else stood out during the last decade. Some even noted a significant attendance drop during that time and expressed uncertainty regarding the cause of this drop. I asked the group how self-emptying practices would have affected the history of Webb Chapel. Some believed that self-emptying practices had in fact taken place, but were simply not recognized as such. Others saw additional possibilities for how self-emptying practices could have enhanced or even changed the historical outlook at Webb Chapel. Although the team generally thought that Webb Chapel was sacrificial and desired to take the good news of Jesus to all parts of the world, they also acknowledged that the congregation historically seemed more comfortable with the concept of financially supporting a missionary to go somewhere else than with carrying out similar evangelistic endeavors at home.

Webb Chapel has a heart for helping those in need. This past summer, a dozen adults went to Monterrey on a medical mission trip and did much good for the Lord and his church in that area. During the hurricane season of 2005, we prepared to house as many as one hundred evacuees from Katrina and Rita. Even though we did not house anywhere near that number, over \$25,000 was collected and sent to relief agencies on the Gulf Coast. Our members give on a weekly basis to fund our benevolence ministry, and

⁵ Mission Forum was the name given to an annual event hosted by Webb Chapel to encourage mission work. In its prime, the Mission Forum would brought together missionaries and those interested in supporting missionaries from literally all over the world. Mission Forum is at least partially responsible for Webb Chapel's continued support of Thaddaus Bruno in St. Thomas and Tony Coffey in Dublin, Ireland.

we collected over \$2,000 to buy back-to-school supplies for a local elementary school. Nevertheless, we generally would rather pay for services than be involved in relational ministries. I desire that Webb Chapel continue the good ministries that are already in place while instilling a new passion for meeting the needs of the people whose faces we see on a regular basis.

Attitude of Awareness of the Needs of Others

While Webb Chapel has responded expansively to the needs of those in other areas of the world, it has not been quite so responsive to the needs of its neighbors. Each session built upon the theme of imitating the self-emptying practices of Jesus in the world in which we live. Comments about “seeing people with the eyes of Jesus,” “being the hands of Jesus in the community,” and “joining in ministry in which Jesus is already involved” began to spring up as team members looked for areas in which to be emptied of self and be the presence of Jesus.

No area stands out more distinctly than the integration of the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking members at Webb Chapel. Little dialogue takes place between the two groups, and many of the English-speaking members do not even know the names of most of the Spanish-speaking members, and vice-versa. If this log-jam is ever to be broken, self-emptying practices absolutely must be implemented. Self-emptying supersedes simple acceptance of a different culture in the assembly; it requires willingness to empty self for the needs of the other. We love the same God, we attend the same church, we share virtually the same theology, yet because of a lack of self-emptying, we maintain a two-tiered system of the Lord’s church. Such a paradigm should never be.

The team wants to instigate self-emptying by beginning in small ways and growing to the point where the entire congregation has been exposed to its principles. They thought that the message needs to be preached from the pulpit, taught in the classroom, and presented in small groups. To prevent waning of the desire to imitate the self-emptying practices of Jesus, the team requested that we continue to meet periodically. I will count on these team members individually and collectively as we go forward with the recommendation for an incarnational ministry model that I presented to the eldership in December 2008.

Independent Expert

Stephen Austin, an independent outside expert, evaluated the model. Dr. Austin formerly worked, in association with *Impact Houston*, in inner-city ministry. He currently trains and equips Hispanic preachers to spread the news of Jesus in their native language. Dr. Austin's background in incarnational ministry made him an ideal consultant for this project. I sent him a copy of the incarnational ministry model via e-mail and requested that he reflect on four questions.

First, is the model consistent with the theology of Paul found in Philippians 2:5-11 regarding the self-emptying practices of Jesus? Austin found the discussion of what Jesus gave up when he emptied himself intriguing and commented that how one understands this emptying is crucial for determining what is to be imitated. If one believes the passage refers to Jesus' emptying of his human side, taking the path of a servant, and choosing the theology of the cross and of suffering, that interpretation provides a valid (though challenging) example to imitate. Humans can choose to empty themselves as Jesus did; therefore, the church at Webb Chapel can choose to follow that

example. Austin considers this not only a possibility, but the obligation of all Christians to imitate Jesus through the guidance of his teaching and example.

On the other hand, Austin posits, if one interprets the passage in a different way, seeing Jesus emptying of himself through giving up his rights and authority as deity and voluntarily limiting some of his attributes of deity, the passage becomes more difficult to apply to the church. Obviously, the church cannot give up characteristics of deity that it never had. Based on this interpretation, the church would admire, revere, and worship Jesus for what he sacrificed when he came to earth, but it could not imitate him completely. Therefore, Austin concludes, if one understands Jesus' emptying to refer to what he sacrificed as a human, then the challenges offered by the model to imitate him do reflect the theology of Paul in Philippians 2:5-11.

Second, I asked, is the model functional in a practical sense? Could it actually be used in a congregational setting? Austin believes clarification of the term "model" would be helpful. He noted that I appeared to be using the word in three slightly different ways: a style of life, the project itself, or whatever system of ministry that may result from the eight-week process (not the process itself). Austin pointed out that if the project is the model, then the team is simply the first group to be exposed to it. If, on the other hand, the team developed the model heuristically, the results might be different. Obviously, it would take longer than the eight-week process for the team to work through the theology, and some of the team might not be interested in spending the time and effort for that process. However, at the end of the process one likely would have greater understanding and acceptance across the board among those who participated. Thus he does consider the model functional in a practical sense for use in a congregational setting.

I then asked Austin to consider whether participation in this model would form the congregation at Webb Chapel into the image of Jesus. He pointed out the impossibility of knowing the results beforehand. However, he saw the feedback from the model team as positive and believed that any course of action that involves an individual's intentionally acting more like Jesus—like salt and light—is bound to result in a church that looks and acts more like Jesus.

Fourth, I questioned, what were the strengths and weaknesses of the model? Austin found this an intriguing subject, and the ideas and theology presented in chapter 2 provided much stimulating food for thought. He liked the application of the theology of Philippians 2:5-11 to the culture, changing demographics, and urban context inside and outside of Webb Chapel. He found the summaries concise and challenging and appreciated the various group activities such as the congregational time-line and asset mapping. He noted that a wider sample of Christians and non-Christians were included through the action- and thought-provoking homework given to group members. Austin did question how we could possibly cover the material in the sessions during a one-hour time frame and thought that implementing this project on a wider basis would require a different packaging of the material—for presentation in the context of preaching, teaching, education curriculum, and ministry structure, so that everyone could interact with it. Austin questioned how the model would proceed. Who will decide what will be done? How will it be implemented?

Finally, Austin questioned how I would evaluate the progress of implementing the model. How would I recognize success or progress as the model is put into action? What tools could I use to measure it? Such a radical shift for individuals and the church could

cause upheaval, consternation, doubt, confusion, and discouragement. This possibility requires me to be able to recognize whether I am headed in the right direction, be able to correct mistakes and learn from them, and be ready to encourage others in big and small ways.

Response of the Eldership

On December 3, 2008, the model was presented to the eldership during one of their scheduled meetings by representatives of the incarnational ministry model team. I spoke as a representative of the team and presented the model as found in appendix C. The eldership allowed me to read the entire document to them and we stopped occasionally for questions or clarification. I was careful to define certain words or phrases in order that the individuals present might not be confused by any of the language.

Upon completing the presentation, there were a few comments by individual elders, but it was fairly clear that it was something that they would not make a decision upon that evening. Some elders indicated that they believed Webb Chapel already possessed self-emptying practices and that this effort might be redundant, but most of the elders were simply non-committal. One of the elders challenged the representatives of the model team and me specifically about his belief that Jesus never was emptied of anything either divine or human. One of the team members countered by asking the elder to read Philippians 2:5-11. Upon reading the passage out loud, the elder's response was that if Jesus was emptied of anything at all, it was not anything that we were advocating in the model.

After a brief discussion, the elders thanked the incarnational model team representatives for being present and informed us that they would consider the model and get back with us at a later date. The later date happened to be December 17 at the next scheduled eldership meeting. At that point, the elders informed me that delegates from the eldership would meet with me at a later date to discuss the model presentation and its possible implementation. Since that meeting did not take place until after the project was completed, any findings regarding the acceptance of the model plan would take place post-project.

The response of the eldership was not a total rejection, yet it was not received in a manner that would indicate immediate adoption either. For the most part, the elders remained silent during the first presentation and told the model team it would not be considered until after the first of the year. After it was revisited on December 17, a sub-committee of two elders was named to work with me individually to find out more about self-emptying practices and the implication of the model for the congregation.

Conclusion

The purpose of the methodology used in this chapter was to address a problem that hampers the spiritual development of the Webb Chapel congregation. Webb Chapel needs a model for incarnational ministry that promotes the self-emptying practices of Jesus. During the project sessions, several themes surfaced from my field notes, from the interviews found in the participant questionnaire, from the eldership, and from my independent expert.

First, the self-emptying practices, as discussed in the theological perspective chapter of this thesis, point to Jesus' being emptied of his humanity rather than his deity.

Our weekly reflection on Jesus' emptying of self through *lectio divina* set the stage for the discussion of each session. In theory, every Christian could emulate this self-emptying, giving each individual a Christ-emulating ministry.

Second, discussing the concept of self-emptying during our sessions led to a better theological understanding of that which we as Christians and followers of Jesus were trying to be emptied. The discussion of giving up self and all the ramifications of being emptied constituted the most valuable aspect of the sessions. As we began to understand that self-emptying was not a gift, but rather a call, individual team members began to voice the need for us to be more humble, generous, patient, understanding, kind to the less fortunate—in short, to be the presence of Jesus in every aspect of our individual lives.

Third, the team sought meaningful ways in which to promote self-emptying practices within the congregation at Webb Chapel as well as nurture these practices in their own lives. This led to the recommendations presented to the eldership at Webb Chapel in December 2008.

Finally, the lack of a positive response by the eldership has left some gaping holes in the implementation of the model by Webb Chapel. Plans are being made to teach the model in an adult class setting in the spring of 2009. Further plans are being made to develop and institute a relationship-building class on Sunday evenings to be comprised of Anglo and Hispanic members. This invitation-only class is an attempt to place different cultures at the same table to discuss theological and current events.

The final chapter offers my concluding reflections and discussion of this project. Included in this discussion are implications for ministry, the effects of the project on me

personally, an analysis of how effective this project might be in other congregational settings, and future actions that should be taken regarding the project.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The general purpose of this doctoral project thesis was to apply the ministry competencies to which I have been exposed in the doctor of ministry program to a unique need within my own ministerial context. This thesis addresses the problem of Webb Chapel's inadequate model for emulating the self-emptying practices of Jesus by asking an incarnational ministry team made up of various members of Webb Chapel to focus on developing a useful and appropriate model. This final chapter explores the project's implications, generalizations, and conclusions for ministry, as well as questions for further exploration and future actions as a result of this project.

Implications for Ministry and Generalizability

At least five implications from this project may be generalized for other doctoral projects or general ministry interventions. First, success requires that leadership supports and promotes the project. Two members of the incarnational model team serve on staff at Webb Chapel, and they see the model as vital to the spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation. In addition, the elders must be convinced of the need to develop the model; otherwise they may view it simply as another assignment, merely a requirement of my doctoral program. Before the project began, I received approval from the eldership to conduct the incarnational ministry sessions. In hindsight, maybe having an elder on the

incarnational model ministry team would have been a positive approach for bridging the gap with the leadership.

Second, proper development of the model required careful selection of the incarnational ministry model team. The criteria for choosing the team members included 1) being actively involved as a member at Webb Chapel, 2) representing diverse aspects of the congregation (e.g., age, sex, culture, and worldview), 3) demonstrating a desire to be self-emptying, and 4) being generally accepted as an opinion leader at Webb Chapel. The Webb Chapel staff created the list of potential candidates, issued invitations, and selected the candidates according to willingness to be a member of the team. Potential team members were informed individually of the time commitment required for the project and other responsibilities before they agreed to be part of the team. The team meetings consisted of eight sessions held on Sunday afternoons at 4:00 in the church library. As in other aspects of church leadership and service, ideal candidates for an incarnational ministry model team already demonstrate self-emptying practices in their lives. I considered it absolutely crucial that the team represent as many different aspects of the church membership as possible.

Third, this project highlighted a need within the congregation that was not as apparent as maybe it should have been. The commitment of the incarnational ministry model team to gaining a deeper insight into the self-emptying practices of Jesus should positively impact the general membership of the church—even those who have not been exposed to this model. The fact that the model addressed a need recognized by the leadership for a greater involvement of the congregation in the community around Webb Chapel increased the odds of involving leadership as well.

Fourth, the results of this project needed to develop as a grass-roots movement within the congregation. As seeds were planted through discussion in adult classes, small groups, care groups, one-on-one, from the pulpit, in the bulletin, and through other venues, it appeared that acceptance by a portion of the congregation seemed very likely. Since results within the model team indicated a lack of understanding regarding self-emptying practices in most of the various sub-groups of the congregation, implementation was needed throughout the congregation. Despite my own expectations for the project, I attempted to maintain a role as a facilitator, rather than a teacher or director, with the model team. At times it was difficult for me not to project my expectations upon the model team, but I tried to remain unbiased throughout all of the sessions. Congregation-wide implementation will require the model team to employ similar restraint.

Finally, if someone wants to replicate this project, I would recommend that the team be as varied as the makeup of the congregation. One of my shortfalls lay in identifying opinion leaders from various groups who would be willing to commit to the project. While I had little difficulty in identifying potential Anglo team members, I had a great deal of difficulty in identifying potential Hispanic team members and even more difficulty in getting them to commit. I had originally intended for the group to be evenly mixed with Anglos and Hispanics, unfortunately, only one Hispanic member who committed to the entire project. While I believe a significant voice was not heard due to the lack of participation, I do not believe this situation arose due to the absence of leadership involvement in the selection process; the elders would have probably selected

most of the same people we contacted. I do not know the solution to this problem, but awareness of the problem is of paramount concern in replicating this project.

Despite this drawback, the resulting incarnational ministry model team did work quite well together. The members attended almost all of the sessions, and even when members missed a session, they made themselves available to me personally so I could obtain their input regarding the subject of that session. The last session overflowed with dialogue and ideas for implementing the model. My plans were to develop the recommendations of self-emptying practices and discuss them with the model team before presenting the recommendations to the eldership. One team member even suggested that the entire team or those who could attend be present when the recommendations were presented to the eldership.

Personal Impact of the Project

I have never been involved in a project of this magnitude before, and its effect upon me personally greatly changed my theological worldview. The purpose of the doctor of ministry degree program—to stretch and mature the student theologically and spiritually—has been achieved in me. A project intended to change the congregation regarding its self-emptying views cannot help but affect those same views in the facilitator of the project. I coached many youth sports teams as my daughters were growing up, and I understand completely that the coach teaches, encourages, demonstrates and motivates. Yet the coach does not enter the game as a player. In a similar way, my role as a facilitator for the incarnational ministry model team required me to serve as a catalyst for the team's understanding of the concept of self-emptying principles, but without telling them what they needed to identify and learn. As I diligently

sought to guide the team heuristically into learning self-emptying practices, my success was sprinkled with failures. Nevertheless the team itself experienced success. In addition, the process of simply attempting to identify particular self-emptying practices and allow the model team to discover them underscored the same need for self-emptying in my own life.

During the process I learned to empty myself by humbly keeping my own views in check and allowing the team to discover or not discover what self-emptying practices entail. Also, although I need to write my theological perspectives on a scholarly level, I also need to employ epistemic humility in communicating concepts I have learned on a scholarly level with those who have not been exposed to those concepts before. In conjunction with humility, I learned to be patient with the team as they sometimes struggled with self-emptying concepts. It would have been much easier simply to tell the team my understanding of the concepts, but they needed to struggle and individually discover self-emptying concepts on their own.

I was moved by the generosity of the team members who, because of their giving spirits and desire to work on something that might help the Webb Chapel congregation, gave up eight Sunday afternoons without even knowing all that the commitment would involve. Not only did they give their time; they gave me a great deal of encouragement to pursue self-emptying practices as a model.

One indication that self-emptying permeated the process itself lay in the fact that the team was in control, not I or any other individual. Unlike many groups of this nature in which an individual generally promotes a private agenda at any given opportunity, we stayed on task quite well. We discussed our views, and even if we did not all agree, we

were not disagreeable. The primary goal of the group involved exploring a model for self-emptying practices, and we did not stray off course very often or very long. After seeing the effect on the model team, I feel optimistic about the possibility that Webb Chapel would grow in its use of self-emptying practices. I realize that the team members do not represent typical members of Webb Chapel; they are atypical because of their commitment. At the same time, they are Christians who love the Lord and they were moved by the project. Many other Webb Chapel members fit that profile and form a target group for future teaching.

As a result of the process I have become more aware of the lack of self-emptying practices in my own life. It is so easy in ministry to lose sight of one's true calling because appointments, schedules and daily agendas get in the way. We fail to see those that are hurting around us and need us to minister to them. I now pray with my wife each morning before we leave home that God will place individuals in our paths that day that need us to minister to them. I want to know who is struggling. How can I be of assistance to others? Where am I needed today? What plans for ministry does God have in store for me today? When an opportunity arises, will I be prepared to give of myself as needed?

Internal and External Validity Issues

This project was designed to provide an incarnational ministry model developed heuristically by the entire incarnational ministry model team. One of my major goals was to transfer the theology and theory to which I had been exposed in the course of my doctoral studies into applied action at my home congregation. My model team stayed focused upon the task at hand; the development of the model was our primary interest.

They understood that this model, although it might apply to other congregational settings, was being designed specifically for implementation at Webb Chapel.

We set as our primary goal to emulate the self-emptying practices of Jesus, and the model team provided insight into what those practices might involve. We conceded from the beginning that Webb Chapel needs a greater emphasis on self-emptying practices and actively sought methods by which those practices might be introduced into the congregation. The model team concluded that self-emptying practices should be introduced by various means: adult classes, sermons, retreats, seminars, small groups, one-on-one, and a period of special emphasis in which a variety of these methods are used. Externally, this project should be applicable in a different congregational setting without major changes in its format, assuming the leadership of the adopting congregation supports the effort and the incarnational ministry model team commits to its goals and represents the various sub-groups of the congregation.

Another area of concern involves the level of cognitive dissonance that can be tolerated in attempting to bring multiple cultures together for a task. All model team members were invited to participate voluntarily on the team, yet the unwillingness of key Hispanic members to participate cost the team some of its potential to be fully multi-cultural. While I maintain that the findings are still valid, based upon the team members who participated, the voices of several potential team members were not heard, making the voice of the team as a whole less varied than I had originally hoped.

The method of content delivery and the collection and analysis of the data help maintain the internal validity of the project. I based the content of the seven project sessions upon theological research (see chapter 2) and followed established procedures in

collecting the data (participant observation, a questionnaire and group interview of the participants and the use of an independent expert). I attempted by this triangulation method of data collection to limit or eradicate the possibility of personal biases that could skew the results of the model.

Future Action

Because of the bonding of the incarnational ministry team, several of the members wanted to continue meeting on a regular basis in order to continue to discuss the possibilities for self-emptying practices at Webb Chapel. Additionally, half of the team members indicated in their survey that they would be willing to host a small group dedicated to discussion of the matter. In March of 2009, one of the team members will teach an adult Bible class on Sunday mornings focusing on the self-emptying practices of Jesus in conjunction with an emphasis on spiritual formation. I will co-teach a relationship-building class made up of Anglos and Latinos on Sunday evenings with Henry Roncancio, our cross-cultural minister. We intend to use the self-emptying material as our curriculum. "Self-emptying Practices" has been proposed as the theme for an adult retreat during the spring of 2009, and I also hope to convince the preaching minister to address the subject in a sermon series within the next few months.

The eldership was slow to become involved with the model. After listening to the proposal on December 3, 2008, delegates of the eldership waited until February of 2009 to approve the model. A productive meeting was held in which ideas and concerns were exchanged regarding the model and its feasibility at Webb Chapel. Not until early March at a second meeting was I convinced that members of the eldership really understood the model. Upon a recommendation by an elder, I summarized the concepts of self-emptying

practices and action items to develop from those practices in a bulleted, two page document that I sent to my primary advisor, Charles Siburt, before it was presented to the eldership. Siburt approved the document and commented that it should help the eldership better understand the relationship between self-emptying practices and spiritual formation practices. We are proceeding with the model and it is being implemented on a limited basis at this time.

Conclusion

This thesis reported a doctor of ministry project to develop a model for self-emptying practices at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ. An incarnational ministry model team was selected from active members and opinion leaders, with the expressed purpose of meeting for eight weeks to develop the model for self-emptying practices. During the process, the team became more like Jesus themselves as they entered into dialogue with each other and participated in session exercises and homework activities. Since the model was a group effort, I believe it is reliable and is not slanted toward my individual biases. I strongly believe that the implementation of this model at Webb Chapel could strengthen and nurture the current theological paradigm in positive ways for years to come.

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APPENDIX A

PROJECT SESSION HANDOUTS

Invitation Letter

Team members,

I want to thank you again for agreeing to be part of this model team. My goal is for us to develop a model for what incarnational ministry would look like at Webb Chapel. You may be having concerns right now because you are not sure what “incarnational ministry” even means! We are simply trying to look at the ministry of Jesus and determine how he emptied himself (as was mentioned in Philippians 2) and became a servant. What would it look like if Webb Chapel “emptied itself and became a servant”? What would you look like if you “emptied yourself and became a servant like Jesus”?

We will meet each Sunday afternoon at 4:00 pm beginning this coming Sunday, August 31st through October 19th. All sessions will be concluded around 5:00 pm, and I chose the 4:00 start time because of meetings which usually begin at 5:00. Your time is valuable to you and it is valuable to me as well. I will structure each meeting in order to complete the task at hand that day. You will be asked to do some “homework” during the week in which you will apply the information you have learned in the previous meeting to be applied in practical ways. We will begin each session with a devotional time called *lectio divina* in which we will explore different aspects of the self-emptying of Jesus as presented in Philippians 2.

Your opinion is important. You have been chosen to be part of this model team because of your ability and willingness to serve God and to consider the hard questions. Please participate in the discussion of the model team. Try not to dominate the discussion, yet make sure that your opinions and beliefs are articulated for the entire team. My role is that of facilitator, not teacher. I will participate in the discussion, but I will not set a framework by which the team’s conclusions will be determined. When we finish the last session, there should be a fairly clear-cut view, developed by this incarnational ministry model team, of what self-emptying practices will look like at Webb Chapel.

The sessions will have the following titles:

- 1.) *Tell Me Something Good about Webb Chapel*. In this session we will look back at the historical “high-water-marks” of this congregation.
- 2.) *Incarnational Ministry and Webb Chapel: Is There Any Need for Change?* We will discuss the definition and description of an incarnational ministry, and consider whether it fairly describes Webb Chapel currently.
- 3.) *Embodying Self-Emptying Practices at Webb Chapel*. What did Jesus give up? What did he retain? What efforts were required to give

everything away and how did his efforts affect the disciples? What would self-emptying look like today? What influence would self-emptying have on an unbelieving world?

4.) *Theology Gloria or Theology Crucis: The Theology of the Cross or The Theology of Glory?* What is the difference between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory? Are we serving God or are we serving ourselves and trying to convince ourselves that we are serving God? Triumphalism states that the strongest rule—and deserve to rule—because they are the strongest.

5.) *The Changing Profile of Global Christianity and its Effect on North Dallas and Webb Chapel.* Why has Christianity been losing adherents and members the last several decades? How has that affected Webb Chapel? What human assets do we have here to help us be the presence of Jesus in our community?

6.) *Discipleship in a Strange New World.* What is discipleship and what methods have been used in the past to achieve discipleship? What are the names of your neighbors who live within three houses of you in any direction?

7.) *Self-Emptying to Outsiders.* Are the cultural differences of our community in any way more difficult than the cultural differences of the first century church? How are we intentionally trying to bridge the gaps between the cultures of our communities?

8.) *Webb Chapel: Toward Becoming an Incarnational Church.* This session will include a questionnaire in which the model team members will be given the opportunity to individually describe their understanding of what an incarnational ministry would actually look like.

We will attempt to develop a team model of the self-emptying practices as well as recommendations for how Webb Chapel will be the presence of Jesus in its community. I am available to answer (or at least attempt to answer) any questions you may have and I truly look forward to working with you on this project.

Grace and Peace,
Bert

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 1: Tell Me Something Good about Webb Chapel

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. Paul tells the readers to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus; what is that attitude?
2. In verse 7, Paul says that Jesus “made himself nothing” (NIV] or simply “emptied himself.” What was emptied from Jesus? Did he empty his divinity? Did he empty his humanity?
3. How did he humble himself?

Introduction:

Why are we here? What do you mean by “Incarnational Ministry”? What is the purpose of the “team”? Why was I selected? Do the elders support this effort? Will they consider our “model” when we are finished with the study?

The Ministry Context of the Webb Chapel Church of Christ:

Looking at the handout, do you generally agree with the statement of the current demographics at Webb Chapel?

1. Is the changing demography an advantage or disadvantage for Webb Chapel?
2. Could the relationship between the differing cultures at Webb Chapel be described as *symbiotic*?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the assumption that Webb Chapel is in an “empty nest” stage and heading towards “retirement?”
4. What are the advantages of having a team develop a model rather than an individual develop a model?
5. What is your concept of “cross-cultural ministry”?
6. Using the definition that *missional* is “the concept of a church being missional seeks to focus the conversation about what the church “is”, created by the Spirit and having a unique nature, how this differs from what a church “does”?

Reflecting and Remembering in a Positive Way:

On the walls around you are large sheets of paper representing the different decades of the Webb Chapel church.

1. Reflecting on your entire experience with this congregation, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive, and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did you feel?
2. Recall a time with this congregation when you felt most connected to God's work in the world. What happened? Who was involved? What was your part?
3. As guests encounter Webb Chapel, where do you think they will see God most clearly?
4. Do you remember a time when you felt energized by a risk the congregation took? What happened? Who was involved? What was your part? Could that event be duplicated? Could it be made even better?

I want you to go to the decades that represent the time you have been at Webb Chapel and write down major events and memories associated with the congregation. After you have written your memories, read the memories of others and vote on the three most important memories/events of the decade by numbering them either "1," "2," or "3."

Homework:

Using the four reflection questions above, ask another member of Webb Chapel, (outside the incarnational ministry team), about their memories and reflections. How did their responses differ from yours? Did they remind you of something that you had forgotten? Does sharing a "group memory" at Webb Chapel seem important to you? How do memories become legacies?

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 2: Incarnational Ministry and Webb Chapel: Is There Any Need for Change?

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. What mental picture do you have when you think of humility?
2. Discuss what Jesus “emptied,” and what in your life needs to be “emptied” in order to be like him.
3. How much do you think your attitude controls your actions? Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: *A belief leads to a thought, a thought leads to a feeling, a feeling leads to an action and an action leads to a way of life.*

Review:

1. Looking at the timeline from last week, what features stand out for you?
2. What major events or activities are repeatable? What events or activities could be reformatted into successful ventures today? What new events or activities do you think would be of benefit to Webb Chapel?
3. How do you feel that guests are received at Webb Chapel? What intentional efforts are being made or should be made in order to help them feel welcomed?
4. How do others at Webb Chapel feel about the memorable events and activities of our past? What value do you see in sharing a “group memory” at Webb Chapel? What legacies have been made at Webb Chapel and what legacies can be developed for the future?
5. What is the difference between “being” and “doing”?

Incarnational Ministry:

The church is only the church when it exists for others...The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary life, not dominating, but helping and serving...It must not underestimate the importance of human example which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian killed in a concentration camp during the last weeks of the European Campaign of World War II)

Paul’s appeal in Philippians 2:5-11 demonstrates that the community’s understanding of love is determined by its adoption of the “mind of Christ” (see verse 5). Jesus exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave. Christian transformation occurs

when the community also looks to the interests of others, identifying with the Christ who gave himself for others.

Jesus' kenotic existence created a new alternative community, a kenotic church. Since the word *church* literally means "a community that has been called out," to be called out means to be "missioned or commissioned." The ministry of the church must be understood in the light of the self-sacrifice of Jesus and of his compassionate ministry to the marginalized and the oppressed. In his ministry Jesus makes it clear that anyone who would follow him is called to live as he did; self-giving for the sake of others constitutes the way of discipleship. The kenotic ministry of Christ's church is characterized by its communal dimension and complete restructuring of all personal relationships. We have to treat people differently, because we have been treated differently by Jesus.

In a kenotic church, power becomes a dominant issue. Power is usually understood as the capacity to influence someone prior to or apart from the exercise of freedom. Power and powerlessness exist as dimensions of relationships and are therefore a part of the unavoidable complexity of human interaction. Power as physical force is clearly distinct from power as spiritual force. Power that limits human freedom is surely to be understood differently from that which elicits consent. Power that involves physical force often coerces and abuses another's freedom. Power, even when God-given and legitimate, is "something to be gradually modified and absorbed by love. It should be used to bring about its own abrogation, though this is only absolutely possible eschatologically." God's power enables us to relinquish power. God can empower even the rich and powerful so that they are able to sacrifice wealth and power in the service of the poor.

Our contemporary situation requires that the church travel light and live off the land. Here the metaphor for kenotic church is that of "pilgrimage," and the church is called to minister "on the road." In the gospels of Mark and Luke, road (*hodos*) becomes the language defining Jesus' salvific mission. Pilgrimage as a metaphor best describes the church in a world where so many are physically and spiritually homeless. A kenotic church should also be characterized as a place of pilgrimage:

Places of pilgrimage are as a rule, more hospitable to the strange and the stranger than institutions entrenched in one particular community. In a place of pilgrimage, pilgrims of all races and social strata leave behind their particular cultural milieu; they become a new community on the way.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do the previous comments describe Webb Chapel? In what ways? What is lacking? Give examples.
2. How were successful past events at Webb Chapel "incarnational"?
3. Jesus generally did not stay in one location and have people come to him, but rather, he went to the masses to perform his ministry. How does that paradigm fit with what is generally done in our modern churches?

4. What relationship between “power” and “powerlessness” exists in the church? How is it seen at Webb Chapel?
5. Is Webb Chapel a “place of pilgrimage”?
6. Name specific ways in which Webb Chapel has been “self-emptying.” Name individual incidents in which you have seen “self-emptying” from someone at Webb Chapel. Describe what you would consider to be a “self-emptying” practice that is currently not being done at Webb Chapel.

Assignment for the Week:

Using the reflection questions, dialogue with another Webb Chapel member regarding their understanding of the incarnation of Jesus and what incarnational ministry at Webb Chapel might look like. Discuss with them the differences between “power” and “powerlessness” and their relation to incarnational ministry at Webb Chapel. Ask them how they emulate the “self-emptying” practices of Jesus in their lives.

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 3: Embodying Self-Emptying Practices at Webb Chapel

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. Do you think that Jesus gave up any of his divinity, and if so, what?
2. We talked last week about the concept of Jesus emptying himself of his humanity and the desire to acquire power, fame, and control. What drives you in your life?
3. How would you react to the statement that “the two greatest idols of a Christian are security and self-dependence”?

Review:

1. Jesus’ self-emptying (*kenosis*) created an alternative community. How does the Webb Chapel church community look like the Webb Chapel neighborhood community? How is it different?
2. If the ministry of the church must be understood in light of the self-sacrifice of Jesus and his compassionate ministry to the marginalized and the oppressed, what are we as individuals at Webb Chapel really sacrificing?
3. In a kenotic church, power becomes a dominant issue. How do we at Webb Chapel—and how do you as an individual Christian—react to the dynamic tension between power and powerlessness?
4. Kenotic churches use the metaphor of “pilgrimage” to describe the journey as the church is called to ministry. Is it fair to describe Webb Chapel as a “place of pilgrimage”? (In a place of pilgrimage, hospitality is shown to the strange and the stranger. Pilgrims of all races and social strata leave their cultures behind and become a new community on the way.)

Embodying Self-Emptying Practices:

Exactly what did Jesus give up when he “emptied” himself? Some would posit that Jesus gave up his divine preincarnate glory, his rights and authority as deity, relinquishing the independent use of his godly power and authority, and limiting the use of some of his attributes of deity (e.g. omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence). Conversely, I maintain that what was emptied from Jesus came from his humanity rather than his divinity. Jesus displayed the self-giving which constitutes the essence of divinity. His emptying involved no compensatory loss of divine powers, because his example shows us that divinity is humble rather than powerful. His way to the cross was the revelation of an unchanging, consistently humble divinity. Jesus emptied himself of any of the power and control that every human seeks. He repeated over and over that he was “about his Father’s business” during his ministry and this total subjugation of the Son to

the Father left the Son willingly under the control of the Father during Jesus' entire earthly ministry. Jesus jettisoned all human desire for personal power and control and is the example for his followers as well.

It seems plausible to conclude that the kenosis was not a *getting*, not a *surrendering*, but a *giving*. Kenosis involved, not the acquisition of divine attributes, nor a setting aside of divine attributes, nor yet an exchange of divine characteristics and the taking up of human qualities in their place. Instead kenosis involved Jesus giving himself, the divine one, to humanity sacrificially as a servant. Jesus "emptied" himself upon humanity, assumed the form of a servant and became the *theanthropos*, "the God-man." Paul makes it clear that Jesus expects his disciples to exhibit the same self-emptying practices that he showed throughout his earthly ministry. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Jesus tells Paul that "My grace is sufficient for you, for *my power is made perfect in weakness*" (my emphasis). The contrast of terms is striking and Moses serves as a prime example of divine power being made perfect in the weakness of the human revelatory mediator (see Exodus 3:1-15:21). God uses the inability of Moses as an effectual public speaker to speak to the children of Israel through Aaron, the brother of Moses. Again we see the power of God to work through the weaknesses of his children. Paul's weakness engenders practically no stigma, and Christ's power is made perfect in the apostle's weakness.

God's power in the gospels cannot be understood except in terms of powerlessness, its apparent opposite. God has the power is to renounce power. According to Mark, it is through God's power that Jesus is free to become powerless and submit to death. Dorothy Lee-Pollard sees in this paradox that, "The divine power by which Jesus in the Gospel heals and liberates others is the same power by which he is able to renounce power to save his own life."

Both Mark and Luke present Jesus as a servant, but the disciples must be servants also. In this section the disciples are called to follow Jesus, and the disciples and Jesus are "on the way" (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17). Their journey toward suffering leads to Jerusalem where Jesus will be crucified. The teaching about Christology is deeply intertwined with teaching about discipleship, and Jesus invites the disciples to follow his "way," which Mark reveals as the way of the cross. They are invited to shed their "Christological blindness" in order to follow Jesus' way and to discover the authentic nature of his mission. For Mark, discipleship is intimately bound up with Christology.

Within the community of disciples power should be measured in terms of servanthood and willingness to suffer for the Kingdom of God. While Mark speaks in various ways of the powerlessness of the disciples, the dominant image is that of cross-bearing as found in 8:34. No symbol of relinquishing power is greater than that of cross-bearing, because to bear the cross is to suffer shame and rejection. In Mark's Christology, power is comprehended in terms of a servanthood exemplified by Jesus' own servanthood; it demands self-denial. For Mark, renunciation of property and possessions provides the clearest indication of authentic discipleship.

The passion narrative dramatically displays the theological and Christological issues of power and powerlessness are dramatically displayed. In this narrative Jesus' own experience of powerlessness is made evident. The focus of concentration is no longer the disciples but Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane, he expresses deep anguish and indicates that his grief is enough to kill him. In the garden he must choose: the

exercise of power or the giving up of power? His divinity or his humanity? While “everything is possible for God,” for Jesus there is no escape from this agony of mind and spirit. The language of suffering is explicit in 14:33 when Jesus “shudders in distress” and “anguishes.” Each phrase evokes horror.

The coexistence of power and powerlessness is most intensely realized not as one might expect in the resurrection, but in the crucifixion. In Mark, the theology of the cross appears to be the power to renounce power, and it is only through God’s power that Jesus is able to accept powerlessness and face the necessity of the cross. The presence of God may be found not in the human institution of power but in those places where human beings experience powerlessness as an oppressive and life-denying force. The powerlessness experienced by Jesus cannot be equated with defeat, for it is through such means that the Kingdom is established and strengthened. In Mark we see a paradoxical “presence in absence,” for the powerlessness that usually indicates the absence of God is now revealed as the very presence of God.

Philippians 2 and the gospel of Mark establish a paradox that must permeate all Christian life. Salvation and well-being are attained not by conquest, not by domination of the other, not by exploitation, but by self-effacement and self-giving love. This is the paradoxical process that ultimately leads to self-realization. The coming of the Kingdom is realized through self-actualization of the other. Real authority and real power lie in compassionate persuasive love, in choosing weakness instead of strength. The crucifixion story in Mark dramatizes the mysterious paradox of authentic Christian existence: “Power comes to its full strength in weakness” (2 Co 12:9).

Reflection Questions:

1. If we agree that Jesus gave up his humanity rather than his divinity, what would we be like if we gave up our humanity to be like him?
2. If you had the opportunity to give a large amount of money to your favorite university and had the option of having a building named after you, what would you do?
3. It has been said that, “There is no limit to the good we can do for others if we do not care who gets the credit for it.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement?
4. How could the power of God be made perfect through your weakness?

Homework Assignment:

Perform a random act of kindness, preferably for someone you do not know. Mow a yard, change a flat, comfort a crying child, or visit an elderly shut-in. Do something out of the ordinary!

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 4: Theologia Gloria or Theologia Crucis?

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. Does the act of self-emptying make us weaker or stronger?
2. Will self-emptying practices make you a better leader or a better servant?
3. If the kingdom of God is realized by the “self-actualization of the other,” how would self-emptying practices lead us to God’s Kingdom?
4. Discuss a recent event in which you were consciously self-emptied. What were the circumstances? Who was involved? What was the outcome?

Review:

1. Kenosis is not a getting, not a surrendering, but a giving.
2. Jesus empties himself of any power or control that every human seeks.
3. Jesus told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (1 Corinthians 12:9).
4. In both Mark and Philippians, Jesus is presented as a servant, but his disciples are called to be servants as well.
5. Salvation and well-being are not attained by conquest, not by dominion over the other, not by exploitation, but by self-effacement and self-giving love.

Theologia Gloria and Theologia Crucis:

We could spend much of our time today looking at examples of self-emptying practices exhibited by men such as Paul, John the Baptist, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, but we need to press on to a new concept. The Latin term *Theologia Crucis* literally means the “theology of the cross.” This concept should guide the individual Christian and the church in general. The Latin term *Theologia Gloria* means the “theology of glory”; another term for it is “triumphalism.” This refers to the tendency in all strongly held worldviews, whether religious or secular, to present themselves as full and complete accounts of reality, leaving little if any room for debate or difference of opinion expecting of their adherents unflinching belief and loyalty. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

Jesus exhibits the theology of the cross by his willingness to spend his life for others; he does not seek personal fame or glory, but gives everything he has to help people. The theology of glory seeks fame, power, wealth and anything that pampers or betters self. The theology of glory is most often seen in individuals but it can be the driving force behind entire nations. Triumphalism declares that the strongest rule—and deserve to rule—because they are the strongest! Despite a sense of fair play, the rules generally are tilted to the stronger, richer, and more influential.

The theology of glory confuses and distorts because it presents divine revelation in a straightforward, authoritarian manner that silences argument, silences doubt, just generally silences all conversation. It overwhelms the human with its brilliance, its contestability and its certainty of self. It confuses because God's object in the divine self-manifestation is to not overwhelm, but to befriend.

The theology of the cross, on the other hand, says not that God thinks humankind so wretched that it deserves death and hell, but that God thinks humankind and the whole creation so good, so beautiful, so precious in its intention and its potentiality, that its actualization, its fulfillment, its redemption is worth dying for.

Some people claim that the theology of the cross fixates on the negative and on suffering. The world is full of pain and God loves the world. A religion, Christian or otherwise, that wishes to accentuate the positive without doing business with the negative may enjoy temporary success in affluent and powerful societies. However, it will turn to ashes in the face of one dying child. Death is not glorified in this theology; it is the enemy. But the message of the cross is that this enemy and all the other forms of negation symbolized by the name of this enemy, may only be overcome from within, not from above. Therefore the faith that emanates from this cross is a faith that enables its disciples to follow the crucified God into the heart of the world's darkness, into the very kingdom of death, and to look for light that shines in the darkness, the life that is given beyond the brush with death.

The theology of glory, dressed in whatever guise it assumes, tempts us to a theology of sight, not faith; finality, not hope; power, not love. The theology of the cross is an applied theology. How in this world of the here and the now are we to perceive the presence of the crucified one, and how shall we translate that presence into words and deeds or sighs too deep for either?

The incarnation of Christ Jesus represents the antithesis of this human drive to dominate. Although he had access to all the privilege and power to which his identity with God entitled him, and although he could have exploited that privilege and power to dominate his creatures, Jesus considered his deity an opportunity for service and obedience. His deity became a matter not of getting but of giving, not of being served but of serving, not of dominance but of obedience. The difficult part of all this for the modern believer is that Paul did not leave in the realm of abstract speculation his description of Christ's astounding refusal to dominate. Instead, he advised the church at Philippi—and through them the church of today—to follow Christ's example. This means that the church and the believer must adopt an "incarnational" demeanor.

However, modern Western societies make this extremely difficult. Great, sometimes ultimate value in these societies is often attached to wealth, glamour, power, and prestige, and the accepted ways of achieving these ends often involve dominance over others. With our minds assaulted by the abusive use of power day after day, it is easy for us and the churches we represent to think that in our own way it is acceptable to dominate others in order to achieve our ends. Advocates of the "prosperity gospel," which promotes health and wealth through giving money to God, evidence this attitude all too well. But are the same principles at work in some church building campaigns? Are these campaigns genuine efforts to see the gospel advance, or are they ways of enhancing the prestige and comfort of our own people?

Reflection Questions:

1. Is our nation most influenced by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory?
2. Is Webb Chapel influenced by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory?
3. How have you been influenced by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory?
4. How would the theology of the cross change the theological paradigm of the church at Webb Chapel?
5. What changes do you foresee for the future of Webb Chapel if it should adopt self-emptying practices? Would self-emptying practices include teaching ESL classes? Would it include mentoring local school children or teaching parenting classes for the community?

Assignment for the week:

Look at the reflection questions again and be introspective. Discuss them with your spouse or someone else from Webb Chapel and get their perspective. Next week, be ready to discuss whether you are influenced more by the theology of the cross or the theology of glory and give examples.

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 5: The Changing Profile of Global Christianity and its Effect on North Dallas and Webb Chapel

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. How were your parents “self-emptying” in their relationship with you? Describe a time when your parents demonstrated an example of “self-emptying” for you.
2. If Jesus emptied himself of the desires that control us as humans, how can we as humans follow his example? Give a specific instance of a self-emptying practice.
3. What do you think is the disconnect between Christians emulating Jesus in self-emptying practices and the reality that many/most do not see self-emptying as a spiritual discipline to emulate?

Review:

1. What is your understanding of the difference between the “theology of glory” and the “theology of the cross”?
2. Is our nation or Webb Chapel influenced by the “theology of glory” or the “theology of the cross”?
3. If Webb Chapel made a conscious effort to magnify the “theology of the cross,” what areas would we expand? What areas would we introduce? What areas would we jettison?
4. Realizing that this is an election year, how involved should a Christian be in politics? Do we change our neighborhood through political means or through outreach from the church? If we are to change through outreach, what does that outreach look like?

The Changing Profile of Global Christianity and its Effect on North Dallas and Webb Chapel:

In this session, we will explore how Christianity has changed in the past century and specifically how it has changed in North America and the United States. Christianity was the dominant religion for much of the first two hundred years of America’s existence; however, Christianity has been losing adherents in the past two to three decades. At one point, America was sending missionaries to all points of the world, but now the fastest growing regions of belief are generally in third world nations. How has the “Bible Belt” changed in your lifetime? How has the church changed in your lifetime? How has society’s attitude changed towards religion during your lifetime?

As recently as ten years ago, there were over 340,000 churches in the United States ranging from family churches of less than twenty to mega-churches attracting more than fifteen thousand people every weekend. George Barna reports that there are perhaps three dominant classes of churches. Small churches that focus on the needs of people living near the church generally have fewer than one hundred people involved and struggle to figure out how to attract young people and families. Their congregational profile tends to include retired Caucasians who have been in their church for several decades. These ministries attract few guests, and a large proportion of those who visit never return. Attendance is obviously small and programs are extremely limited. Change of any type comes slowly to these churches. They are proud of their history and see great value in continuing the traditions on which their church was founded.

The second class of churches attracts an average of two hundred to four hundred people each weekend. One out of every four Protestant churches fits this category. They appeal to younger families and have a wider range of congregational activities. The building is used throughout the week for various purposes, mostly ministry activities focused on the needs of church members. These more evangelistic churches sponsor one or two community events each year to invite unchurched people to experience what their church has to offer. These churches set as a primary goal numerical growth, which will enable them to expand their range of programs and their facilities. One of the biggest challenges is to keep people focused on the vision and primary goals of the church.

Barna's third class of churches consists of the large congregations that dot our landscape. They get the lion's share of media attention, but they represent just a fraction of the total church world. (Mega-churches constitute less than three percent of all of the churches in the United States.) They have a comprehensive menu of activities, programs, and events. They strive to have something for everybody and work hard at being sensitive to the needs and expectations of their guests. An unusual mixture of people from the church, people from other churches, and those who have no church affiliation but appreciate the ministry and social services offered make constant use of their facilities. Demographically, these churches often provide a mirror image of the profile of the community at-large. These churches tend to be less than forty years old and full of young families with children.

Church attendance has dipped over the past few decades, and while the percentage of people who say they believe in God and are members of a specific church constitutes the majority, less than half attend worship services weekly. Only one-third of church members read the Bible during the week on a personal basis. While many proclaim their faith in God, they do not put that faith in action. Thirty years ago, the most committed members averaged four blocks of time during the week for corporate religious activities; today, the most committed church people allocate two blocks per week including worship on Sunday morning. Obviously, it is difficult to develop any sort of community within the church when its members only see each other once or twice per week.

The following list represents what Americans Really Believe according to George Barna:

- The Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves (81%).
- The Bible teaches that money is the root of all evil (49%).

- People are blessed by God so they can enjoy life as much as possible (72%).
- The primary purpose of life is enjoyment and fulfillment (58%).
- All religious faiths teach equally valid truths (40%).
- All people pray to the same god or spirit, no matter what name they use for that spiritual being (53%).
- Satan is not a living being but is just a symbol of evil (60%).
- If a person is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven (55%).
- The Holy Spirit is not a living entity but just a symbol of God's power or presence (61%).
- There are some sins that even God cannot forgive (34%).

Based on current projections, the Census Bureau informs us that while three out of four Americans are presently Caucasian, by 2050 only half of the nation will be Caucasian. Today Caucasians in the United States generate zero population growth: they bear enough children to “replace” those who die but not enough to expand the size of Caucasian population. Minority populations, on the other hand, are growing due to an increased immigration of minorities and minority populations bearing (on average) a greater number of children per family. African Americans have grown by fifteen percent in the past two decades, while the Hispanic and Asian populations have increased a staggering forty percent!

The church cannot afford to ignore the realities of cultural diversity. As we have said before, the population around our church facility has been changing ethnically in the past decade. How do we reach those living in our neighborhood? How do we reach those living outside our neighborhood?

Let us take an objective look at Webb Chapel. Luther Snow developed an asset-building process that enables groups of people to experience a combined corporate feeling of sharing qualities and talents in order to determine the strengths of the group. Groups are encouraged to recognize their assets and connect the dots that link the assets together in order to brainstorm actions that can be taken to get things done. The Asset Mapping process has been used corporately and adapted for congregational use as well. For the rest of our time today, we will briefly look at how Asset Mapping might be beneficial to Webb Chapel.

Step one—Recognize your assets. List all the assets you believe are available at Webb Chapel. Assets might fall into the following categories: physical, individual, associations, institutions, and economic. Read your assets aloud and comment on the choices of others. Choose three or more types of assets to work on. What are two or three physical assets of our congregation? What are other physical assets that you did not think of at first? What are two or three things you can do with your hands? What is something no one in the church knows you care about? Name a few talents and skills of other people at the table. What groups of people do you connect with in your community? What institutions have something in common with your congregation? What does the congregation spend money on?

Step two—Connect the Dots. Look over your assets and think about God's will regarding the gifts he has given you and the congregation. Brainstorm actions that connect two or more of these assets to accomplish God's will. You should end up with a few clusters of assets representing particular actions. Do not put assets into categories based on similarity. Connect diverse assets to brainstorm actions. (Actions include projects events, performances, campaigns, celebrations, demonstrations and developing things.)

Step three—Vote with your feet. Follow your heart and listen to each person report on the actions they have discovered through brainstorming. Decide which of these actions you would most like to take part in yourself. Stand up for the plan of action which interests you the most. Develop your work plan based upon the job before you and the people with you who have an interest in the same idea. Look around and what do you see?

Assignment for the week:

Do the asset mapping exercise with others from Webb Chapel. Do their findings duplicate what we found in our exercise or do you have a whole new set of data? Do the results from our exercise give you hope for the future of Webb Chapel? Were you disappointed? Were there more assets than you realized? What was the most creative action of combining two or more assets that you had not considered before? How can we combine current assets into new models of ministry?

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 6: Discipleship in a Strange New World

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. If you were told that you would be given something that you needed/wanted but could not afford if you gave up something that was important to you, what would you do?
2. Do you hold the door for people to enter? Do you smile at people you know when you greet them? How about those you do not know? Do you give up a parking space to a stranger? Do you allow someone to pull in front of you in heavy traffic? Have you stopped and helped a stranger change a flat tire? What excites you most at Christmas: gifts received or gifts given?
3. When was the last time you sacrificed something for yourself in order to provide something for someone else?

Review:

1. How effective is Asset Mapping? What are the major assets which Webb Chapel possesses?
2. How interconnected are the assets at Webb Chapel? Are there “hidden” assets of which you were not aware?
3. With the current assets, what ministries should be more effective? What new ministries could be established without a great deal of re-tooling?
4. Does the concept of corporate assets (assets that belong to the community of the church: facilities, human resources, financial assets, spiritual assets: assets that belong to the community of the church) make Webb Chapel a stronger entity? If you were responsible for networking these assets, what approach would you take?

Discipleship in a Strange New World

What images flood your mind when you hear the term “discipleship”? Do you feel a twinge of guilt when you hear the word? Is discipleship something like flossing—you know you should do it, but you really are not that interested? Why does discipleship conjure up images of forcing yourself on someone you do not know very well and leading them through a “connect the dots” study of the Bible? Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “You will never convert someone to the Lord who is not

first your friend”? In this session, we will look at some past discipleship practices in order to attempt to heuristically develop a current and future model for discipleship.

Leadership in most congregations realizes that discipleship is not only a mandate from the Lord, but it is vital to the survival of the individual congregation. Maybe a congregation has been blessed with a location that is conducive to numerical growth, maybe it has a balanced membership with individuals varying in ages and backgrounds, or maybe there is not a great deal of competition from other churches in the area; many factors can influence the numerical growth of an individual congregation. In my observation, “discipleship” and “church growth” have often been used interchangeably, although, in fact, they are not necessarily the same thing. For example, how does one tangibly measure the “spiritual growth” in a church? Conversely, if a church has a negative numerical growth rate, is it necessarily negative spiritually as well?

When Jesus ministered to his disciples, he spent time and effort with them helping them to grow and nurturing them. Is it possible to “convert” someone to the Lord without the effort of getting to know and understand (be a friend) to the individual? What percentage of members in an average congregation do you suppose could sit down with a friend and lead them through a study of the Bible in order to help them know Jesus? What percentage of the membership at Webb Chapel could conduct a Bible study with a friend?

Past approaches to “discipleship” include, but are not limited to the following: canvassing and “door-knocking” a neighborhood; weekend cottage meetings; Visualized Bible Series (Jule Miller filmstrips); friendship evangelism; “An hour with someone who loves you”; Bird’s Eye View of the Bible; The Safety Chain; Salvation Highway; and Searching for Truth. All of the above programs do not necessarily serve as good models, since it is necessary for the participant to learn a set technique that does not vary from one individual to another. This “one-size-fits-all” approach to theology depends upon the participant learning how someone else has approached discipleship and trying to copy it exactly. Some even include “track” questions and answers from which the participant is not to stray. I do not see this form of discipleship exhibited either in the gospels or the letters.

Jesus approaches discipleship relationally. He generally approaches everyone on an individual basis, or in small groups, with the obvious exceptions of events such as the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain or when he speaks in the synagogue. Many times Jesus teaches his disciples in small groups or individually. While it is quite common for Jesus to meet the physical needs of individuals before their spiritual needs, he always met the spiritual needs when the time is right. Jesus heals the sick and lame, restores sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf without demanding a statement of faith by the individual. Simply put, Jesus met individuals where they are and develops relationships at that point.

The case of the Samaritan woman provides a good example. Jesus, being God, knows about both her past and her present. He does not begin the conversation with how the Samaritans have polluted Judaism, or how they worship God in the wrong place and in the wrong way, or how she is not fit to be a disciple because of her five previous marriages or the fact that she is not married to the man with whom she currently lives. He approaches her relationally and develops a dialogue based upon questions she asks. When

he finishes talking with her, she goes back to the town and begins to tell everyone of Jesus and what he has done for her.

What do we learn from the examples of Jesus' approach to discipleship? He values relationships above programs. He is not afraid to engage in conversation with anyone—literally anyone. He met the people where they are and does not make disciples of everyone. Some reject him outright, some reject him at first only to accept him later, some accept him at first only to later turn away, and others hear him and accept him from the start. Jesus serves as living proof that “people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

We cannot get someone else to “do discipleship” in our place. It requires effort and participation on the part of each individual. In our fellowship, we tend to consider discipleship and “foreign missions” synonymous, though in reality they could not be further apart. Discipleship happens daily when we have opportunities to be the presence of Jesus in the lives of the people we meet. I have heard it said that “you will never convert to Jesus someone who is not your friend first.” Discipleship is not a program; rather it is a way of life in which people can see Jesus.

Who are the people with whom you work? Do you know their life stories? What are the names of the neighbors who live in front and behind you? Who are your neighbors who live next door? When was the last time you invited them over for a meal? If one of your neighbors had a crisis in his life, would he turn to you? If you had a crisis, would they know about it? When was the last time you did something nice for your neighbor with no intention of being paid back?

We take things for granted. We assume that the way things are is the only way they can be. We assume that if our neighbors are not interested in the Lord, it is because that is a conscious decision on their part, and we should not bother them.

Assignment for the week:

Your assignment for the week is to perform another random act of kindness, this time it must be done for a neighbor. Do something—anonously, if possible—to let your neighbor feel as though someone acknowledges their existence and appreciates their efforts. Report on this in the next session.

Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry

Session 7: Self-Emptying to Outsiders

Lectio Divina: Turn to Philippians 2:5-11 and read the “Christ Hymn.”

1. Self-emptying practices involve actually giving up something that is important to you. What have you given up in the last six weeks? What have you considered giving up but have not had the faith or courage sacrifice?
2. If someone came to our assembly today and needed assistance, would you be more likely or less likely to help them because of the church setting? Do you expect the church to be involved in assistance activities or programs in which you have no desire to be involved personally?
3. In what ways are you willing to be self-emptying with those in our congregation or community whose culture is different from your own? Does self-emptying make you more appreciative or resentful?

Review:

1. Is discipleship something that is important for your personal walk as a Christian? Do you consider discipleship to be a gift, and not necessarily your gift, and therefore, the responsibility of someone else?
2. How would you personally define discipleship? Is discipleship and numerical church growth essentially the same thing? How does one determine the spiritual growth of a congregation or an individual and demonstrate it tangibly?
3. Is discipleship best served by programs?
4. If a friend or co-worker asked you today to help them know Jesus, could you do it? Would you take them to the scriptures or would you need a program to help you? What would you do if they asked you a theological question for which you did not have a definitive answer?
5. Who are your neighbors?

Self-Emptying to Others

For several weeks we have been discussing self-emptying practices in general. Today, we want to be more specific. I believe that self-emptying practices by individuals and from this congregation are vital not only for the growth of the church, but for its very

existence as well. Based upon the research I have done in the life of congregations in general, I believe that the current paradigm at Webb Chapel will not be adequate for the future. In the past, we have been able to attract guests who eventually became members. These new members generally replaced the members we lost due to families moving to new areas, and the attrition of members with health issues or death. That paradigm has changed in the last decade as the loss of members has exceeded the rate of new member gain. In other words, Webb Chapel has lost more members than they have added in the last few years, and even though that rate has hit a plateau, we are not gaining new younger families at the rate we once did.

What does this have to do with self-emptying? Everything! If we maintain the same “business as usual” attitude we had during our peak growing period at a time when we struggle to attract new families, something is very wrong. Self-emptying practices help the individual and the congregation becomes much more “transparent” to the outsider. If outsiders feel as though an agenda—of which they are not informed—exists, they will be reticent about becoming part of the spiritual community. What is our mission at Webb Chapel? What is our “mission statement”? In what ways do we attempt to make the outsider feel as though he is or can be part of us? In what ways do we attempt to assimilate believers and Christians of differing cultures into our assembly?

Cross-cultural analysis reveals that there really are some basic mental traits that are universal, in the sense that they are normal everywhere. Some unusual traits are found in every human population. Building on these traits, cultures produce a great deal of variety, but also much that is the same. Part of the reason for this is that our environment presents similar problems; and societies, like natural selection, often settle on the same solution because it is the best available. Human societies have many deep things in common, including practices like music, poetry, dance, marriage, funerals; values resembling courtesy, hospitality, sexual modesty, generosity, reciprocity, the resolution of social conflict; and concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, parent and child, past, present, and future. We have a shared human nature that allows us to make sense of one another.

How does Webb Chapel resemble the congregation in which you were reared? How is it different? Do you agree or disagree with the statement, “Generally, everyone feels as though his congregation is friendly, because if he did not, he would leave”? Is hospitality a self-emptying practice? How is generosity a self-emptying practice? When was the last time you sacrificed something you wanted for something that someone else needed?

How were the cultural differences addressed in the first century in Rome or the cities of Galatia? Are the cultural differences greater or less than those we face at Webb Chapel? Would Webb Chapel be a better congregation if it were more heterogeneous or more homogeneous? Does cultural diversity make us stronger and more unified or weaker and more disconnected? Do you feel as though Webb Chapel would be better off if it had only one dominant culture? If not, what methods should be used to help assimilate the cultures at Webb Chapel?

On the following page, please note similarities and differences within our congregation. After you have filled out this portion, fill in the columns for the similarities and differences between Webb Chapel and our local community. What approaches, using

similarities, could be implemented to overcome differences? How would self-emptying practices aid the process?

Within Webb Chapel

Similarities

Differences

Webb Chapel and the Community around It

Similarities

Differences

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE # ____

I personally want to thank each of you for your time and participation with this project. This questionnaire will help me evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions and hopefully help me understand how to improve it in the future. Please speak from your heart and be as specific as possible.

How do you see self-emptying practices as a model for you to be more like Jesus?

What specific self-emptying practices does the model propose for the Webb Chapel congregation?

Do you feel that this model will lead Webb Chapel to more adequately manifest the presence of Jesus in our community?

If Webb Chapel became more incarnational in the community, what do you believe would be the effect of the model on the community? What was the effect of the model on you personally?

Do you feel that this model would be accepted by the majority of the membership at Webb Chapel?

What venues do you see as a means of reaching the congregation with this model?

What effects do you see the model of self-emptying practices having on the community around Webb Chapel? What effects do you see the model having on guests who visit at Webb Chapel?

What stands out in your mind as the most important thing you have learned from this experience?

Would you be willing to facilitate a small group of members in exploring the model?

APPENDIX C

Recommendations for Developing Self-Emptying Practices
at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ

Submitted to the Webb Chapel Eldership

December, 2008

By

An Incarnational Ministry Model Team:

Bert Alexander
Hai Cao
David Day
Ronald Dunn
Greg Hargis
Bondey Mays
Jan Mays
Henry Roncancio

Recommendations for Developing a Model for and Incarnational Ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday afternoons from August 31 through October 19 of 2008, Bert Alexander guided a team of Webb Chapel members through a study the self-emptying practices of Jesus emphasized in Philippians 2. This study¹ examined the self-emptying practices used by Jesus primarily in Philippians and in the gospel of Mark as a model for the modern Christian to understand and emulate the same practices today here at Webb Chapel. In the following presentation, the team reveals its findings from the eight week study as well as recommendations for further practices to promote a spirit of self-emptying at Webb Chapel. The team humbly makes these suggestions, which were developed in a spirit of self-emptying practice during the sessions.

SELF-EMPTYING AT WEBB CHAPEL

The Webb Chapel congregation has remained for over half a century in the same location. As of this writing, some charter members still regularly attend worship services, and many other members have been at Webb Chapel for multiple decades. Webb Chapel has a long history of unselfishly giving support to missionaries who have worked all over the world, and the congregation has maintained the relationships with some of these mission points for over thirty years. From the early days of struggle and frugality to the days when Webb Chapel counted its membership above seven hundred to the present time when Webb Chapel seeks to find positive ways in which to engage an ever-changing local neighborhood, the church has always been ready to deal with a challenge.

After the year 2000, the attendance and contribution at Webb Chapel went into a declining pattern. With a current attendance of about four hundred on Sunday mornings, we have seen both the dynamics and the demographics change from the previous decade. As a large segment of our membership left for other congregations, Webb Chapel became more representative of the community in which our property is found: we are a congregation that is getting older with our Anglo members and younger with our Hispanic members. Though Webb Chapel maintains a fairly high percentage of members involved in some sort of ministry, for the most part participation in multiple ministries is in decline. Care Groups operate on a participation continuum ranging from quite involved to only meeting a few times per year. Nevertheless, several ministries inspire active and enthusiastic involvement, such as the Prime Time Cruisers and the Young Life Group.

¹ In partial fulfillment of the doctor of ministry requirements at Abilene Christian University.

At the beginning of this intervention, Bert Alexander asked the incarnational ministry model team to note “important dates or events in the life of Webb Chapel” on a congregational time line. Interestingly, the team perceived times of challenge as the most significant moments of our history, including events such as acquiring the property on which our facility was built, building the state-of-the-art auditorium, establishing and conducting the Mission Forum for almost forty years, placing Tony Coffey as a missionary in Ireland over thirty years ago, being part of the Continent of Great Cities missionary team in various South American mission points, building the fellowship hall after the “old house” was destroyed by lightning, and remodeling the auditorium in 2002.

Webb Chapel has always been willing to help those in need. During the hurricane season of 2005, our fellowship hall was prepared for use as an emergency shelter, and even though we received no evacuees, we still contributed almost \$30,000 in funds for disaster relief. However, as evidenced above, self-emptying seems to be perceived as “events” or “crisis” and not necessarily as a way of life which attempts to emulate the self-emptying practices of Jesus. During the final session on October 19, Bert Alexander asked the team, “How do you see self-emptying practices as a model for you to be more like Jesus?” The responses included:

If I truly empty myself of my humanity as Jesus did, then I will model Him. I will never achieve complete humility, but I will be better equipped to run the race.

The idea of self-emptying practices was foreign to me when we began. The idea of Jesus giving something up had not occurred to me in the same sense that we are to give up something for others. The self-emptying model has identified the smaller values needed to become more like Jesus.

Jesus emptied himself of himself. For me to follow this model, I would need to be more the humble servant, become selfless, and learn to give up my will, my rights, and my self-centeredness.

The model was a collaborative effort, rather than simply something that Bert Alexander taught the model team. The team developed the model heuristically by the team as it discussed and struggled with the concept of the self-emptying practices of Jesus. When asked, “What specific self-emptying practices does the model propose for the Webb Chapel congregation?” the model team responded:

We need to strive for a reduction of criticism, resentment and other human frailties that impede our progress toward true love for each other.

Learning to empty ourselves of pre-conceived cultural and doctrinal ideas is of vital importance. Empty ourselves of the conformity to our modern life style and open our hearts to be challenged by the “primitive” ways of Jesus.

The membership should develop a servant mentality and spirituality that would show in every endeavor and prevail in every relationship.

Through discussion and participation the team developed a model for self-emptying practices at Webb Chapel. The first step is to educate the congregation about what it means to be self-emptying. The team suggests ways in which self-emptying may be kept in front of the congregation. Although the team realizes that self-emptying is primarily about emulating the mind of Jesus, they do believe it can be promoted through opportunities to give sacrificially of self to others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR PROMOTING SELF-EMPTYING PRACTICES AT THE WEBB CHAPEL CHURCH OF CHRIST

- I. Self-Emptying, Revealing the Mind of Christ. The incarnational model team reached a consensus that self-emptying practices can best be brought before the congregation by teaching and promoting it through classes and sermons. The emphasis should be focused upon Philippians 2 and examples of Jesus' self-emptying practices in the gospels, primarily Mark.
 - A. Sunday Morning Sermon Series
 1. Themes from Philippians and Mark
 - a. Self-emptying explained
 - b. Promoting the mind of Christ instead of the selfish mind
 - c. Self-emptying as a life-style rather than as a program
 2. Self-emptying as a way of being Jesus in the community
 - a. Opportunities for service
 - b. Expansion of self-emptying into new ministries
 - B. Sunday Morning and Wednesday Evening Class Series to Build on Themes Developed in Sermon Series

- II. Self-Emptying, Nurturing the Mind of Christ. The incarnational model team realizes that unless self-emptying practices are kept in front of the collective eyes of the congregation, they could simply disappear from memory of the individual members. The team suggests various methods or activities to serve as mediums for keeping self-emptying practices ever before us.
 - A. Keeping Self-Emptying Practices in Front of the Congregation
 1. Small Groups
 - a. Several incarnational model team members willing to facilitate small group in self-emptying practices
 - b. Could be promoted during Care Group meetings
 2. Online discussions

- a. Using threaded conversations with Webb Chapel webpage to engage both Webb Chapel members and those who are not part of our fellowship
- b. Encourage direct conversations by phone or in person over a meal
- B. Daily reminders and reflections
 - 1. Spiritual reflection
 - a. Using church webpage to send devotional material to members
 - b. Assign scriptures for daily prayer in conjunction with the sermon
 - 2. Use of visual aids to promote self-emptying practices
 - a. Photographs in worship bulletin/on auditorium screens depicting members in self-emptying practices
 - b. Use of bulletin boards
 - c. Weekly self-emptying thought posted on webpage

III. **Self-Emptying, Emulating the Mind of Christ.** While the team realizes that self-emptying is a mindset, way of life, and most importantly, an attitude instead of an action, nevertheless there still needs to be an emphasis on corporately scheduled events to promote self-emptying practices. These events will serve as reminders and keep the concept of self-emptying practices before the congregation.

- A. Weekend retreats for adults to work on self-emptying practices
- B. Special days of emphasis on self-emptying practices
 - 1. Entire Sunday service planned around self-emptying practices, including sermon with special guest speaker, combined adult classes and fellowship meal
 - 2. Saturday evening activity emphasizing self-emptying practices
- C. Needs Analysis Survey
 - 1. Conduct spiritual giftedness survey to understand better talents and gifts of members
 - 2. Emphasize spiritual gifts of individuals while promoting self-emptying practices.

CONCLUSION

It is not the intention of the incarnational ministry model team to presume to tell the leadership at Webb Chapel how the congregation should be led, nor do we believe that this model will be readily accepted by the entire membership at Webb Chapel. Realizing that the leaders face daunting responsibilities as an eldership, we present our

recommendations with the hope of strengthening the body, not fracturing it. We do believe that the self-emptying practices of Jesus represent a lifestyle that all Christians should attempt to emulate; they are not presented merely a program to facilitate a membership drive. Self-emptying practices are best promoted in conjunction with an understanding of spiritual formation and the disciplines that nurture that formation.

The team intends to present this model to the elders for their review. When asked, “What effects do you see the model of self-emptying practices having on the community around Webb Chapel?” one of the team members responded:

If guests and others in the community see a selfless, serving body at Webb Chapel, they will want to be a part of it.

As we worked together in the team meetings, it became apparent that while the recommendations look good in theory, someone has to make sure that there is guidance throughout the process of implementation. Bert Alexander wants to continue in a lead position with this ministry and will rely heavily upon the members of the incarnational ministry team to promote and nurture self-emptying practices at Webb Chapel. For questions or comments regarding this project, please contact Bert Alexander at 972-985-4517, or bert@webbchapel.org.

FURTHUR READING

Alexander, L. Bert *Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ*, DMin thesis, Abilene Christian University 2008. The five chapters are presently complete which present the (1) Ministerial Context, (2) Theological Perspectives, (3) Methodology, (4) Results, and (5) Implications.

Bullard, George W. “Congregational Passages” in *National Consultant for Denominational Transformation, Southern Baptist Convention* (August, 1996-June, 1998), unnumbered pages.

Coakley, Sarah. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Knapp, Daniel T. “The Self-Humiliation of Jesus Christ and Christ-Like Living: A Study of Philippians 2:6-11.” *Evangelical Journal* 14-15 (1996-1997): 80-95.

Van Gelder, Craig. *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Developing a Model for an Incarnational Ministry at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ.

Principal Investigator: Bert Alexander
Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors: Dr. Charles Siburt
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University
Dr. Fred Aquino
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

Introduction: I understand that I have been asked to participate on a team to develop a model for incarnational ministry in order to promote self-emptying practices at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to work with a team of diverse church members to develop a model for incarnational ministry in order to promote self-emptying practices at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ. The project will encompass reflection upon biblical concepts, group discussion, and weekly practices and exercises to be completed both inside and outside of the meeting sessions. These sessions will conclude with the development of an incarnational ministry model promoting self-emptying practices which will be presented to the church elders.

Procedures: The project will enlist approximately twelve church opinion leaders from a list compiled by the ministry staff. The staff was requested to propose leaders representative of the congregation as a whole. The project will entail eight one-hour sessions on Sunday afternoon, beginning on August 31, 2008, and ending on October 19, 2008. Signing this document signifies that you understand that your opinions may be incorporated into this thesis including the model that will be presented to the church eldership.

Potential Risks: There are no identifiable risks to participants in this research study. All published participant quotations will remain anonymous.

Potential Benefits: Your participation may benefit you by: (1) revealing more clearly God's call to have the mind of Christ; (2) enhancing relationships with other members of the incarnational ministry team; and (3) forming a model to help the congregation become more self-emptying.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

Rights of Research Participants: I have read the above. Mr. Alexander has explained the nature of the group and has answered my questions. He has informed me of the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research.

I understand that I do not have to participate in this research and can withdraw from this research project at any time.

I understand that all of the information I provide will remain confidential.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Alexander at 972-241-3293 or by e-mail at bert@webbchapel.org.

Signature of Participant _____ . Date _____

Signature of Principle Investigator _____ .

APPENDIX E

FIELD NOTES CODING PROTOCOL

1. Themes of self-emptying that surfaced during *lectio divina*
 - The self-emptying nature of Jesus
 - Emptying of the desire to use power over another
 - Emptying of the desire to be renowned
 - Emptying of the desire to be selfish
 - Self-emptying as an alternative for humanity
 - Love God with whole heart
 - Love neighbor as self
2. Themes of self-emptying for Webb Chapel (attitude of Christ)
 - Attitude of denying self
 - Removal of all attitudes of preferring one person over another
 - Removal of pride or boasting of corporate self
 - Removal of self-sufficiency or self-dependence
 - Attitude of awareness of needs of others
 - Developing the vision to see others as Jesus sees them
 - Developing the desire for humility and sacrifice
 - Developing the understanding of incarnational ministry that
 - Encourages sacrifice and servanthood
 - Attitude of self-emptying becoming model for Webb Chapel
 - Understanding that self-emptying goes beyond the church calendar and budget
 - Understanding that self-emptying is more than outreach which
 - Does not connect relationally with community
 - Understanding that self-emptying is not a phase or a fad
 - Understanding that self-emptying is imitating and emulating Jesus

BRIEF VITA

L. Bert Alexander was born in Morrilton, Arkansas on May 25, 1954 and was reared in nearby Casa, Arkansas. He began his collegiate education at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, but transferred to Freed-Hardeman College to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. After owning a contracting business in Plano, Texas, he entered the ministry at the White Rock Church of Christ in Dallas in 1995. In 2000, while ministering at the White Rock congregation, he earned a Master of Science in Biblical and Related Studies from Abilene Christian University. Later that year he began working for Webb Chapel Church of Christ and earned a Master of Divinity from Lipscomb University. Bert married Cheryl Campbell in 1976 and together they have two daughters, Allison Kirksey, and Ashley Miller, who both reside in the Houston, Texas area. Bert currently serves as the church life minister at the Webb Chapel Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas.