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God's Story, Our Story Telling, Re-Telling and Re-Storying

Rev. Kara Carter¹

In this paper I will discuss three paradigm shifts that inform my theology of ministry and a current leadership challenge. I will present an Anabaptist ecclesial perspective and discuss ways in which institutional and social movement values impact the current ministry context. I will discuss adaptive leadership theory and how it relates to culture change within an organizational system. In closing, I will provide an overview of narrative leadership and its rich potential as pastors adapt and respond to changing ministry landscape. It is the thesis of this paper that narratives are deeply embedded in congregational culture and when examined narratively, unpacked, and re-storied, it is possible to lead culture change.

Formation of Vocational Identity

If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path. (Quotation attributed to Joseph Campbell. Original source unknown.)²

An unexpected encounter with a visiting African Anabaptist Bishop in the late 1990s sowed seeds of change and illuminated new steps for my path. Following Sunday morning worship, providentially, the steps of the guest preacher and my own converged at the coffee maker. In response to pleasantries, Bishop Mulandi asked me, "Are you the youth pastor here?" "No," I responded with a chuckle. He inquired, "Is God calling you to be a youth pastor?" Taken quite aback I was quick to respond, "Oh, I don't think so." The Bishop prodded even further asking, "But you don't know for sure, do you?" My discomfort spiraled. "I'm not qualified for that" I answered, hopeful to redirect this strange unsettling conversation. But Bishop Mulandi would not be dissuaded. He even succeeded in getting in the last word, prophetically stating, "We are never qualified for where God calls us to go."

At the time of this unexpected encounter, I was enjoying a fulfilling career spanning some 15 years as an Optometric Assistant / Office Manager. Over many years I had come to embrace my career of working with the public as a call from God. I had come to understand that my vocation involved caring for and meeting the needs of patients/the public, overseeing administrative details, and training and supporting staff. Such were tangible ways I lived into "sentness" as a disciple of Jesus, sharing my gifts, and participating in the mission of God.

Engagement in and with the world beyond the four walls of the church are seeds that were sown during formative years of my faith development. A family "sweet corn" project, in support of a global mission, formatively planted seeds of mission within me, that is,

¹ PhD in Human Relationships – TH740A: Comprehensive Exam: Theory & Praxis, Winter/Spring 2018.

² Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone*. (New York: Random House, 2017), 40.

participation in the restoring, reconciling, and saving purposes of God. Mysteriously these seeds took root and sprouted despite a core theological teaching that permeated the Mennonite church of those formative years: separation from the world. Articulated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2, “do not be conformed to the world but be transformed through the renewing of your mind,” emerged as a core Anabaptist ecclesiological distinctive and was proclaimed from the pulpit during my formational years. So foundational was separation “from the evil and wickedness which the devil has planted in the world,” it was articulated in the very first Anabaptist Confession of Faith, *The Schleithem Articles of 1527*.³

Up until the unexpected conversation with Bishop Mulandi, I had never imagined myself called to ministry within the church beyond teaching children, committee involvement, or leadership role with youth. This belief in large part was resultant from a significant congregational conflict in the early 1980’s. At that time, during a pastoral search process, diverse theological perspectives arose with heated vigour when my home congregation was invited to consider calling a woman to serve in the lead pastoral role. Strong opposition to women in pastoral ministry was voiced by a segment of the congregation. Biblical passages including 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 and 1 Timothy 2: 8-15 were used to justify opposition to women in roles of authority and pastoral ministry. Sadly, some families left the church due to a lack of openness to women in pastoral leadership roles. Strong patriarchal ethos and biblical literalism articulated by some in the congregation was also deeply embedded in my family of origin and that of my husband’s which was rooted in the Amish tradition

The conversation with the Bishop touched a deep place within my spirit. Unknown to the Bishop, I had a growing awareness that the Spirit of God was stirring something deep within. A call was evolving, including a prompt to further education. God’s Spirit was moving, poised to do a new thing. Could it be that I was about to perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19) From the coffee maker conversation, I rejoined my family and, almost immediately, the chairperson of the Staff Relations Committee joined our table, asking for my input regarding the hiring of a youth pastor! The congregation had long been served by one full-time male pastor. I was informed that recently leadership had begun exploring the possibility of hiring additional ministry staff. Later that day, as I reflected upon these unexpected encounters, something new and disturbing welled up. Was it possible God *was* calling me to serve in a congregational ministry position? Surely not, I tried to reason. The thought was terrifying. My experience and training too limited, I believed. After a lengthy discernment process including prayer, reflection, and conversation with mentors, I applied for and was interviewed for a half-time youth pastor position in my home congregation. While I was not offered the position, personal learnings were deep. This was the first time I had embarked on this path, stepping out in faith, allowing myself to be vulnerable and brave enough to express a growing and emerging sense of call and vocational identity as a ministering person *within* the church. While vulnerability did not feel like courage, this critical step opened a pathway for further steps.

Researcher and author Brené Brown asserts the “foundation of courage is vulnerability – the ability to navigate uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.”⁴ According

³ Karl Koop, ed. *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition 1527 – 1660* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 25-32.

⁴ Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, 144.

to Brown, “vulnerability is the birthplace of love, joy, trust, intimacy, courage – everything that brings meaning to our life.”⁵ Such values also inform the path of discipleship. For Brown, living vulnerably and authentically is to choose courage over comfort, to choose practicing “your values rather than simply professing them.”⁶ Such wisdom is echoed in the ancient words of St. Irenaeus who was quoted stating, “the glory of God is the human fully alive.”⁷

About one year after these unexpected conversations, the chairperson of the Staff Relations Committee approached me again informing me that he was serving as a Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) resource person, supporting a local congregation in a search process to fill a youth pastor position. The chairperson asked my permission to take my name to the search committee for discernment. Following an in-depth process including candidating, I accepted a call at the age of forty to serve as half time youth pastor and, at the same time, I enrolled as a theology student at the University of Waterloo.

Scripture reveals that God moves in and through history, cultures, and people. God calls individuals into God's service, into particular activities, and ministries. The biblical narrative is rich with accounts of God calling unexpected ones, the least likely ones. God called Moses and Sarah to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12). God directed Moses to liberate slaves from oppression and Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3). God called Mary a young peasant girl to bear the Christ-child (Luke 1). With the coming of Jesus, the incarnation and full revelation of God, God's passion for reconciliation with all of humanity and the world has been made known. During his earthly ministry, Jesus called regular folks to follow (Matthew 4: 19) and to embrace a life of discipleship (John 20:21). From its early roots, Anabaptist/Mennonites held “that the call to conversion and discipleship was a lifelong journey with Jesus that would involve transformation through the faith community's communal practices of worship, ministry, and mission.”⁸ Furthermore, through the “Holy Spirit's power God's people are loved, redeemed, called, and sent into this world to participate in God's mission of reconciling all people to God, humanity, and creation (Romans 8).”⁹

The invitation to follow Jesus is at the root of my vocational calling and identity. I chose “believers baptism” at age fourteen. In the Mennonite Church, baptism is a public declaration and commitment made before the church bearing witness to the individual's covenant with God to walk in the ways of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism by water is a sign of repentance and the forgiveness of sins through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Cleansed by water, believers are incorporated into Christ's body on earth, the church (1 Cor. 12: 1-11). Adult baptism is a kind of initiation rite “not only into the institutional church, but into the Mennonite community.”¹⁰ Over time I have come to understand baptism as an individual response to the grace and love of God, which God pours out to all of creation.

⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷ Quotation attributed to St. Irenaeus (125CE – 202 CE), accessed March 1, 2018.

<https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/man-fully-alive-is-the-glory-of-god-st-irenaeus>.

⁸ *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA* (Harrisburg VA: MennoMedia, 2014), 13.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ James A. Reimer, *Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2003), 58.

First and foremost, calling is of God. Journeying deeply into my vocational identity as a ministering woman has involved claiming my power for the sake of my call to ministry and for the purpose of nurturing a faith community's calling. Theologian Karoline Lewis asserts that the power of women in ministry "does not need to be enabled, affirmed, or empowered – it just is."¹¹ This power as Lewis references is "premised on the true power of God's love to change the world."¹² According to Lewis "true power comes from identity and authenticity."¹³ Claiming power from within is grounded in the truth of who I am: authenticity, personhood, and identity. Identity, authenticity and personhood are deeply rooted in who God has created me to be and the purposes for which God calls me.

God's calling extends beyond myself as an individual. God extends a collective call for congregation. Pastorally, I invite the congregation to engage with the question: "What does it mean to be faithful, outward- focused disciples of Jesus in a 2018 Mennonite context?" Call involves a context and a community. According to the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, "the church is called to live and minister as Christ lived and ministered in the world."¹⁴ Varieties of gifts and ministries in the church are given for the common good.¹⁵

Frederick Buechner is quoted saying, "The place God calls you is the place where your deepest gladness and the world's deepest hunger meet."¹⁶ During the nearly seven years that I served as youth pastor (2001 – 2008), I experienced a call to lead an outward focused ministry, joining God beyond the four walls of the church. Personal engagement in the world wells up a deep joy from within and meets tangible needs of the world. The needs of the world call out the leader within me. The ache of the world calls out the Healer within me. Ongoing development as a missional pastoral leader is grounded in Scripture. Jesus sent "the 70" out in pairs to the surrounding villages and towns with a message that characterizes God's reign, "Peace to this house!" (Luke 10: 1-11). The specificity of "being sent" shapes a life of engagement in the world that God desires to transform as well. Biblical teaching, worship, spiritual formation within the congregational setting is grounding from which God "sends" disciples into the world to further God's mission of restoration and healing.

When God calls, God equips and empowers the "unqualified." Call contains both inward and outward aspects. Inwardly I have experienced God's call to ministry. Outwardly, the church has affirmed giftedness for the role and tasks of pastoral leadership. Following seven years of youth ministry I sensed God calling once again. Following a season of discernment, I completed my pastoral term as well as undergraduate degree, a BA in Religious studies, (University of Waterloo, 2008), and I enrolled in further theological studies in the Master of Divinity program (Waterloo Lutheran Seminary 2008-2011). Surprisingly, a fellow-student, a young woman enrolled in the M.Div. program, and I became reacquainted the first weeks of seminary studies. Providentially, we had both been present for the tenuous congregational meeting more than thirty years previous. While her path had led her from a

¹¹ Karoline Lewis, *She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), xxii.

¹² Ibid., xxiii.

¹³ Ibid., xxiii.

¹⁴ Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1996), 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (London: Mowbray, 1994).

Mennonite context to a Lutheran expression of faith, and my own steps had led to theological training in a Lutheran institution, both paths converged as we formally trained for ministry.

The multi-faith context at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary (WLS), supportive collegial relationships, and contextual ministry placements provided a rich learning and formative experience in which to further explore God's call to congregational ministry. On the day I commenced from WLS, I received an invitation to interview for the full-time pastoral position. I accepted a call from the congregation in November 2011 and continue to serve there as lead pastor as the first full-time permanent lead pastor in the congregation's forty-three-year history.

While shaped and formed through the experience of congregational ministry, another formative experience began to unfold in 2013 when I was invited by MCEC leadership to participate in a one-year pastor cohort group as a participant in Pastor Stephen Drudge's doctoral studies. Drudge's research interests involved equipping Mennonite missional pastors in a post-Christendom context.¹⁷ Participation in Drudge's action reflection research project involved monthly gatherings with five other MCEC pastoral colleagues. Coaching support was provided by *The Missional Network* (TMN), a Canadian-based missional consultative group.¹⁸ Intentionally carved out space for directed readings, reflection, including the sharing of leadership autobiographies and the creation of adaptive leadership challenges, has shaped me as a ministering person and a missional leader. In 2015, I was invited by MCEC staff to give leadership to a pilot-project involving the equipping of congregational leaders, an iterative process proposed from Drudge's study. Drudge proposes that to, instill missional change deeply and more permanently within a congregational system, it best come from congregational leaders rather than the pastor.¹⁹ Rich learnings have evolved over the past years as Drudge and I, with ongoing coaching support from TMN, have sought to implement "Going Local" a missional project in which congregational leaders are invited to participate in cohort learning, growing in awareness to the presence and activity of God in order to join with God to further God's mission.

Unexpected conversations, a significant congregational conflict, and new pathways that have opened have deepened my sense of call, initiated by a holy God. God calls both men and women to follow Christ in order to participate in God's redemptive and reconciling purposes for the world. As the Apostle Paul writes,

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us, we entrust you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5: 17-20).

¹⁷ Stephen Drudge, "Developing Leadership Capacities for a post-Christendom context: Implementing and Evaluating a Mission Change Process with Mennonite Pastors" (DMin diss., Tyndale College, 2015).

¹⁸ *The Missional Network* (TMN) is a Canadian-based consultative group that fosters learning through engagement with denominational leadership, clergy, and lay leaders across North America. TMN promotes learning and partnering together so that the people of God might join with God in our local contexts.

¹⁹ Drudge, "Developing Leadership Capacities for a post-Christendom Context."

Current Context of Ministry

The congregation I serve was formed in September 1974. The early founders had a vision for a Mennonite congregation within the village limits at a time when many Mennonite families were travelling beyond the community to established Mennonite churches. The early founders were progressive, seeking a more flexible approach to church life and order. From its earliest beginnings they took pride in being a more inclusive, tolerant church in terms of ideas, theology, and people. Over the years, the congregation found a way to meaningfully blend diverse worship needs and successfully process the hiring of a female pastor.

The congregation I serve is like a diverse garden: an interconnected organizational system, grounded in love, sustained by God's Spirit, bearing good fruit. Anabaptist roots are healthy and deep: Christ-centeredness, centrality of Scripture, peace theology, and rich community life and mission extends into the surrounding neighbourhood and beyond. Worship and a congregational culture of caregiving nurtures the garden's spiritual growth. Over the years the congregation has grown in openness and inclusion, which has shaped a community church identity. Transplanted Christian traditions into the congregational garden have added beauty and diversity to the garden. Diverse interpretation of Scripture at times have been at the root of some misunderstandings and congregational conflict over the years.

The congregation has evolved as a worship-centered, programmatic, structure-oriented faith community. Strengthening children's and youth ministry has arisen as a priority in the past two congregational visioning processes. Today many MCEC congregations bridge two worlds. Many long-time faithful members live out of a centuries old culture of faithful weekly attendance, regular financial giving, and active engagement in the ministries of the church. In contrast, local community's building booms have not resulted in congregational growth. It is becoming evident that, no matter the programming, the church no longer "attracts" as it once did. Declining worship attendance and active participation across all ages is currently a source of anxiety in the congregation. The demographic that has most notably changed are the young-adult and young-family age groups. This has resulted in a shrinking junior Christian education department. These demographic changes are noted broadly across MCEC's one-hundred plus congregations. Indeed, Executive Minister David Martin, at a spring 2016 regional gathering, reported approximately half of MCEC are currently in "survival mode."²⁰

Cultural change, changing attendance and giving patterns contribute to congregational anxiety. Anxiety is expressed as lament for a past season in which children's programming and attendance was bustling with high attendance and activity. Holding onto their "success story" appears to be binding God's people, keeping them stuck within a limiting narrative. There is resistance from many to settle into this new season and new place, to "plant gardens and eat what they produce" (Jer. 29: 5).

The congregation in which I serve is highly structured, becoming legally incorporated in 2014. Incorporation emerged as a congregational goal from its 2007 visioning process. Two congregational business meetings are held each year and the majority of agenda items concern budget issues, compliance to structure, and building maintenance. Compliance to incorporation has emerged as primary focus for leadership to the point I have become

²⁰ David Martin, *Future Directions Task Force Meeting*, (Floradale Mennonite Church, ON) April 6, 2016.

curious whether compliance to structure has emerged as the mission, vision, and purpose of the congregation.

Following a congregational discernment process I was recommended for ordination and was subsequently ordained in April 2015. The roots of ordination, according to the Anabaptist tradition, are located in the Hebrew Scriptures in which “God instructed Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests for the congregation of God’s people (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8-10).”²¹ While the New Testament provides no clear instruction for ordination, it narrates several instances in which “Jesus and the church gave their blessing and confirmation to persons called and sent to represent God and the church in service and witness.”²² For example, Luke 9: 1-6 (mission of the twelve); Matthew 28: 16-20 (commissioning of the disciples); Jesus’ words to Peter (John 21: 15-19); Acts 6: 1-7 (seven chosen to serve).²³ Ordination according to the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* is a “one-time event, kept active by continuing service in and for the church.”²⁴

In Mennonite Church Canada congregations, ordination is understood as a “joint act of the congregation, the area conference, and the denomination which calls and appoints members to ongoing leadership ministry in the life and mission of the church.”²⁵ According to the *Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*, when the church ordains a man or woman to leadership ministry, it intends to: confirm the call of God, affirm the person for unique leadership gifts which one brings to ministry, and identify the person “as one who in some way represents God within the faith community.” Authority is granted, the congregation and person ordained enter a covenant of mutual accountability, and trust is declared in that the person’s leadership ministry is to build up the church for service in the world.²⁶

In the Mennonite church, ordination is not “a sacrament that effects change in the person being ordained.”²⁷ However, covenant experiences become life-shaping and identity-giving moments.²⁸ According to Mennonite polity, “Leadership ministry is anchored in one’s primary call to follow Christ.”²⁹

Liminal Space

Home for me is a nine-acre hobby farm which includes orchard, gardens, and pasture field for miniature goats and a miniature donkey. Being connected to the earth, nature, and the rhythms of seasonal change is deeply imprinted in my spirit, having grown up on a dairy farm. From my desk on the day of this writing, I soak in a thick glistening blanket of white which has drifted across countryside landscape as far as the eye can see. Mid-February crisp, barren days, display frosty glory and beneath the frozen earth, tulip bulbs await springtime warming. Wintertime is a season of beauty and barrenness, a season of waiting. Tree

²¹ Ibid., 18.

²² Ibid., 18.

²³ Ibid., 18.

²⁴ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 61.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶ *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership*, 38-39.

²⁷ Ibid., 38.

²⁸ Ibid., 38.

²⁹ Ibid., 39.

branches stand stark against winter sky and deep beneath the earth, dormant life awaits greening and growth.

In the opening verses of our sacred story we read about God's good creation and how it was experienced in a garden setting. God breathed all life into being and continues to tend the garden of creation with loving kindness. God sustains all with the Breath of Life, the Spirit. The wisdom writer of Ecclesiastes proclaims there is a "season for everything."³⁰ In congregational life, as in personal life and nature, the rhythm of changing seasons is constant. Some seasons are ripe for cultivating and sowing, some seasons ripe for growth and harvest. There are seasons of winter rest and seasons of spring greening. Late-February is a pre-spring season, a season of pre-newness. It is a liminal space, a time in-between, when growth lies fallow and untapped possibilities and potential lie in wait. Many are averse to being stuck in liminal spaces. According to church consultant Christine Beaumont, "Stuck seasons in the life of a congregation provoke feelings of helplessness, ambiguity, anxiety."³¹ At present, such is true for many congregations.

Contemplative writer Richard Rohr suggests liminal space is a position humans hate to inhabit, yet it is "where the biblical God is always leading them."³² Liminal space is "when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else."³³ Pastoral leadership in this liminal season involves attentiveness to the unique tasks of each season: winter rest, spring-time cultivation and sowing, summer-time growth, autumn harvest. In the current liminal space, I feel called to be attentive to shoots of new life, places that glimmer with God's presence and activity. I seek to gently tend the garden: sowing, pruning, and drawing the congregation's attention to the source of life, the Gardener. The current liminal space calls for me to be still and know God is God and I am not and to boldly proclaim Easter hope of new life and new possibilities as poetically penned by the song writer:

*In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed an apple tree;
in cocoons the hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free.
In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be;
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*³⁴

Roots of Leadership

Experiencing a secure place of belonging and connectedness through nurturing relationships within my first faith community formed spiritual roots that inform my leadership. As a teen, my family uprooted and moved to a new community. Being transplanted in this way resulted in a lengthy season of disorientation. Rootedness was tender, impacted by wounding experiences and loss. However, as the sunflower in its growing season turns its face toward the sun, I too turned toward Light and thus encountered the face of God turned toward me with love, grace, and care. Nourished, I grew in love for God and community and was strengthened to break new ground, a new path, stepping into my vocation which involved becoming unbound from a patriarchal

³⁰ Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8.

³¹ "Embracing Liminal Spaces," Susan Beaumont & Associates, LLC, accessed December 10, 2017. <http://susanbeaumont.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SB-Embracing-Liminal-Space>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Hymnal: A worship Book*. (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992), 614.

conservative theology, furthering education, speaking truth, and surrendering to the resurrection and life-giving movement of God's Spirit.

A Biblical story that informs my leadership is found in the Gospel of John chapter 11 in which one encounters a very human Jesus who weeps and raises his friend Lazarus from death to new life. The part of the story that most critically shapes my life and leadership is found in verses 43 and 44. In a loud voice Jesus cries out, "Lazarus come out!" Lazarus emerges from the tomb, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth. Jesus instructs the witnesses, "Unbind him, and let him go." Growth as a leader has involved bringing to consciousness the unconscious, deconstruction of narratives, and the construction of new narratives in order to live into a new future. As a disciple of Jesus, I seek to submit to the unbinding, transformative grace of God.

Analysis and Integration: *Paradigm shifts*

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, locally the Mennonite Church experienced a significant paradigm shift. Mennonite women began responding to God's call to serve in pastoral ministry in congregational settings. Women enrolled in theological studies, some trained for pastoral ministry, and some congregations extended a call to women to serve in pastoral roles. During the 1970s, three branches of Anabaptist Mennonites came together: the Ontario Mennonite Conference; the Western Ontario (Amish) Mennonite Conference; and the United Mennonite churches of Ontario (which had origins in the Russian Mennonite immigration to Canada).³⁵ Thus emerged the joint "inter-Mennonite Conference."³⁶ By 1982, at least one woman had been ordained in each branch of the church.³⁷ According to retired pastor Mary Schiedel, "Because it was a new experience for the church to have a woman as a minister, there was some confusion at times in the conferences and congregations, and also some pain – especially for the women involved."³⁸

Amidst this shifting paradigm, God's people wrestled theologically with interpretation of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, influences of the dominant culture including the women's movement, patriarchal hierarchy, and structure. It was a season in which God's people prayerfully discerned what it means to be the faithful people of God in a Mennonite context. In 2018, for the majority of MCEC congregations, calling women to lead pastoral roles no longer results in heated and tenuous theological debates as occurred in the past. Ultimately, the shift occurred.

Another paradigm shift is underway, re-forming the church. Nearly two decades ago, Mennonite Church Canada congregations were introduced to missional church concepts through a study guide.³⁹ While mission was not new for North American Mennonites, "the notion of speaking about mission with adjectives and adverbs instead of nouns and verbs" was very new.⁴⁰ The change of language articulated that mission is not simply a program of the church but its purpose. Indeed, "the vision of a missional church is that all members and

³⁵ Schiedel, Mary A. *Pioneers in Ministry: Women Pastors in Ontario Mennonite Churches, 1973-2003* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁹ Robert J. Suderman "Navigating the Missional Church" (Mennonite Church Canada, 2001), 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

actions of the church intentionally carry out the mission of God in the world.”⁴¹ In a February 20, 2018 interview with the author of the study guide, Jack Suderman said the task is not complicated: “the Kingdom of God is here and the church’s task is to form communities that reflect its presence. Period!”⁴²

Biblical and theological grounding for missional theology is based on Jesus’ definition of gospel as articulated in the Gospel of Mark: “After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel’”⁴³ God’s timing is here. God’s Kingdom is at hand and the mission of the church is to reflect the Kingdom’s presence. Jesus told stories and parables and painted word pictures to illustrate what it looks like when the Kingdom of God approaches. When the Kingdom appears: the sick are healed, fisher folk form communities, lepers are liberated, “the powerful show mercy and are full of compassion,” hungry people are fed, prisoners are set free, and true leadership is defined as servanthood, and God is worshipped.⁴⁴ When God’s Kingdom infuses a community lives are transformed. This is good news. God’s transformation comes through people, communities, and it needs to be enfolded. With the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus had to cut through layers of institution. Suderman, former executive secretary of Mennonite Church Canada, suggests that in our time we may actually have more layers.⁴⁵

The current missional paradigm shift is led by denominational leadership. Pastors and congregations are invited to make the shift from a chaplaincy leadership model in which congregations organize and identify as centers for nurture and worship to a missional identity in which congregations are structured and identify as centers for mission. Chaplaincy leadership focuses upon meeting its members’ needs, performing rituals, comforting people in times of crisis, and passing along faith to children. While chaplaincy is a vital calling and function of the church, MCEC congregations are currently being equipped and encouraged to live more fully into their identity as “sent” communities which reflect the values of God’s counter-cultural kingdom. Martin asserts, “the focus and target [have] been to help congregations to think beyond themselves, to see themselves as less centered on self-care and more focused on engaging their faith in the marketplace, with their neighbours.”⁴⁶

A third paradigm shift underway is related to institutionalized religion. Author and scholar Diana Butler Bass specializes in American religion and culture. Butler Bass asserts, “The 1970’s, were a time of profound change, a rearrangement of social relationships, a time of cultural upheaval and transformation.”⁴⁷ Accordingly, social, political, and the spiritual life of culture were not left untouched.⁴⁸ Butler Bass contends, “Institutions and practices that once composed what was ‘normal’ in American life began a prolonged period of decline,” a phenomenon that continues today.⁴⁹ Phyllis Tickle, former religion editor of *Publishers*

⁴¹ Drudge, “Developing Leadership Capacities for a post-Christendom Context,” 9.

⁴² Robert J. Suderman, Conversation with author, February 20, 2018.

⁴³ Mark 1: 14-15.

⁴⁴ Robert J. Suderman, *Re-imagining the Church: Implication of Being a People in the World*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 6.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Suderman, Conversation with author, February 20, 2018.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The end of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Weekly, and others assert the Christian church is undergoing transformation as great as or greater than the 16th century Reformation.⁵⁰ The Christian church is in the midst of significant hinge moment. As this transformation unfolds, leaders are becoming acutely aware that old church institutions are no longer sustainable and are even failing. According to Butler Bass:

*American churches were organized on the same principles and structures as were twentieth-century American corporations. Beginning around 1890, denominations built massive bureaucratic structures, modeling themselves after American businesses, complete with corporate headquarters, program divisions, professional development and marketing departments, franchises (parish churches), training centers, and career tracks.*⁵¹

For a time, organized religion worked well. Even today, structure and organization is necessary. However, as evidenced at my current congregation, the business of the church, including the maintenance of structures and compliance to incorporation, can risk replacing the vision, mission, and purpose of the church. Missiologist and TMN Consultant Alan Roxburgh asserts, “the church was a dominant institutional structure of the West through to the first half of the twentieth century, when that dominance began to evaporate.”⁵² Roxburgh argues that institutional structure is increasingly “irrelevant to large percentages of people across Europe and North America.”⁵³ Indeed, in a context of significant cultural change, it has become “evident that structure and institutions that once served us so well are no longer producing the results we have come to expect or they seem to be a primary block to any real change.”⁵⁴ Roxburgh is bold to suggest “structures and institutions are themselves the problem and in need of either being changed or discarded.”⁵⁵

Alan Hirsch, founding director of *Forge Mission Training Network* contends, “Institutions and organization are initially set up in order to fill a necessary religious and social function and to provide some sort of structure support for whatever that function requires.”⁵⁶ Indeed, “all living systems require some form of structure in order to maintain and perpetuate their existence and while it is entirely true that structure does not in itself create life (as in a machine), without it life cannot exist for very long.”⁵⁷

The “solution” to the current unravelling that is occurring for the church is not as simple as discarding the institution and structure. Organizational change and the implementation of new programs and strategies will also not adequately address the challenges the church is encountering today. As God draws the church into an unknown future, many are asking “what kind of future do we have?” As a pastoral leader, I seek to be attentive to ways the institution can take on a life of its own and become an end rather than

⁵⁰ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

⁵¹ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion*, 71-72.

⁵² Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁶ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 187.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

a means to an end. When such occurs, the institution and its structures become a barrier rather than facilitator to further God's mission.

As a pastoral leader, I am increasingly aware of the tension between missional identity and institutional identity. Suderman, in his book *Re-imagining the Church: Implication of Being a People in the World*, asserts that "good words are used to talk about Jesus – radical, revolutionary, counter-cultural, subversive, prophetic, alternative. Not so good words are used to talk about the church – institutional, bureaucratic, self-serving, conservative, slow, irrelevant, limited, calcified, resistant to change, out of date."⁵⁸ This tension, I believe, is reflected within today's culture. In Canada, "a large majority (80%) of our population identifies itself as 'Christian', but a declining minority (16%) says that it is connected to the church. In other words, 64% of Canadian prefer Christianity without the church."⁵⁹ According to sociologist Reginald Bibby's research, 20 percent of Canadians attend worship services weekly.⁶⁰ Missiologist Alan Roxburgh writes, "if you were born after 1984, there is less than a 10 percent chance you are in church today."⁶¹

While numerous studies have been conducted to identify influences and the root causes of this shifting trend, one must wonder whether God's people over time have lost touch with the purpose of the church. Is the church's purpose solely about meeting its members' needs or performing certain spiritual tasks for congregants such as marriages, burials, baptisms? Is it the church's purpose solely to comfort people in times of crisis and train "children in the customs of faith," a chaplaincy model of church? While these ministries are crucial for faith communities, pastoral leaders must proclaim and articulate the purpose, vision, and mission of the church.

The chaplaincy model of ministry is a familiar one. Diana Butler Bass suggests, characteristic of chapel-style churches, that "members *receive* customs, traditions, and beliefs rather than create new ones."⁶² Chapel religion, "assumes that the surrounding culture is friendly and supportive of the congregation – which tends to be a homogeneous, closed system."⁶³ The "chapel-style" worked for a long time within a particular social structure and was practiced regardless of denomination. Some would argue this model is incomplete. According to Suderman, "the church is meant to be an alternative community; subverting the values of our dominant society with kingdom of God priorities. It is to be radical counter-cultural, and prophetic. It is to be a mobile and portable reservoir of kingdom-living that can be present and contextualized everywhere. When this happens, the gospel is proclaimed."⁶⁴ The church is called by God "to live and minister as Christ lived and ministered in all the world."⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Suderman, *Re-imagining the Church*, 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰ Reginald Bibby, *A new day: the resilience and restructuring of religion in Canada*. (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2012).

⁶¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 6.

⁶² Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶⁴ Suderman, *Re-imagining the church*, 3.

⁶⁵ "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective," 40.

Missional Theology

The missional theological framework is grounded in the Trinitarian model *missio Dei*: God the Father sends the Son; the Father and the Son send the Spirit; the Father and Son and the Spirit send the church into the world.⁶⁶ Thus the church comes to understand itself as a “sent people.”⁶⁷ Missional is not a new construct. Rather it is a renewed vision of the biblical narrative. The *missio Dei* framework emerged from the foundational work of Lesslie Newbigin, an English missionary. Upon returning to his home country in the mid 1950s, Newbigin discovered the west was a more difficult mission field than India.⁶⁸ Newbigin’s extensive work of articles and books, beginning in 1933 and continuing until his death in 1999, provide a theological basis and foundation for missional theology. The thrust of Newbigin’s work which other missiologists have adopted “began to construct a new paradigm for mission, one whereby mission would be indispensable to the being of the church, and one that might release new energy for the contemporary mission of the church.”⁶⁹

Guder’s book *Missional Church: A Vision for Sending of the Church in North America*, published in 1998, emerged from a study and research process initiated by the *Gospel and Our Culture Network*, which had evolved from Newbigin’s work.⁷⁰ Guder was convinced that a theological revolution was needed and suggested that as “denominational and centralized structures diminish in importance and power, local congregations are beginning to see their own context as their mission.”⁷¹

Suderman’s 1991 document: *Navigating the Missional Church: Understanding the Journey*” was ground breaking for Mennonite Church Canada congregations.⁷² According to Suderman, “If God initiates mission, then our role is to respond to God’s initiatives.”⁷³ Suderman articulates the denominational shift from that of the popular chaplaincy model of leadership to a missional leadership model. This transition is also captured by missiologist Alan Roxburgh’s critical question: “How do we transition from a consumer model of church to one that is essentially missional in nature?”⁷⁴

In a telephone interview October 12, 2017, missiologist Alan Roxburgh said, “missional has emerged has yet one more way to ‘fix the billboard,’ that is, the church.”⁷⁵ Roxburgh explains his statement in this way, referencing a conversation with Sally Mann, *Journal of Missional Practice* (JMP) editorial team member.⁷⁶ Mann attended a fall 2017 “Think Tank” in which the editorial team listened to stories from various people, suggesting

⁶⁶ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁶⁷ Darrell L. Guder, Lois Barrett, Inagrace T. Dietterich, George R. Hunsberger, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁹ Darren Sarisky, “The Meaning of the *missio Dei*: Reflections on Lesslie Newbigin’s Proposal That Mission.” *Missiology: An International Review* Vol. 42 No. 3 (2014): 258. doi:10.1177/0091829613497465.

⁷⁰ Guder, et. al, *Missional Church*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷² Robert J. Suderman, *Navigating the Missional Church*, Mennonite Church Canada, 2001.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006). xiii.

⁷⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh, Interview by author, Wellesley, October 12, 2017.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

existing structures and the continued unravelling of the Protestant churches is preoccupying leaders. In response Mann reflects:

The most compelling picture that came to my mind at the 2017 Think Tank was that of a dilapidated billboard with a beautiful view beyond. Broader Western imaginations, our constructions, the ways we expect to see God to work and the ecclesial structure that we have relied upon to 'do mission', are falling apart. Some might feel called to try and repair them, to make them work again; to do more of the same, only better. Perhaps this is because we have been slow to notice the beautiful view behind the billboard? Could it be that what looked so 'set in stone' in our ways of thinking about church and mission were temporary constructions of our own making; perhaps useful for a time, but disassembling now. How should we feel about this? One option is to embrace the shift; to be hopeful. Beyond this deconstruction, if we attend well, do not panic or attempt to seize back agency, signs of something new and beautiful might be emerging.⁷⁷

I affirm that many church leaders are deeply invested in “fixing” the billboard. Leaders fixate on the billboard mulling over “fix it” questions and strategies. Roxburgh asserts it is vital to attend to a different conversation. According to TMN, the primary location of God is not in the church, but in the world. Therefore, to shape the church for mission, one must start with God, asking God questions rather than asking “church” questions.⁷⁸ Additionally, it is crucial to grow in our capacity to identify the presence and activity of God within the world in order to join with God and further God’s mission.⁷⁹ This represents a tension for Anabaptist Christians who have historically been suspicious of “the world.”

God is a sending God, active and at work within the church *and* the world through the sustaining and life-giving power and presence of the Spirit. It is not so much that the church has a mission. The mission of God has a church and the “church is a participant in God’s mission (*missio Dei*).”⁸⁰ Such a stance prioritizes the activity of God’s Spirit. Accordingly, “the church finds its location in the world through discerning the Spirit.”⁸¹ To shape mission, therefore, we must start with “God and who God [he] is in the world and only then ask how the church is to respond.”⁸² According to Roxburgh, “The Spirit is disrupting and calling our churches into a new imagination about what it means to follow the way of Jesus.”⁸³ Rather than seeking ways to “fix” the church, Roxburgh suggests the church needs to engage in a different kind of question: “How do we discern what God is doing ahead of us in our neighbourhood and communities and join with God there?”⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Alan Roxburgh. “Outside the Walls and Beyond the Billboard.” *Journal of Missional Practice*. November 2017: Accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.journalofmissionalpractice.com/billboard/>.

⁷⁸ Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking the Church, Changing the World*, ix.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸⁰ David E. Fitch “The Other Missional Conversation: Making Way for the Neo-Anabaptist Contribution to the Missional Movement,” *Missiology: An International Review* Vol. 44 No. 4 (2016), 468.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 468.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 468.

⁸³ Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking the Church, Changing the World*, viii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

Anabaptist Ecclesiology

The church is the creation of God, birthed at Pentecost (Acts 2) and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Anabaptist church, emerged in the historical context of the Reformation nearly 500 years ago, as a “baptizing movement.”⁸⁵ Young scholars, including Conrad Gebel, Felix Manz, George Blauroch, studied Scripture and became increasingly convinced that infant baptism lacked biblical support. For the early Anabaptists, it was their “rejection of infant baptism and their insistence on baptizing believers (even if they had been baptized as infants) that prompted their opponents to label them ‘Anabaptists’ (‘rebaptizers’).”⁸⁶ In the 16th century, baptizing infants incorporated them into a Christian society. For Anabaptists, water baptism “was reserved for those who could choose to follow Jesus and commit themselves to the community of the church.”⁸⁷ Accordingly they did not regard this as a *rebaptism*, for they claimed “infant baptism was *no baptism as all*.”⁸⁸ Baptizing believers and tying the rite to entry into the church “challenged the way in which church membership had been understood during the Christendom era. Believers baptism meant a believers church, not a territorial church; entered by choice, not birth; requiring active participation, not just attendance. It also meant that discipleship was not a high calling for monks and nuns but expected of *all* believers.”⁸⁹

Anabaptist theologian and historian C. Arnold Snyder writes,

All farmers know that in order to grow healthy plants that bear fruit, three things are necessary: good seed, good soil, and careful cultivation. The choice of seed is crucial. Anyone who plants a mango seed and hopes to harvest oranges will be very disappointed. No amount of fertilizer will change the nature of the plant, contained as it was in the seed. But choosing and planting the right seed is not sufficient. The seed must be planted in fertile ground or it withers and dies, and the young plants must be nourished and cared for, if one expects to harvest fruit.”⁹⁰

When one thinks of the Anabaptist church as a plant, one notices that the seed first found fertile ground in the 16th century. Over centuries, soil has been cultivated, the seed has been nurtured, and it has produced an abundant crop.⁹¹ There are a number of distinct characteristics of Anabaptist seed. For Anabaptists, Scripture is foundational and the Holy Spirit is vital to interpretation. Whereas early Lutheranism taught *sola scriptura*, Anabaptists taught “Scripture and Spirit together.”⁹² Anabaptists, however, “found it necessary to modify their teaching” when “some individuals began prophesying and doing questionable things.”⁹³ Thus Scripture and Spirit began to be discerned in the gathered congregation of believers. The “process of congregational discernment provided one way of placing controls on the

⁸⁵ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1997), 8.

⁸⁶ Stuart Murray, *Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2010), 36.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁰ C. Arnold Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999), 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

interpretation of Scripture and prophecy”⁹⁴ Menno Simons (1496 - 1561), from whom Mennonites take their name, emphasized “all spiritual claims must be measured by the life and words of Christ.”⁹⁵ Simons’ emphasis on the life and teachings of Jesus are grounded the writings of Apostle Paul as recorded in 1 Corinthians 3: 11: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”

For Anabaptists, conversion and regeneration of the believer are core tenets of faith. The seed of faith is sown through the Word resulting in regenerative growth and fruit bearing. According to Simons, “The regenerating Word must first be heard and believed with a sincere heart before regeneration, the putting on of Christ, and the impulsion of the Holy Ghost can follow.”⁹⁶ It is through faith one “puts on” Christ, and receives power through the Holy Spirit. It is through grace, former sinners are made new, born again, regenerated thus fit to “interpret and understand God’s will in Scripture and to live new lives.”⁹⁷ Such life is the way of Christian discipleship.

Early Anabaptists were counter-cultural, biblically-grounded, and risk-takers. With bold faith they broke away from institutional norms of the day and ultimately paid harsh consequences, including loss of life. Early Anabaptism, as all social movements, required organization for survival. Over the centuries, movement ethos diminished and institutional strength and values emerged.

Theologian H. R. Niebuhr, quoted in *The Forgotten Way*, cites a number of essential differences between institution and movement. According to Niebuhr:

*The one is conservative, the other progressive; the one is more or less passive yielding to influences from the outside, the other is active in influencing rather than being influenced; the one looks to the past, the other the future. In addition, the one is anxious, the other is prepared to take risks, the one guards boundaries, the crosses them.*⁹⁸

Pastors as myself have been trained to lead amidst a complex organizational, institutional structure. One challenge related to institutionalized religion is the loss of core values, the spiritual grounding of the 16th century Anabaptist “movement.” North American Anabaptists today are not persecuted people. Indeed, Anabaptists are enculturated, powerful, and grounded in place. Have Anabaptists lost sight of their roots, embracing values of institution including strength, growth, stability? Has institutionalized religion choked out values of social movements?

In the current liminal space, discerning God’s activity in order to join with God to further God’s mission has arisen as a growing edge for the church. When “build it and they will come” no longer leads to expected outcomes, one must consider whether institutionalism has become a barrier, an obstacle to engage with and further God’s mission in the world.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁸ Alan, Hirsch, *The Forgotten Way*, 190.

Pastoral Theology

Amidst changing season for the church, God's people are once again wrestling with what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus in the current context. Authority of Scripture, interpretation of Scripture, and understanding the cultural context are crucial as God's people once again articulate the purpose and role of the church and its mission. The current paradigm shift is prompting reevaluation of pastoral leadership role and function, including a primary pastoral leadership metaphor, that of shepherd. Consequently, amidst the current paradigm shift, questions concerning the role and function of the institution and structures and how these may or may not be impeding participation in God's mission are crucial to address.

The Scripture I chose for ordination, which at the time resonated most deeply for me regarding the nature and purpose of pastoral ministry and my call to ministry, was John 21: 1-17. In John's post-resurrection account, Jesus tells Peter to "feed my lambs" and "tend my sheep." Clergy have long understood themselves as shepherds of the flock and congregants as sheep. This is a familiar model of ministry. Dr. Rev. Michael Nils, former president of Lutheran Theological Seminary (Saskatoon), in a sermon preached September 13, 2016 put forward that the dominant paradigm has become problematic, not just within the church but also beyond.⁹⁹ It is also problematic when the church looks outward at the culture as a source of decline within the church, yet fails to examine itself.

Is a new leadership metaphor needed at this time? For Nils, when a pastoral relationship is described as shepherd and sheep, one a human and others simply animals to be herded, it holds both pastors and congregants in expected functions and roles. For example, shepherds are expected to feed the sheep, thus making sheep dependent upon the shepherd. Shepherds take on a protective role, are in charge, decision makers, authoritative. As such, sheep are passive followers. Additionally, shepherds' focus is inward, directed toward caring for the flock and, accordingly, a power differential is at play. At a time when missional focus abounds and clergy continue to be trained according to the shepherd paradigm, it is helpful to consider a new metaphor, a new paradigm that respects the relationship between clergy and congregants.¹⁰⁰

The paradigm offered by Nils is rooted in a parable told by Jesus: "a sower that went out to sow the seed" (Luke 8:5). Is it possible to imagine ministry as sowing seed, the seed of salvation in Jesus Christ, the seed of the Kingdom of God breaking into our chaotic world? Ministry as sowing is a radical change in thinking, attitude, and relationship. It is also incomplete in that, according to Jesus' parable, God is the Sower, the Word is the seed, the disciple is the soil.

While the metaphor is complex it offers a helpful framework. Ministry as sowing is liberating in that the focus of ministry is not internal but rather external, the world. The relationship between clergy and congregant becomes mutual, since members are also sowers of seed. This redefines the pastor's role of training and equipping disciples to build up the body of Christ. Further, sowing involves reliance on God for sun, rain, and growth. Thus pastoral leaders are freed to sow seed as growth emerges through the work of the Holy Spirit. Bounty is resultant from the grace of God. The Apostle Paul grasped the dynamic of

⁹⁹ Michael Nils "A different way of thinking and being – a paradigm shift" (sermon preached Saskatoon: SK, Sept. 13, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

sowing, watering, and growth amidst changing context and uncertain season writing, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6).

The current liminal time calls for examination of primary metaphors and narratives of leadership and the church. In order to break out of paradigms that no longer work, a “primary challenge is to engage in culture change rather than simply to work harder at the organization, structure, and role issues.”¹⁰¹ Gilbert R. Rendle, former Consultant with Alban Institute, suggests this time of shifting paradigms “test our very assumptions about life.”¹⁰² The New Testament metaphor of the body of Christ presents the body as a community of systems, each part working together for the common good. Accordingly, it is vital to engage “congregations primarily as cultural systems rather than organizations.”¹⁰³ It is vital to cultivate new thoughts and habits. Radical change must start at the root.

Leadership Theory: Organizational Change

How will the church adjust and adapt in the current liminal space? What leadership is required to lead God’s people into an unknown future? Adaptive change holds the potential of transforming the present culture within our faith communities. Foremost educator on change and leadership, John P. Kotter, defines culture as “the norms of behavior and the shared values in a group of people. It’s a set of common feelings about what is of value and how we should act.”¹⁰⁴ Culture change involves transformation of beliefs, practices, habits, and attitudes.¹⁰⁵ The culture of an organization is “not only what we do but also why and how we do it.”¹⁰⁶ Culture change is hard. It takes time. Culture change “sticks” “only when it becomes ‘the way we do things around here.’”¹⁰⁷ Change theorist Samuel Chand suggests it takes about three years to change culture and involves four stages: knowledge, attitude, individual behaviour, resulting in institutional behaviour.¹⁰⁸ John Kotter suggests “until changes sink down deeply into the culture, which for an entire company can take three to ten years, new approaches are fragile and subject to regression.”¹⁰⁹

Adaptive leadership theory holds possibilities of transforming the present culture within our faith communities. Ronald Heifetz, educator and leadership specialist, has written extensively about leadership in a time of change. Heifetz is “candid about the real leadership task: to mobilize people to live up to their values, meet great challenges, and achieve adaptive change.”¹¹⁰ At its core, adaptive leadership is “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.”¹¹¹ It is an act of capacity building for both individuals and

¹⁰¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 119.

¹⁰² Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. (Alban Institute, 1998), 3.

¹⁰³ Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era: A Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery*. (Eagle, ID: Allelon, 2007), 39.

¹⁰⁴ John P. Kotter. *The heart of change*. (Boston, MS: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 165.

¹⁰⁵ Chand, *Cracking the Code of the congregation*, 103.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Chand, *Cracking Your Church’s Culture*, 105.

¹⁰⁹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 13.

¹¹⁰ Stern Strategy Group website, accessed March 7, 2017. <https://sternstrategy.com>.

¹¹¹ Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14.

organizations “so that people can learn to live in a less predictable, more ambiguous environment, and learn to adapt to changing circumstances as a way of life.”¹¹² According to Heifetz, successful adaptation has three characteristics: it preserves the DNA essential for continued survival; it discards the DNA that no longer serves current needs; and it creates DNA that gives societies the ability to flourish in new ways and in more challenging environments.”¹¹³ Adaptive change builds on the past and occurs through experimentation. Progress, while radical over time, occurs incrementally as evidenced for example in the evolution of calling women to pastoral leadership.

Heifetz asserts, “the most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as they were technical problems.”¹¹⁴ Heifetz draws a helpful distinction between adaptive challenges and technical “fixes,” asserting technical challenges are problems that are effectively addressed through specific expertise, an “expert in the field” resources, or concrete technical skill. Such is often enacted through policy making, restructuring, or creating procedures. Addressing “technical fixes” usually involves connecting expertise with the problem. In contrast, adaptive challenges are those which have no obvious, single solution. Adaptive challenges are generally difficult to identify and describe, they require a revising of norms, beliefs, and practices. Without learning new ways – changing attitudes, values, and behaviours – people cannot make the adaptive leap to thrive in a new environment.¹¹⁵ Adaptive change can be disorienting for an institution such as the church because it can challenge unspoken core assumptions and values in light of a drastically new and changing context.”¹¹⁶ According to Heifetz:

Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and culture. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent: that is a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.¹¹⁷

Drawing upon wider breadth of leadership practice, author and consultant Peter Block, in his book *The answer to how is yes*, prompts the reader to discern the difference between the question of “how to do something” with the more important question: “what is it that matters most?” According to Block, the pragmatic “how” questions stalls, prevents, and imprisons. When one asked “how to do something it expresses our bias for what is practical, concrete, and immediately useful often at the expense of our values and idealism.”¹¹⁸

Harvard educators Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey in, *How the way we talk can change the way we work*, suggest the way we speak forms thinking, feeling, and meaning-

¹¹² Susan Beaumont workshop July 6, 2017 (Saskatoon, SK).

¹¹³ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁵ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Danger of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 13.

¹¹⁶ Kara Carter, “Leading Culture Change Amidst an Institutional Model of Church: Re-capturing Movement Ethos” (PhD Assignment Fall 2017 Waterloo Lutheran Seminary).

¹¹⁷ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line*, 30.

¹¹⁸ Peter Block, *The answer to how is yes: acting on what matters*. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publisher Inc., 2003), 11.

making. These authors suggest “if we want deeper understanding of the prospect of change, we must pay closer attention to our own powerful inclinations *not* to change.”¹¹⁹

Reflecting theologically, the journey of transition can be likened to death followed by burial and the joy of resurrection. Jesus said, “unless a grain of what falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12: 24). Amidst the current paradigm shift, the garden of creation yearns for a message of hope, symbols of hope. The cross is the primary symbol of Christian faith. According to theologian Henri Nouwen, the cross “invites us to see grace where there is pain; to see resurrection where there is death. The call to be grateful is a call to trust that every moment can be claimed in a way of the cross that leads to new life.”¹²⁰ Prior to Jesus’ death, Jesus offered his disciples his “body and blood as gifts of life, he shared with them everything he had lived – his joy as well as his pain, his suffering as well as his glory – and enabled them to move into their mission in deep gratitude.”¹²¹ The improvisational leadership art of “sowing” is an act of living into a hopeful future. For Nouwen, hope does not mean one avoids or is able to ignore suffering. Rather, hope is centered in God who has overcome the world. Christian disciples follow the one who is not limited or defeated, not by sufferings, nor by paradigm shifts. God brings us to new places of faithfulness and fruitfulness. To trust in God of new beginnings is to live in hope.¹²² Indeed, “we let God work out some details that we feel tempted to know or control but ultimately cannot.”¹²³ Further, “As we break through our need to cling to what we have, what we know, what we possess, we can be liberated by trustful surrender to God. Then our anxiety will not cripple us, but point us forward in joy, point us even to what we cannot predict or fully see, even our own death.”¹²⁴

Attentiveness to spiritual health, growth, and anxiety, which impacts the congregation, is a vital pastoral leadership role. In an age of “quick fixes,” in an age of institutional stuckness, congregational anxiety can flare, causing congregations to turn further inward. In the current season in which there is thirst for renewal, institutional-movement tension, and concern for being a counter-cultural community, movement theory offers another important lens through to reflect upon the current context of ministry and its embedded challenges.

Social Movement Theory

A growing focus amongst contemporary missiologists Roxburgh and Hirsch, as well as theologian Brian McLaren, is the discussion regarding movement ethos. Frost and Hirsch use *movement* as a “sociological term to describe organizational structure and ethos of the missional church.”¹²⁵ In other words, missional is movement, it is the process. Hirsch’s working definition of movement is as follows: “a group of people organized for, ideologically

¹¹⁹ Robert Kegan & Lisa Laskow Lahey. *How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 1.

¹²⁰ Henri Nouwen. *Turning my Mourning Into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 18.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹²⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The shaping of things to come: Innovation and mission for the 21st Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 278.

motivated by, and committed to a purpose which implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in recruitment of others; and whose influence is spreading in opposition to the established order within which it originated.”¹²⁶

Authors of Harvard Business Review article, *Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, not a Mandate*, argue, “We often think of movements as starting with a call to action. But movement research suggests that they actually start with emotion – a diffuse dissatisfaction with the status quo and a broad sense that the current institutions and power structure of the society will not address the problem.”¹²⁷ As such, “brewing discontent turns into a movement when a voice arises that provides a positive vision and a path forward that’s within the power of the crowd.”¹²⁸ It is typical for movements to start small with a group of passionate enthusiasts. With emergence of small wins, efficacy is demonstrated to nonparticipants, thus helping the movement gain steam. Skillful movement makers frame the issue, demonstrate quick wins, harness networks, create safe havens, and embrace symbols.¹²⁹

Sociologist Todd N. Fuist draws upon 30 years of social movement theory to construct a framework of three ways that culture is seen as shaping collective action:

- Culture within sites: According to research, social movements “tend to emerge out of communities and social networks.” The “pre-existing culture within social sites and cultures created by movements serve as connective tissue within these spaces, helping make mobilization possible.” A prominent area of research in which we see culture within sites discussed is in the study of religious movements. For example, the Black Church. Cultural meaning and the content of the church’s teachings became a rich resource for mobilization of a social rights movement. Content of preaching and spiritual practices can be brought together in order to mobilize a social movement.
- Culture as resource: Resources involve specific cultural elements. A culture “provides meaning that can be put toward collective action.” Studies show cultural resources can include frames and collective identities. Primary resources for the church include narratives and story-telling strategies. Such enable faith-based groups to connect with diverse groups from a variety of contexts. Some scholars studying emotional and social movement theorize that “feelings such as anger, shame, and pride can influence movement action in ways that are both conscious and purposeful as well as ‘operating beneath conscious awareness.’” Engagement with feelings such as these is a powerful force to engage with and motivate social movement.
- Culture as wider contexts: Wider contexts include ideologies, norms, and values. These shape how “social movements understand the world and act collectively.” Cultures are not self-contained but rather “embedded in a wider cultural context, that, that shapes how

¹²⁶ Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Way*, 191.

¹²⁷ Bryan Walker and Sarah A. Soule. “Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, Not a Mandate.” *Harvard Business Review* June 2017, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.harvardbusinessreview.org>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

they operate.” The existing context can act as constraint or enable actions of a movement.¹³⁰

Fuist suggests individual biographies can help one better understand how the meaning associated with a particular site makes it fruitful for mobilization. Faith communities are rich in stories, symbols, and meaning-making, making congregations a rich resource for pastoral leaders to be thinking about culture and movement ethos.

Engaging in storied ways is an effective pastoral leadership approach in order to attend to congregational anxiety and to navigate current liminal space. Congregational stories hold values, beliefs and attitudes. Narratives hold clues to the current institutional stuckness, cultural resources, and motivation. Stories can also hold clues regarding the future which God is inviting the church to live into.

Narrative Leadership

Just over twenty years ago I served on the building committee at my home congregation. The committee was tasked with oversight and construction of a new sanctuary and office space. During one meeting the committee wrestled late into the night. *How large do we build? What seating capacity is needed? What projection for growth out to be considered?* After a lengthy and unfruitful discussion, a decision was made to invite the president of the construction company to a follow-up meeting. I still recall with clarity the president’s confident response to the committee’s dilemma: “*Build it and they will come.*”

For decades for the Christian church in North America, “build it and they will come” was a successful story. It was a story steeped with meaning, beliefs, expected outcomes, assumptions, and more. Having served in pastoral ministry for fourteen plus years and having experienced significant change in the church and culture, I would argue that this particular predominant story has become a limiting narrative, even problematic. Such creates a pastoral leadership challenge in that many congregants continue to live into this story, even if perhaps verbalized with different language today.

Engaging narratively with the lived experience of pastors as they lead change can be an effective means to identify barriers and facilitators that impact change. Narrative leadership involves the work of storying and re-storying the life of a community or organization. According to consultant and researcher Larry A. Goleman, narratives can have an unconscious hold on congregational life. Accordingly, a vital pastoral leadership task is to “uncover narratives in order to understand congregational culture, identity, and mission.”¹³¹ Transformative organizational change involves bringing “the unconscious into consciousness.”¹³²

According to church consultant Susan Beaumont, stories not only help us to understand our past, stories are also about creating the future.¹³³ Faith communities have multiple stories and effective leadership creates space for all voices to share their stories.

¹³⁰ Todd N. Fuist, “Culture Within Sites, Culture as Resources, and Culture as Wider Contexts: A Typology of How Culture Works in Social Movement Theory,” *Sociology Compass* 7/12 (2013): 1044-1049.

¹³¹ Larry A. Goleman, ed., *Finding our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 5.

¹³² Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 193.

¹³³ Susan Beaumont, “Tell me a Story,” accessed April 4, 2018, <http://www.susanbeaumont.com/tell-me-a-story>.

Embedded within narrative are theologies, deep core values and belief systems, through which congregants interpret lived experience. As evidenced through conflict in my home congregation, many lived out of a patriarchal, male-leadership dominant narrative. Over the decades, that narrative has been re-storied, leading to the calling of women to pastoral roles.

Goleman draws upon the narrative therapy framework of Michael White and David Epston. According to White and Epston, "Stories provide the framework that makes it possible for us to interpret our experience, and these acts of interpretation are achievements that we take an active part in."¹³⁴

Stories are shaped within a particular culture, context, and religious tradition.¹³⁵ The narratives we live by can become so "internalized that we may not see an alternative to them, especially when they become dysfunctional or unable to adapt to changing conditions."¹³⁶ Based upon social theorist Michel Foucault's framework, "internalized narratives can be deconstructed by naming the ways they dominate or control our own lives."¹³⁷ And finally, "narratives can be reconstructed or replaced by re-storying our lives according to newfound strength and capacities for change."¹³⁸

Philosophically, humans live storied lives. Indeed "people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories."¹³⁹ Stories are a "portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful."¹⁴⁰ As Christians we locate ourselves within God's unfolding story of salvation and redemption. Stories provide a framework to understand experience. Furthermore, stories can be de-constructed and re-constructed in order to identify strength and capacities, thus leading to individual, congregational, institution, and systemic change.

Conclusion

Theologian Walter Brueggemann preached at the 2014 Festival of Homiletics in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Drawing together Isaiah 45, Jeremiah 18, and 2 Corinthians 4: 1-7, Brueggemann critiqued the ancient Corinthian church for "majoring in minor stuff and neglecting major stuff."¹⁴¹ According to Brueggemann, the people of God have the container, the clay jar, and they have the treasure, the gospel. And, God's people have confused them! We focus on the clay pot thinking it is the real thing while neglecting the treasure. This image is helpful when discussing institution, social movement, structure, mission, and the present need for culture change within our congregations. Maintaining the institution is about the clay jar.

The current liminal space creates a significant leadership challenge in that the church is caught between what was and what is yet to come. Many of the ways in which pastors and congregants have been accustomed to seeing the world, assumptions about "doing church," organizational structure, and mental models, are deeply tied to another time. Anabaptist

¹³⁴ Goleman, *Finding our Story*, 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Getting Smashed for Jesus," Sermon preached at *Festival of Homiletics* May 25, 2014.

“separation from the world” theology, which was spiritual grounding for the emergent adult re-baptizing movement, is now working against the church and may currently be keeping Anabaptist/Mennonite congregations bound, inhibiting God’s people from living fruitfully into God’s mission. I believe God’s people yearn to hear anew that Christ has bound God’s self to God’s people, inviting us to bear God’s fruit in the world.

Many within the Mennonite church hold within their collective memory the experience of navigating significant paradigm shifts. Within MCEC at present, the male/female pastoral balance is approximately 60/40. A more expansive story that embraces inclusion across gender has been embraced. This culture change, which evolved over decades, was fraught with conflict and opposing theological understandings, including the interpretation and authority of Scripture. A recurrent question, however, woven throughout the biblical narrative and throughout history is this: “what does it mean to be God’s faithful people in present the current context?”

Cultural change unsettles assumptions and expectations, as witnessed in a tenuous congregational meeting nearly forty years ago. In the current context, many leaders are looking for “technical fixes.” Many believe that strengthening children’s programming or congregational re-structuring will revitalize congregations and draw the neighbourhood into the church. The attractational model of ministry, however, is lodged within a certain narrative. At a time when anxiety and fear can cause congregants to turn further inward or succumb to survival-mode, the invitation is for congregations to be unbound turning outward and engaging in its local neighbourhood. As such, God’s people become increasingly attentive to what God is already doing in the local context in order to join with God and further God’s mission.

As Samuel R. Chand contends, culture is the most powerful factor in any organization. It is “usually unnoticed, unspoken and unexamined.”¹⁴² Culture determines how people respond to vision and leadership. It is, therefore, a vital leadership role to unearth stories of an organization in order to lead culture change. The 21st century church has evolved into an institutional model of church. As such, God’s people have come to embrace the values and stories of institution including power, sustainability, predictability. Such can become significant barriers when seeking to further God’s mission. Church and synagogue consultant, Dan Hotchkiss, contends that “institutions resist change, not because of any special trait personality or culture, but because that’s what an institution does. Or better yet, because that’s what an institution *is*.”¹⁴³ The church appears anxiously stuck, holding tightly to stories that are no longer relevant. Systems theorist Peter Steinke suggests intense and prolonged “anxiety has a strangling effect, depleting people’s energy, disturbing their thinking and dividing their loyalties.”¹⁴⁴

Stories are containers of meaning, experience, values, assumptions are more. By engaging with predominant leadership and congregational narratives, pastors can identify barriers and facilitators, deconstruct and re-construct a new story in order to respond and adapt to changing ministry context.

¹⁴² Chand, *Cracking Your Church’s Culture Code*, 10.

¹⁴³ Dan Hotchkiss “Should the Leader Advocate for Change?” Congregational Consulting Group, accessed January 23, 2018, <http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/leader-advocate-change>.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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