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The Mission of Nazarene Theological Seminary, a graduate school of theology in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, is to prepare women and men to be faithful and effective ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to offer itself as a theological resource in service to the Church of the Nazarene, its sponsoring denomination, and the wider Christian Church.

Dear Friends,

NTS is pleased to participate in a vital way in M15. We are offering over 10 workshop sessions as well as providing the speaker for one of the conference’s mega-seminars. We hope you will benefit and be enriched by our offerings.

As an additional gift to you, we have published various articles, blog pieces and academic papers in the journal that follows. This is “Theology To Go” if you will—reflection to take with you into your week and into your ministry – whatever setting and context in which you find yourself. We pray these articles will challenge you to think deeply, pray fervently celebrating the past and hopeful for the future of the Church.

Peace,

Carla Sunberg
President
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Past to Present: Social Justice as a Missional Work of the Church of the Nazarene

By Carla Sunberg

Oh Lord, please bless us in this endeavor.

The world is forgetting about God and is engaging in injustice in regard to our neighbors with inhumane responses to the weaknesses of humanity. These are winning the day, confirming the words of the Apostle Paul:

Rom. 1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.

Rom. 1:29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips,

Rom. 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents,

Rom. 1:31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

God is calling these, his children back to his service and instructing them to refrain from evil and be diligent in showing compassion toward their neighbor. Isaiah instructed,

Is. 1:16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;

remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,

Is. 1:17 learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

The law contains many injunctions forbidding us to wrong our neighbor and many precepts directing us to be merciful and compassionate. If either of these admonitions were to be neglected, the other all by itself will not justify us before God.

Proverbs then gives us this admonition,

Prov. 3:9 Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; (or justice).

If you have acquired gains from honest work and do not make offerings to God, by which the poor may be fed, you will be declared a thief. This is what we read in Malachi:
Mal. 3:8 Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! What we must do is to combine justice and mercy, spending in mercy what you have with justice, because it is written: “Keep mercy and justice and draw near to God always.”

Because God loves mercy and justice, he who takes care to do mercy and justice draws near to God. It remains, then, for each of us to examine her/himself and for the rich person to take careful inventory of the private resources from which they are to offer gifts to God, to make sure that he/she has not oppressed a poor person, or used force against someone weaker than themselves, or cheated someone dependent upon them, and in this way exercising license rather than justice.

The kingdom of heaven does not employ force, nor does it exact tribute, but it welcomes those who freely offer their goods, so that, in giving them away, they may receive and may be honored in bestowing honor, and that, in sharing their temporal possessions, they may become partakers in eternal blessings.

Thus we come to the end of Basil of Caesarea’s sermon On Mercy and Justice written in the middle of the 4th century when the region of Cappadocia in which he lived suffered from a terrible period of famine. In the 4th century the great leaders of Christianity were preaching on the need to mobilize the church for social justice. This wasn’t Basil’s only sermon on the topic. In I will Pull Down My Barns, he urges all Christ followers to be engaged in helping their brothers and sisters:

What shall I do? Offhand I would say: 'I shall fill the souls of the hungry. I shall open my barns, and I shall send for all who are in want. I shall be like Joseph¹ in proclaiming the love of my fellow man. I shall cry out with a mighty voice: 'Come to me all of you who have need of bread; for of the abundance that divine love has given to me, let each of you take according to his need.'²

In his sermon, To the Rich, Basil writes:

You gorgeously array your walls, but do not clothe your fellow human being; you adorn horses, but turn away from the shameful plight of your brother or sister; you allow grain to rot in your barns, but do not feed those who are starving; you hide gold in the earth but ignore the oppressed! And if your wife happens to be a money-loving person, then the disease is doubled in its effects. She stirs up the love of luxury and inflames the craving for pleasure, spurring on fruitless pursuits. Such women contrive to procure precious stones and metals of all kinds...They do not give anyone a second to breathe with their incessant demands!³

This concept of social justice and the life of the church is not new. What is new and unusual is that we would not preach it. Jumping ahead a number of years, John Wesley was a man who was deeply moved by what he saw happening in his society. He reacted against the Calvinists who sat in the pews every Sunday, wonderfully and selectively saved, while the remainder of the week functioned as taskmasters to those in servitude to them without respect to their lives or spiritual state. He did not believe we could live eternally secure in the fact that we’re going to heaven and let the world around us die in a poverty of our own creation. And so was birthed the Methodist movement – a group of people committed to a Method of spiritual growth which was punctuated by a deep love for Jesus Christ, exhibited by our love for neighbor.

Wesley’s holiness message was deeply Christo-centric. To be God’s holy people meant being transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. To be like Jesus Christ was to walk and talk and minister among the poor and needy of the world.

This was the passion that grounded early Nazarenes like P.F. Bresee too. They understood holiness as Christlikeness and the holiness movement was mobilized for social justice. The optimism of the early

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¹ Gen. 47:2.
³ Basil, Homily 7, To the Rich 4.47.
Nazarenes included hope for both personal and social transformation. For example, Bresee and others serving with him preached scriptural holiness with one hand while battling for prohibition on the other. The early Nazarenes were prohibitionists through and through and this was not something to be separated from their concern for the spiritual well-being of those around them. On the contrary, they could not imagine not caring about the spiritual and physical well-being of an individual for this was the kind of transformation they believed was possible.

In his doctoral thesis, Tom Nees sadly declares, “because holiness leaders have reacted to theological liberalism and the social gospel movement, the holiness churches of the twentieth century have been associated with fundamentalism and have appeared to be uninvolved with the problems of society and uninformed of their own tradition and theology.”

Bresee however was not concerned with theological liberalism as the enemy within the Church but rather saw the major threat as materialism and wealth. He wrote: “It requires far more courage to preach in many of the pulpits of the great churches, the whole gospel, than it does to preach doubt and heresy.”

For the early Church of the Nazarene there was no particular social agenda except for prohibition, however, it was assumed, Tom Nees writes: “… that the Church would naturally be identified with the poor and for any cause which would further the spiritual and material well-being of those denied the rising prosperity of the rich.”

When the Church of the Nazarene was just eight years of age Bresee lamented: Without the deep breaking up of what is regarded as the Christian conscience in America, and the bringing of a new sense of righteousness, which means intense loyalty to the truth recognized, and obedience to known duty, there can be no real reform. It is this condition which makes the ordinary church today such a hopeless place for securing action on any needed reform.

Bresee was speaking out about what he saw in nominal Christianity. He was trying to Christianize Christianity and felt that the Church was shirking her holistic responsibility. He expected something much more from the Church of the Nazarene.

Tom Nees, goes on to tell us:

“While the vision of holiness preachers serving as reformers was more or less understood to relate to the prohibition issue, even prohibition was not simply a cause to protect individuals from the pleasures of alcohol. Prohibition was understood as a solution to social evil and thus related to all the great reform issues of the times, and on this issue the holiness leaders were in the forefront of those who knew that the multiplication of converts would not necessarily bring about social reform. Neither would social reform come without a foundation of righteousness faithfully proclaimed by the preachers of America.”

In sum, the Church fought for prohibition not because she wanted to take something away from people that made them “happy, but because [she] knew that it made them defeated and unhappy.”

I didn’t realize how much this social justice issue – the first tackled by the Church of the Nazarene - had permeated my own history until I began to reflect on the ministry of my grandmother, Mrs. C.B. (Marie) Johnson. She lived all of her life in Nebraska and joined the Church of the Nazarene in the very early years of the denomination. I grew up in Germany but we would come back to the United States and visit my

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6 Nees, 19.
8 Nees, 21-22.
grandparents every four years. One of my earliest memories is of Grandma talking about places in town that were applying for their liquor license. She knew all of the details and was working hard to make sure they weren’t issued. I would later find out that she was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

My Grandmother’s history intersected with my own a few summers ago when I led a youth group on a prayer walk through a community in Canton, Ohio where a friend, Cindy Bishop, works with women of the street to provide a place of rehabilitation. We were in her community and praying on her streets when I stopped in front of the local convenience store. As people were exiting, their arms loaded with alcohol, I began telling the youth group about the importance of praying in this place. When the only store in the community is a convenience store that sells alcohol and lottery tickets primarily, it destroys the neighborhood. Parents don’t buy food for their children but instead spend it on their own habits.

As I explained the scene in front of me and we prayed, I was suddenly back in my grandmother’s living room in Kearney, Nebraska. When I was a child I had thought it was just one of Grandma’s quirks to talk about such concerns but now I could hear her voice in my head and I “got it.” This is what Grandma had been worried about - she, along with many of the other women of the Church of the Nazarene, had engaged in the critical issues of their day.

Within the holiness movement, there was always the reminder that social reform could never be a substitute for personal transformation.\(^{10}\) In the March 12, 1913 issue of *The Herald of Holiness* B.F. Haynes wrote, “Men may be great reformers and know nothing about God. Socialism does not recognize the importance of the new birth.”\(^{11}\) There always had to be a balance between personal transformation and the engagement of the Church in social issues, but engage in social justice, she did. Tom Nees tells us, “*The Herald of Holiness*, during its first decade, included editorials and articles relating to a wide range of reform and political issues – a call for a constitutional amendment to prohibit polygamy, opposition to home rule for Ireland, and support for immigration restrictions.”\(^{12}\)

The Church of the Nazarene was especially mobilized to speak out on the issue of women’s suffrage (the two major political issues of the day being prohibition and women’s suffrage) because, from the very beginning, the Church had encouraged women in ministry. “At the time of the suffragette movement, nearly twenty percent of the Nazarene ordained ministers were women.”\(^{13}\) The first women’s rights convention was held in 1848 in the Wesley Methodist Chapel of Seneca Falls, NY with the holiness movement at the forefront. Many of the suffragettes were those from holiness churches who had been called to preach. The suffrage movement and the issue of women’s rights were both very closely linked to the holiness movement. In 1912 the *Herald of Holiness* published an article called, “Women, the Secret of National Prosperity.” This article was a “biblical and historical defense of equal rights for women in the interest of the nation’s economy.” The author, Frieda Marmberg wrote, “prosperity consists not so much in material gain as it does in the gain received from the physical, intellectual and moral development of every member of society.”\(^{14}\)

The issue of suffrage and women’s rights led the Church to address the concern of “White Slavery” as well. It was a form of human trafficking where women were being forced to work as prostitutes or in brothels – not unlike today. Women like Jonnie Jernigan chose to get involved. Seth Rees’ provides the following account:

*They are held in stockades, and sold from the auction block to the highest bidder. During the month of November, 1911, seventeen hundred girls disappeared from trains running between New York and Chicago.*

\(^{10}\) Nees, 33.


\(^{12}\) Nees, 34.

\(^{13}\) Nees, 36.

Since the life of a girl in sin is about five years, one hundred thousand recruits must march to the Slaughter every year.\textsuperscript{15}

Responding to this critical issue is where the idea of “Rescue the Perishing, Care for the Dying\textsuperscript{16}” came about. The Church mobilized to respond to the crisis by striving to free women from their captors. Rest cottages were provided for the young pregnant women, and orphanages were established for the children borne to them. Numerous babies were also adopted out to families within the Church of the Nazarene.

Ministry to the poor was often called “Relief and Rescue Work.” At the second General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene a “Rescue Work” Committee was formed. In 1915 the Rescue Committee was expanded to include “City Missions.” By 1919 the Church of the Nazarene had five different committees which dealt with social welfare. It was then determined that every district was to have a “District Board for Social Welfare.” Significantly it was at this time that one of these districts recognized that we had no American blacks in our membership! They pleaded with the General Church to be intentional about reaching out to this group of society, concluding their argument by stating, “While we are sending missionaries to far-away Africa, we are sadly, or wholly, neglecting thousands of the African race in our midst.”\textsuperscript{17}

The church became strategic in her mobilization process. Bands of women deaconesses were organized to do the relief and rescue work in each local church. There was a section in the Manual that provided training for these deaconesses. They wore uniforms that showed that they were set apart for this special ministry.

The orphanage work of the church was also organized. In 1915 the orphanage committee was organized and in 1923 this became the Orphanage Board. The General Church urged local churches to support orphanages with their offerings. In 1914 G. W. Bugh wrote, “Our people have the cause of Christ and the poor at heart. Perhaps we are behind with orphanage work. Let it be remembered, our church is not soliciting a great membership, and we are the Lord’s poor, and little ones, as a church.”\textsuperscript{18} The goal was not a huge membership – the goal was the cause of Christ. Holiness people were challenged to live a lifestyle of self-denial and hardship which made the church different from other worldly churches. This was Wesley’s Christ-centered vision of holiness.

The concern began when the Christ-centered vision of holiness was replaced with a Spirit-centered vision, as tended to happen in the American holiness movement. The shift was radical – from Christlikeness to a personal concern for Spirit-gifting. The result was an emphasis on the testimony of the experiential, just a slight deviation which would begin a trajectory in a different direction. But the work had been started and the following ministries founded:

**Rescue Homes**

- Beulah Training Home, Memphis, Tennessee
- Rest Cottage, Kansas City, Missouri
- Rest Cottage, Pilot Point, Texas
- Berachah Rescue Society, Arlington, Texas
- Nazarene Rescue Home, Bethany, Oklahoma
- Hillcrest Rest Cottage, Southern California
- Hope Cottage, Swampscott, Massachusetts
- Lebanon Home, Seattle, Washington
  - Nazarene Rescue Home, Texarkana, Texas
  - Refuge Home, Hutchinson, Kansas
  - Rest Cottage, Oakland, California
  - South McAlester Rescue Home, Indian Territory

\textsuperscript{16} Fanny J. Crosby, *Sing to the Lord*, 185.
\textsuperscript{17} Fifth General Assembly, “Official Minutes” 1919, p. 112.
Southwestern Training Home, Lake Charles, Louisiana
Wichita Rescue Home, Wichita, Kansas

**Orphanages and Training Homes**
Peniel Orphanage, Greenville, Texas
Oklahoma Orphanage
Division of Child Welfare Services
Bethel Institute/Home/Orphanage, Arriaga, Chiapas, Mexico
Boys Orphanage in Khardi, India
Dependent Children's Home, Davenport, OK
Orphanage, Juarez, Mexico
Pentecostal Mission Training Home for Girls, Nashville, Tennessee
Rest Cottage Children's Home, Pilot Point, Texas
Spruce Orphanage, Floresville, Texas
Washington Children's Home

**Rescue Missions**
Kansas City Rescue Mission, Kansas City, Missouri
Peniel Mission
Brooklyn Rescue Mission, Brooklyn, New York

**Medical Ministries**
Samaritan Hospital and School of Nursing, Nampa, Idaho
Nazarene Medical Missionary Union
Bresee Memorial Hospital, Tamingfu, China
Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital, Bremersdorp, Swaziland
Reynolds Memorial Hospital, India
Nazarene Hospital, Kudjip, Papua New Guinea
Bethany Home Sanatorium, Phoenix, Arizona
Nazarene Hospital and Williams School of Nursing, Columbus, Georgia¹⁹

But what happened?

World War I rocked the nation and the world and slowly perspectives and priorities began to change. There was not the optimism that had existed before the war. By 1928, at our 7th General Assembly, only three of the original social justice committees remained. By 1932 only one committee reported about social welfare or rescue work. There continued to be declining interest until 1948 when all such committees were dissolved. There were no longer any reports at the General Assemblies related to social engagement. The focus became personal ethics, especially the use of tobacco and alcohol. In 1972 a Christian Action Committee was formed but primarily to deal with the issue of separation between Church and State.²⁰

In sum, we lost the passion and rather independent nature of the founding leaders of our denomination. The encroachment of fundamentalism into the North American Church also had an effect on the Church of the Nazarene. Nees tells us, “The second generation of Nazarenes, after the

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²⁰ Nees, 45.
passing of their founding fathers, tended to be more conservative, sectarian and preoccupied with the internal life of the denomination.”

If we are to learn from the past, we may need to be intentional about reversing that trend. The work of the kingdom is not connected to any particular political party, but instead must exist in our connection to Wesley and an understanding of a Christo-centric holiness. We are called to be like Christ in the world. We cannot be sectarian. We must be willing to partner with others whose hearts are as ours. John Wesley, in his sermon *Catholic Spirit*, quotes 2 Kings 10:15, “When he left there, he met Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him; he greeted him, and said to him, ‘Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?’ Jehonadab answered, ‘It is.’ Jehu said, ‘If it is, give me your hand.’” In that sermon Wesley goes on to discuss the different issues that become unimportant when we begin to partner together with those who are at work in the kingdom. In essence he writes that while we may be members of different congregations there is no reason that we cannot join hands and work together for the business of God’s kingdom.

These days we in the Church of the Nazarene are uniting together with our sisters and brothers in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition to make a difference. We must also partner with our community leaders and other congregations so that we can be stronger together. And we must get our eyes off of ourselves. We cannot be preoccupied with the internal life of the denomination, but instead must become preoccupied with the external life of the kingdom. This is how we mobilize. We learn from the past and we ask God to renew and refill us so that we can be mobilized for his mission. May we mobilize to be Jesus – rescuing the perishing and the dying in our world today.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

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21 Nees, 47.
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Basil, *Homily 7, To the Rich.*


Compassionate Holiness

By Tom Nees

This is a new day of opportunity for the church. I sometime wonder though, if the church is prepared to practice its faith in the public square. I don’t think you can make a believable case for Christianity these days without responding to the critical quality of life issues affecting our neighborhoods, our country, indeed the world such as poverty, illiteracy, disease, unemployment and environmental deterioration.

As government attitudes toward church involvement in meeting human need have changed, the church too has been changing—at least the Church of the Nazarene has. I remember when the prevailing attitude among us was that the work of the church should be confined to so-called “spiritual” things only. To become involved in what we might call social Christianity was seen as a diversion from if not a distortion of the Gospel mandate.

When I got involved in what we now call compassionate ministries in Washington, DC, I had to explain why. Now the reverse is the case. Churches and believers are asked to explain why they are not involved in solving social problems and serving needy people. There has been a remarkable surge in compassionate ministry activity in recent years.

At a compassionate ministry conference in 1998, Dr. Harold Raser, professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary described this recent rush of Christian social action within the Church of the Nazarene as “Beating Back the Amnesia.” Along with other theologians at that event he recognized that the church has awakened from its mid-20th Century amnesia, a deep-sleep during which time the context in which Wesleyan-Holiness theology was born and nurtured was forgotten or denied.

Like many others of my generation I learned a lot about holiness theology and the need for sanctification in a Nazarene college and seminary. But it was years before I stumbled onto compassionate holiness. While a pastor in the center of Washington, DC I had concluded that there was little if anything I knew of in Wesleyan-Holiness theology to guide me as I confronted racial and economic injustice in the Nation’s capital. And then I happened upon an out-of-print book titled John Wesley as a Social Reformer with a chapter that really got my attention: “John Wesley: Apostle to the Poor.”

It was during that time that I completed a Doctor of Ministry degree at Wesley Theological Seminary on the campus of American University. I choose as my project-thesis the topic “The Holiness Social Ethic.” I intended to argue that Wesley’s social concern was a direct outcome of his holiness theology. My advisors required that I prove that his life-long commitment to meeting the needs of the poor was more than coincidental.

Dr. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop was one of the few theologians who remained awake to the social as well as the personal implications of the Holiness worldview. She helped me understand the cause and effect connection between Wesleyan-holiness theology and social Christianity. She is best known for her
book *A Theology of Love*. In 1970 she published three college chapel messages in a little book, *John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary*. She helped me understand things I had never known about the origins of the holiness movement. Wesley once said, “there is no holiness without social holiness.” We understand him to have meant that holiness or sanctification is much more than an individual second-crisis religious experience and an “acute concern for high ethical standards”. Wynkoop suggested that when holiness is reduced to a personal religious crisis experience and personal ethics, these important issues, “central though they are, stand in danger of becoming caricatures of holiness rather than characteristics of it.”

Wesley would never have agreed with the so-called “miracle motif” common to present-day evangelical Protestantism. According to Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in their recent book, *Divided by Faith*, “the miracle motif is the theologically rooted idea that as more individuals become Christians, social and personal problems will be solved automatically.” Wesley knew that social systems as well as individuals needed to be changed. He was optimistic about the possibilities for persona and social transformation.

In “John Wesley: Christian Revolutionary,” Wynkoop wrote: “Wesley’s doctrine, moreover, would not permit him to rest content in biblical theology as such, or religious experience as such--two stopping places for some contemporary Wesleyanisms. Instead it pushed him into the social and economic and educational problems in the world outside the church.” His theology directed him outside the walls of the churches of his day. He preached to illiterate industrial workers in the streets and fields. Charles Wesley, John’s poet brother, scandalized traditional religion by putting this theology into lyrics set to the popular barroom melodies of the day.

John Wesley also translated the Christian classics into easy-to-read condensed versions, which served as literacy aids to teach people to read. Knowing that health care was an unaffordable luxury for the poor he made an avocation of medicine and wrote a medical guide *Primitive Physic*. During his lifetime his book on medicine was more widely read than any of his sermons and theological essays. From his earliest days, he visited prisoners and advocated for prison reform. He organized the first free clinic in London and started the first free day schools when there was no public education for children.

Wynkoop wrote further about Wesley: “Labor problems and child labor came to his attention. He worked for fair wages, fair prices, honest healthy employment. He cared about the whole man, not just the soul. He knew the value of wealth if properly used, but the curse of it when it was controlled by selfish hands. He practiced what he preached by giving away (we are told) 98 percent of his income. He was a powerful antislavery spokesman. Wesley’s social reforms leaped the Atlantic Ocean and influenced American morality more than is recognized.”

I then discovered that this theology of compassionate holiness spawned by John Wesley in 18th Century England was the origin of the Salvation Army, now the world’s largest Christian charitable organization. Many people are surprised to learn that the Salvation Army is a Wesley-holiness denomination. That is not a coincidence.
According to Timothy Smith in his “Revivalism and Social Reform” this compassionate holiness message encouraged if not informed the abolitionist movement in 19th century America.

Encouraged if not driven by this compassionate holiness Biblical tradition, I was privileged to a part of a small group of people who began a multi-faceted ministry in Washington, DC. For more than twenty years we developed a wide range of ministries for homeless families, at-risk children and youth and health care. Those whose lives were touched by this ministry became the nucleus of a congregation that served needy people within walking distance of the White House. People are still being touched by the compassion of Jesus and being invited to become followers of Jesus.

The Wesleyan-Holiness theological foundation upon which this denomination is built contains the best interpretation of the Christian faith I know of from which to meet human need. We are encouraged to respond to needy people because our understanding of Scripture requires it. For over 200 years our spiritual forebears have demonstrated it.

Yet many of our youth are not aware of the rich resources of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition to motive and guide their compassionate instincts. Recently I was speaking to a group of Nazarene college students who were actively involved in compassionate ministries. When I asked them why they were doing this, without exception they pointed to the example of Jesus. But when I probed further none of them were informed by the Wesleyan-Holiness theological tradition. It was not their fault. They had not been taught.

While there was a retrenchment of interest in compassionate holiness during the mid 20th century, it was never completely lost. At the beginning of the 21st century compassionate holiness is alive and well. From a recent survey funded by a grant from the Lilly Foundation we know that 77 percent of Nazarene congregations report some form of ministry to needy people.

When understood fully our message is hopeful. We not only believe that our past sins can be forgiven—we believe that people and society can be change for the better. In the inner-city ghetto of Washington, DC, I witnessed changed lives that could only be described as spiritual resurrections. We began to talk about resurrections stories—the walking dead who come back to life.

Wesley battled against social and religious fatalism. Ordinary people in 18th century England were bound by a caste system that denied them the opportunity you have to improve their lives through education. They were further bound by a theology that insisted that God had condemned them to hell from before their birth. No wonder enthusiastic crowds of thousands stood in the open air to hear this word of hope—that transforming grace is available for everyone and that schools were being established to teach children to read and to train lay preachers.

There is a new kind of fatalism around us today. Millions of people are trapped in poverty from which they see no escape. Even in our American cites there are growing numbers of young people who feel they have nothing to live for and nothing worth dying for. I believe they too will respond to a message of hope when it is demonstrated in tangible acts of compassionate holiness.
Compassionate holiness is liberating – freeing us from fatalism, hopeful – providing the power to change, socially responsible – solving problems and serving needy people. Wesley feared that the descendants of those whose lives were transformed by compassionate holiness would forget their roots and return to materialism and fatalism from which they had come. I pray that those within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, will not forget and will hear again Jesus’ words in Luke 6:36 – “Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.”
Moving beyond Homogeneity: Immigration, Wesleyan Hospitality and A Preferred Future for the Church

By Lynne Bollinger

Homogeneity. It is an instinctive part of our human nature, of cultures and communities, and kingdoms. It is the place that provides comfort and a sense of belonging. It is our people, our food, our language, and our way of life; and when an ‘other’ disrupts our semblance of what is right, we react. We protect, we shun, we put up walls, and we demand uniformity because of our human nature.

A dichotomy ensues at some point when we experience the welcome invitation into communion with God and into the community of God. This intrusion into our homogeneous lives introduces a different nature, a new nature that has been given to the Church. This is the spiritual nature that proceeds from the Triune Godhead. This spiritual nature was breathed into those gathered on the day of Pentecost, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance,”1 and continues to be breathed into the Church generation after generation.

How does the Church exist in simultaneous unity and diversity? Is the nature of the ecclesia transformed from homogeneity into heterogeneity? How does the Church embody holiness found in the spiritual nature of the Godhead? As we participate in table fellowship within the community of faith, how are we also experiencing communion with the Triune Godhead, and with the Church catholic? How does communion with the Triune God speak into the apostolic work of the ecclesia? As the Church exists in relationship with the Triune God in a place of belonging, how can the Church extend the same welcome to the immigrant, the stranger, the ‘other’ living among us? The purpose of this paper is to speak into the preferred future of the Church, embracing the spiritual nature of the Triune Godhead to become the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, particularly in response to the immigrant living among us.

International Migration

“International migration is a global phenomenon that is growing in scope, complexity and impact. Migration is both a cause and effect of broader development processes and an intrinsic feature of our ever-

1 The Holy Bible, Acts 2:4 (ESV).
globalizing world.” 2 While the United Nations has empirical data, which confirms this “feature” of a globalized world, this new paradigm of global interconnectedness has created a shifting context few populations are willing to embrace. The published U.N. Report of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development contains examples of the difficulties inherent to international migration including: the high number of migrants who die either at sea or while crossing international borders, the denial of equal access to education and health services for migrant children, the “de-skilling” or “brain waste” of educated migrants, and the negative stereotypes that exist with regard to migrants and migration. 3 And while majority populations exhibit symptoms of xenophobia, this reality of living in a multicultural existence will soon become a way of life across our globe, our nation and in our own communities.

According to a report of the Pew Research Center in 2013, there are 40.4 million immigrants living in the United States, of which 11.2 million were undocumented. 4 And while undocumented migrants present challenges to economic and social systems, the political policies of our national government still fail to bring resolution to an issue that has incited division within our nation, our communities and unfortunately within the Church.

Social and Economic Impact

With an increasing number of immigrants pouring across international borders, our homogeneous identities are being threatened. This globalization trend is affecting every world area. As the prospect of continued homogeneity wanes, what will it mean in twenty years to be “American?” 5

Beyond the social ramifications, the economics provoke many in homogeneous communities to near panic. While it is true that the existence of undocumented immigrant populations living in the United States comes at some cost to taxpayers, there are also economic benefits as a result of their presence. Jeffrey Carroll of the Pew Research Center sites two of these benefits: the sustaining of the Social Security system, and the growing need for

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2 “International Migration - United Nations Population Division | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”
3 Population Division of DESA (Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, Report of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development, 9.
4 Passel, “Unauthorized Immigrants.”
5 Carroll, Christians at the Border, 17.
employees in the service industry. In both cases, resolving the complications of undocumented immigrants is a win-win as it simultaneously addresses these foreseeable economic trends. 6

In their 2013 report to the UN General Assembly High Level Dialogue, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) shared the following recommendations as steps forward in immigration issues:

1. **Improve public perceptions of migrants.** IOM verbalizes the need to acknowledge “the important role migrants can and do play as partners in host and home country development.” A shift in public perception is a proactive attempt to “avoid discrimination, xenophobia and violence against immigrants.”7

2. **Factor migration into development planning.** As this phenomenon grows at local, national and global levels, responsible planning will allow the issue to be made “public and visible,” and lead to “bilateral cooperation, especially through dialogue.”8

3. **Protect the rights of migrants.** This includes the implementation of national laws to protect the rights of all migrants including: equitable pay, social security benefits, health policies, support for families and positive policy changes.9

4. **Manage migration in crisis situations.** Disaster preparedness can help facilitate post-crisis recovery and advanced planning for migrants during times of humanitarian crises.10

5. **Enhance evidence building and knowledge-based policymaking on migration.** Improving the quality of research and collection of data related to migrants and migration will better inform policy makers.11

6. **Promote policy coherence and institutional development.** Encouraging accountability through regular dialogue and cooperation will result in relevant and effective policy changes.12

While this research and data related to the issue of migrants and migration is hardly exhaustive, there are more significant questions that still need to be addressed. Even with global statistics and trends at our Google fingertips,

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6 Ibid., 29–30.
8 Ibid., 5.
9 Ibid., 6.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 7.
12 Ibid.
Daniel Carroll, author of *Christians at the Border*, reminds the Church of the biblical model of hospitality and the shepherding voice whispering into the ear of the Church:

An appropriate response to the complicated situation in society will not come from detached, objective analysis, cost-benefit calculations, efficiency quotients, and cultural arguments. The decisions that are made and courses of action that are recommended should be commensurate with the life of Jesus – his actions, his teaching, his cross. Analysis and calculations are necessary, but they must be informed by more transcendent beliefs and other overriding life commitments.\(^\text{13}\)

In response to Carroll’s poignant words, the Church must decide whose voice to listen to and obey. There are political, social and economic voices from every culture chattering, attempting to drown out the quiet whisper of the incarnate Christ. As people appointed by God to carry out the mission of God through the Holy Spirit, we must choose to listen to the voice of the “Good Shepherd.” \(^\text{14}\)

**The Incarnational Model and the Eucharist**

Oscar Muriu, Senior Pastor of Nairobi Chapel in Kenya, addressed hundreds of young adults at Urbana 2009. In his keynote address he shares these words regarding the quiet way God chose to reveal God’s self to us.

If I were God I would not have sent Jesus as a baby! If I were God, I would have been in a hurry to save humanity...at his entry CNN would have recorded it live...I would have reached the world at once...So stunned would the world have been, that salvation would have come in a mere few weeks and I may not even have needed a cross. But I am not God. You see God’s way was quiet and subtle and subversive and therefore God’s way won and changed humanity...God’s way was the way of incarnation...a different way, a slow, gracious, dangerous and difficult way.\(^\text{15}\)

The incarnational model of the Christ child begs us to constrain our inclination to live hurried, homogeneous lives that can overwhelm and isolate us from others. In contrast, the incarnational model teaches us to embrace the life-giving practices of Jesus Christ and the early church, as we dwell among others in gracious and subtle ways that at times, can be dangerous and difficult. One of the most formational practices introduced by Christ and applied in the early church was the practice of hospitality.

\(^{13}\) Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 133.

\(^{14}\) The Holy Bible, *John 10:11 (ESV)*.

\(^{15}\) InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, *Oscar Muriu - Urbana 09*. 
There are many methods through which we express hospitality: listening attentively, providing a comfortable place to rest, attending to medical needs or offering financial assistance; but perhaps more than any of these methods, we express hospitality most often through a shared meal. In most every culture, sharing a meal together communicates relationship, care, and sincere concern for another person. We exist in family units and in communities where we experience shared meals regularly.

In Luke 14, Jesus instructs his listeners to exchange their cultural values for kingdom values in relation to hospitality. In an exchange of homogeneity for heterogeneity, they are told to send their dinner invitations to the marginalized of society rather than to their friends, or their neighbors, or the rich. Christine Pohl shares,

In [Jesus’] table fellowship, he challenges cultural assumptions about who is welcome in the community and in the kingdom. Jesus identifies himself with the stranger and sick such that ministry to them is ministry to him (Matthew 25:31-46).  

In her journal article entitled, *Welcoming the Stranger: Christian Models of Hospitality as Justice*, Christine Pohl shares that for a substantive part of the history of Christian tradition, table fellowship or hospitality was the context in which Christians focused their attention to issues of human dignity, overcoming social diversity and breaking social boundaries, which they found left strangers and immigrants in the margins of society. “This rich moral tradition can help to shape a theological framework for contemporary concerns about inclusion and difference.”

In Luke 22, as Jesus institutes Eucharist into the life of his disciples and into the life of the Church, he sets into motion a means of grace for all of humanity regardless of cultural or social identifiers. As the disciples are welcomed into relationship with the Triune God through the symbol of Christ’s suffering, they are seen by God and are invited to exist in a place of inclusion and belonging, but also a place where differences cohabitate, a place of heterogeneity. After a few weeks had passed in the lives of the disciples, this means of grace found expression through the Church, living in the context of the kingdom of God.

What is the relation between the Eucharist and the practice of hospitality? Daniel Carroll shares,

The Lord’s Supper, so central a symbol of the Christian faith and so important for nurturing the remembrance of the person and work of Jesus, was inseparable from the practice of hospitality…to

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17 Ibid.
come periodically to the Table, yet without a commitment to kindness and openness to others, is to not do justice to its purpose and spirit.18

As we move from observing the practices of the early church to the words of John Wesley, we see this same sentiment shared. Table fellowship or communion within the Church grown out of communion with God, must be offered openly. Any other form of table fellowship is a perversion of the purpose and Spirit of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Wesleyan Hospitality: Embodied and Reciprocal

Who is a stranger? How has the Church responded to immigrants in the history of the Wesleyan and broader Christian tradition? What is hospitality and why was it crucial to the Church? How are the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic marks of the Church formed in the practice of hospitality? Pohl shares this definition of the stranger,

Strangers, in the strict sense, are those who are disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, work, and polity…when we offer hospitality to strangers, we welcome them into a place to which we are somehow connected.19

John Wesley’s theology and ecclesiology were woven through his practice of hospitality to the sick, although not in the strict understanding we might have of hospitality or of the sick. From his sermon entitled, Visiting the Sick (1786),

First, I would inquire, what is the nature of this duty? What is implied in ‘visiting the sick’? 1. By the sick I do not mean only those that keep their bed, or that are sick in the strictest sense. Rather I would include all such as are in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body; and that whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not. [2.] ‘But is there need of visiting them in person? May we not relieve them at a distance? Does it not answer the same purpose if we send them help as if we carry it ourselves?’20

Wesley continues by insisting that our attending to the needs of others is impossible through proxy, rather it demands our physical presence. The exchange that takes place in practicing hospitality with the stranger is not one-directional. A traditional understanding of hospitality is to participate in the spiritual practice of welcoming others

18 Carroll, Christians at the Border, 121.
20 Collins and Vickers, The Sermons of John Wesley.
into the comfort and warmth of food and rest, recognizing others as equals in companionship. However, hospitality is not only offered but is also received; it is a reciprocal enterprise.

John Wesley shares more about going into the homes of others more than having them into his home, perhaps because of the nature of his work as an itinerant preacher or perhaps because of his intentionality in visiting the poor where they were. “Because of his travels and extraordinary preaching schedule, and his emphasis on face-to-face discipleship, Wesley was continually visiting, always as a guest.”

According to Wesley, reciprocity takes place as the one who offers hospitality increases in “lowliness, in patience, in tenderness of Spirit, in sympathy with the afflicted which you might not have gained…” The spiritual formation that takes root within us grows holiness as we practice hospitality. As we participate in this practice, the marks of the Church begin to surface: one, holy, catholic, apostolic. Wesley compels us to see others, “with your own eyes…if you do not, you lose a means of grace…”

On December 21, 2014, I decided to take Wesley’s words to heart. That day I saw with my own eyes these faces and listened with my own ears to the stories of these strangers that I worship alongside each week at Central Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, KS. We gathered together for a shared meal and after we finished eating I conducted an ethnographic interview with a small group of undocumented immigrants. Some of their names and faces were familiar to me, others were not, but after sharing in table fellowship, we came together in a small room on a Sunday afternoon, their Spanish conversations buzzing and laughter still ringing as I began to embody this practice of hospitality.

I asked if they would describe what they had experienced when they first arrived to the United States. Their responses brought an immediate quietness to the room,

“We were fearful.”

“I felt mistreated.”

“Loneliness was huge. I was always looking over my shoulder, afraid of the cops…I was frustrated and helpless.”

22 Collins and Vickers, The Sermons of John Wesley.
23 Ibid.
24 Anonymous, Undocumented Immigrants: Ethnographic Interviews.
25 Ibid.
“Language was a big deal.”

Some of them shared their experiences of suffering and mistreatment and as we listened, we all shook our heads in disbelief and sadness.

“I was working labor at a person’s house. The lady was nice; she gave me a glass of water. Her mother was there and saw what she did. She came over to me and took the glass of water right out of my hand.”

As the conversation continued, another shared with me that they had all suffered in some way, but that there were driving reasons to stay in spite of their suffering. A married couple shared their story with all of us, their teenage son was sitting by their side,

We want our family here, it is a much better life. The economy is better, there are no gangs or crime…that is why we stay. We came here from El Salvador. Our son was being recruited by a gang. He was told he would have to kidnap children; that was his job in the gang. We knew we had to leave – for our son’s sake.

Voluntary Ignorance and the Power of Recognition

There is a shared concern among those who suffer, that ignorance is a choice and at times, a preference.

Wesley’s sermon, *Visiting the Sick (1786)*, helps to verbalize what he calls “voluntary ignorance.”

According to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it— and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart. ‘Indeed, sir’ (said a person of large substance), ‘I am a very compassionate man. But to tell you the truth, I do not know anybody in the world that is in want.’ How did this come to pass? Why, he took good care to keep out of their way. And if he fell upon any of them unawares, ‘he passed over on the other side.’

As the needs of undocumented immigrants bear in upon the peripheral vision of the Church, we cannot succumb to voluntary ignorance. The church must acknowledge and bring under God’s sovereignty what Pohl describes as the “power of recognition.”

The French religious philosopher, Simone Weil, articulates her own

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Collins and Vickers, *The Sermons of John Wesley*.
31 Pohl, *Making Room*.
thoughts with regard to “genius” or knowledge in her letters to Father Perrin documented in *Waiting for God*. Weil compels us to pray for genius continually,

> …It is the first thing we have to ask for now; we have to ask for it daily, hourly, as a famished child constantly asks for bread. The world needs saints who have genius, just as a plague-stricken town needs doctors. Where there is a need there is also an obligation.\(^{32}\)

As the Church embraces her missional and holy nature, Weil implores us furthermore to be full of knowledge and saintliness. As the Church is empowered by God to recognize the suffering of others in need, the Church is also obligated to respond with justice.

**Words of Suffering and of Hope**

What are the needs of those suffering as undocumented immigrants and how is the church already responding? These were some of the pressing questions I had for my Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters at Central Church. After asking them how the church had responded to them, their answers began to reveal the work of the Holy Spirit within our church.

> “Even though all week outside we are rejected, here we are accepted.”\(^{33}\)

> “Before the eyes of God, we are all the same. That is why we came to *this* church. We feel the unity in *this* church.”\(^{34}\)

> “This church is kind to us and to our children.”\(^{35}\)

They also expressed the ways in which they continue to suffer and how the Church might still respond.

> “There are still barriers, even in the church. Another way the church can help us is to find jobs.”\(^{36}\)

> The people in the church need to learn the immigration laws, then they can help. Ignorance is not an excuse. This church is big enough – perhaps there are one or two lawyers who could advise us on immigration issues, they could give guidance and we would be willing to pay.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{33}\) Anonymous, Undocumented Immigrants: Ethnographic Interviews.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
“Let us just be one like Christ, as God calls us to be one. Americans, even Christians, haven’t spent time with us. All they see is what is on T.V. that we are lazy and we want to take jobs. We are people who serve the Lord!”

Beyond the needs of jobs and counsel for immigration law there are spiritual barriers felt by these co-laborers in Christ. “How can I fulfill a call to be a missionary or a pastor if I don’t have a Driver’s License? We are not spiritual free because we are not free to explore our call.” Those last words stung as they came from the heart of my friend *Maria who teaches Sunday School each week to this faithful congregation. As we closed our time together, I reassured them that I would share their words with the leadership of our church and find ways to communicate their needs to the larger community of faith.

**Treading New Waters**

The Church of the Nazarene continues to move forward with a biblical response the issue of immigration facing the global Church. One step toward this biblical response came from a statement issued by the National Association of Evangelicals, of which the Church of the Nazarene is a member and is summarized as follows:

- Immigrants should be treated with respect and mercy.
- National borders must be safeguarded with efficiency and respect for human dignity
- Immigration laws should recognize the central importance of the family and provide for reduction in backlogs for family reunification.
- There should be a clear and workable system for legally admitting an adequate number of immigrants to meet both workforce and family reunification needs.
- There must be a sound, equitable process for currently undocumented immigrants who wish to assume the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship to earn legal status.
- There should be fair labor and civil laws for all who reside in the United States, reflecting the best of our nation’s heritage.
- Immigration enforcement must recognize due process of law, the sanctity of the human person and the incomparable value of family.

Addressing issues of immigration require more than words; our actions convey our beliefs and convictions. In addition to this statement by the NAE and supported by the Church of the Nazarene, our

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38 Ibid.
denomination has recently contributed to a new, collaborative initiative called The Immigration Alliance (TIA).

On November 7, 2014, TIA’s executive director, Damon Schroeder wrote to our Board of General Superintendents to thank the Church of the Nazarene as an endorser for this coalition which will bring together fifteen evangelical denominations. Nazarene pastors Rev. Althea Taylor and Rev. Gabriel Salguero are representatives on TIA’s board of directors. Their Church-Based Immigrant Ministry Coalition implementation plan includes practical tools to help churches meet the needs of those congregants who require legal services. Their mission statement reads:

The Immigration Alliance is a national effort that equips churches to provide critical immigration legal services to under-resourced immigrants. TIA’s affiliated churches provide fair, trustworthy immigration legal counsel to include:

- Low-cost legal counseling on immigration-related matters
- Support in determining eligibility for benefits
- Assistance in preparing applications for legal immigration status
- Immigration support to victims of crime and domestic violence
- Assistance in reuniting families

Our denomination’s participation in this practical expression of our theological and biblical foundations is another mark of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The unified effort of the missional Church is observed as we move from the place of belonging within the community of faith. From our own table fellowship of homogeneity, we cross boundaries of difference to engage with strangers and immigrants and our actions reflect holiness through reciprocal acts of hospitality.

A Preferred Future for the Church of the Nazarene

John Wesley articulates a vision of holiness, the missional church and immigration in his sermon titled, The Catholic Spirit. In speaking of the man or woman who is found in the community of faith and in communion with the Triune God, Wesley shares,

While he is united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular congregation, --his heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and

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40 “The Immigration Alliance: Providing High Quality, Low Cost Legal Services to Immigrants.”
cordial affection neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic or universal love. And he that has this is of a catholic spirit.\textsuperscript{41}

Wesleys’ vision is my own preferred future for the Church of the Nazarene, that we, as members of one body, being found in holy communion with the Triune Godhead and with each other, turn our eyes outward upon the faces of both friends and strangers and invite them in to a place of belonging. However, my preferred future does not end there. I envision the Church as people who have moved out of a place of comfort, away from their human nature’s desire to remain in homogeneity, into a place of diversity where we walk alongside others, strangers even, on the path.

The church is drawn into Christ-like beauty through the poor and despised of the world. In this way, while ecclesial communities in North America need to learn what it means to accompany the migrants, such communities are also in desperate need of the accompaniment of migrants on this journey.\textsuperscript{42}

I believe that there is a growing hunger that exists today within the Church and across generational boundaries. It is a holy longing, “for a richer understanding of what it means to be the church in the world”\textsuperscript{43} As the global Church begins to emerge in new paradigm, a clarion call is indispensible for the Church to embrace a biblical and theological vision of the peaceable kingdom of God that welcomes the stranger. If this holy longing bears fruit, the Church catholic may finally embrace its identity as sojourners, pilgrim people journeying together toward the eschaton and in step with the Spirit. This hope is realized within the Church as those who move us beyond a homogeneous identity, accompany us along the way. This reality gives the global Church reason to celebrate as we find ourselves returning to our original purpose, bearing the marks of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

\textsuperscript{41} Wesley, “The Catholic Spirit: Sermon 39.”
\textsuperscript{42} Sweeden, “Eucharist as Gift in God’s Economy of Grace: Explorations in Hospitality and Pilgrimage in Relation to Global Migration.”
\textsuperscript{43} Marsh and Perkins, \textit{Welcoming Justice}, 93.
———. *John 10:11 (ESV)*, n.d.
APPENDIX

Ethnographic Interview with Spanish-Speaking Congregation Members
Central Church of the Nazarene, Lenexa, KS
December 21, 2014 at 1:30pm
Attending: Lynne Bollinger, Angel Sigui (translator), Approximately 10-12 Spanish-speaking congregation members

After describing my role as a student at NTS, and the purpose of the paper I am working on with regard to the Church and Immigration, I received permission from the group to take written notes of what they shared verbally. I assured the group that what they shared could be done in confidence of their anonymity.

Female #4 made a joke about the cops being outside the room after we finished. Everyone laughed, helping to ease the tension of the imminent conversation.

LB: Could you describe what it was like when you first arrived here to the U.S.?

Female #1: It was different then, we had access to services, everything was easier, banking, etc. They have literally shut down the benefits we used to have because the perspective (of immigrants) has changed.

Female #2: Language was a big deal.

Male #1: We came without any papers, we were fearful.

Female #2: You know you are a good person but you feel like a felon. You live with that constant fear.

Male #3: I felt mistreated. My boss mistreats me, people are racist, and they won’t let you drink water from the tap.

Male #1: I was working labor at a person’s house. The lady was nice; she gave me a glass of water. Her mother was there and saw what she did. She came over to me and took the glass of water right out of my hand.

Female #3: My mother was sent back. I was returned to Texas to a ranch where the schools are run by people who are racist. They would ask us, “Who makes the laws?” They were implying the majority population makes the laws and she was clearly in the minority.

Female #4: Loneliness was huge. I was always looking over my shoulder, afraid of the cops. I misunderstood the police, I just answered everything, “Si, si…” I was frustrated and helpless.

Male #4: At work, they appreciate us. They know we are good workers but there is no way to improve our place (no upward mobility).

Female #4: We have all suffered here, but we all have different reasons for staying.

LB: What are your reasons for staying?

Male #5: We want our family here, it is a much better life. The economy is better, there are no gangs or crime.

Female #5: That is why we stay. We came here from El Salvador. Our son (points to her teenage son sitting next to her) was being recruited by a gang. He was told he would have to kidnap children; that was his job in the gang. We knew we had to leave – for our son’s sake.
**LB:** How has the church helped you?

Female #1: They are our family. We have acceptance.

Male #3: Even though all week outside we are rejected, here we are accepted.

**LB:** There are some Nazarene churches that have begun to address the issues facing undocumented immigrants. If the entire body here at Central Church knew your needs, perhaps we could begin to do the same?

Male #2: Before the eyes of God, we are all the same. That is why we came to this church. We feel the unity in this church. As Christians, God will not see rich, poor, black or white.

Female #1: This church is kind to us and to our children. Thank you for accepting us in this church. We did not come to take from but to work, to take care of ourselves economically. We didn’t come to steal, we want to be a part. If you can help us – it will benefit all of us in this country. We will make this country grow stronger.

Male #2: Let us just be one like Christ, as God calls us to be one. Americans, even Christians, haven’t spent time with us. All they see is what is on T.V. we are lazy; we want to take jobs, etc. We are people who serve the Lord, even in our situation we want to be legal. We want to pay taxes, we are not taking, we want to give. If the church helped us, we could help more.

Female #1: How can I fulfill a call to be a missionary or a pastor if I don’t have a Driver’s License? We are not spiritual free because we are not free to explore our call.

Male #5: There are still barriers, even in the church. Another way the church can help us is to find jobs.

Female #4: We are not here because we want to but because we need to.

**LB:** The church can do more to help stop deportation. We have a family in the church from Iran. They fled to the U.S. for religious asylum and they needed people from the church to stand on their behalf and tell the U.S. government that they were people who could be trusted, that they were Christians. The judge listened and they were granted asylum and working visas. Have there been people in your congregation who have been deported? We need to know so that we can help.

Male #2: The people in the church need to learn the immigration laws, then they can help. Ignorance is not an excuse. This church is big enough – perhaps there are one or two lawyers who could advise us on immigration issues, they could give guidance and we would be willing to pay.

**LB:** Thank you for sharing, for being honest with me. I want to share your words with the leaders in our church and I hope that together we can work on your behalf.

We closed the meeting hugging and expressing thanks to each other. It was a great feeling to have had this conversation with people that I have been spending time with in worship, at meals and in conversation for the last nine months. This conversation will go a long way to building credibility and relationship with many of the Spanish-speaking congregation members.
A few months ago, The New York Times ran a front-page story about the strong support coming from evangelical leaders like Richard Land, Bill Hybels, Mat Staver, and Samuel Rodriguez for a comprehensive reform of our nation’s immigration laws. While I appreciated the article as a whole, I thought one particular paragraph was misleading: the article implied that the majority of evangelical leaders, who support immigration reform, do so because of Scripture’s command to love and ensure equal treatment for the immigrant (Lev. 19:33-34 and elsewhere), while those evangelicals who oppose reform heed Romans 13, where Paul instructs the Church to be subject to the governing authorities.

A lot of Christians wrestle with the issue of immigration in a way that pits love and mercy on one side with law and justice on the other—and then feel conflicted. In a theological context, we’re promised that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13), and a few Christians do advocate amnesty for undocumented immigrants precisely because we who could not be saved by fulfilling God’s law are saved by God’s grace (just a synonym for amnesty) rather than through any of our own merit (Eph. 2:8-9). Advocates of amnesty for undocumented immigrants say that, as recipients of grace, they do not want to be stingy in extending it to others and risk the judgment that Jesus told of in his parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35).

While I respect that view—and agree that there ought to be a place for mercy in our policies—I don’t share it entirely. Having interacted with many of the evangelical leaders who have advocated reform, I am confident that they do not affirm this view, either. The role of the state, they would note (and I would agree), is different than that of the church. While they would likely agree that grace is central to our theology and affirm the importance of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships, they do not endorse amnesty as the best public policy. None of them has come to their position by elevating Leviticus 19 over Romans 13.

To the contrary, most evangelical leaders (including each of those mentioned above) have stressed the importance of both showing kindness to undocumented immigrants while also respecting the ideal of the rule of law that we find in Romans 13. Evangelical support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform is built around the idea of restoring the rule of law to a system where, after decades of selectively ignoring the law, it has begun to lose its meaning.

You see, our current system is set up in a way that would be destructive to the American economy if fully enforced. Our employment-based immigration system—the basic structure of which has not been altered in decades—provides just 5,000 permanent resident visas per year for low-skilled
workers, meeting just a tiny fraction of the demand for employees created by our market economy. Because of political pressure from groups whose stated mission is to limit population growth in the U.S.—who have successfully convinced many Americans that, contrary to established economic theory, immigrants are harmful, rather than beneficial, to the American economy—our Congress has not seen fit to adapt the legal immigration system to provide the additional labor flow necessary for sustained economic growth.

**But the alternative—strict enforcement of these outmoded laws—has never been a reasonable option either:** no politician wants to preside over an era of skyrocketing prices for the basic goods and services that immigrant laborers make possible. So, for decades now—under the leadership of both major political parties—we simply do not fully enforce the law, either against immigrants or against the employers who hire them unlawfully. The law says that the estimated 11 million immigrants currently present unlawfully should be deported, but almost no one in Washington is really serious about that possibility, because they know that the economic consequences would be disastrous ($2.6 trillion in lost Gross Domestic Product over a decade, according to one economist).

**Instead, as a society, we have looked the other way as desperate migrants—many of them fleeing conditions of poverty beyond what most Americans can fathom—violate the law by entering or overstaying a visa and then accepting employment without authorization.** It is illegal under the law—no doubt—but just as many of us presume that a 55 mile-per-hour speed limit doesn’t really mean it is wrong to go 58 or 59 (or, in some parts of the country, much faster), immigrants have understood the consistent lack of enforcement as a winking signal that our society did not really mean those laws.

**There is nothing inherently unjust about having borders and controlling the number of immigrants who are allowed to enter: that is a legitimate function of the state.** This becomes an issue of injustice when we avert our eyes as the law is violated, then subsequently deny those who have broken the law any rights, refusing any responsibility to treat them as we would want to be treated (Luke 6:31). We require them to pay Social Security taxes—$12 billion, cumulatively, in 2007—but deny them any benefits. If they are a victim of crime, in some parts of the country they could be asked about their legal status, detained, and deported if they notify the police, making them open targets for criminals. So long as they work quietly and for low wages, sometimes in conditions that fail to meet minimum safety requirements, they will probably be okay, but if they raise their voice against these abuses they risk arrest, detention, and deportation. After all, the common sentiment goes, they broke the law.

**Evangelical leaders realize that this status quo is a broken mess;** they are not advocating that mercy for immigrants should trump the law, but that we must restore the rule of law, prescribing a
punishment for unlawful entry and unauthorized work that fits the crime (think: the equivalent of a fine for speeding down the highway, rather than having your driver’s license revoked).

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform that evangelical leaders have advocated would require those here unlawfully to pay a monetary penalty and earn the right to become lawful permanent residents, but it would also insist that in the future we put into place a reasonable number of visas, tied to the priorities of economic growth and family unity, and that from here on out we strictly enforce the law, both against immigrants and employers who break the law.

That sort of a plan brings together the biblical mandates to be subject to the governing authorities (Romans 13) and to show love and kindness to the immigrant (Leviticus 19), rather than pitting two biblical commands against one another. As pastor and theologian John Piper has said, “it gives honor to the law and it gives mercy to the immigrants.”

Amnesty and Grace
POSTED BY MATTHEW SOERENS ON MARCH 21, 2013

Even as popular opinion—and the opinions of a growing number of Members of Congress—seems to be shifting in favor of immigration reform legislation, the American public is still very much wary of the idea of amnesty. The concept is so unpopular that population control groups seeking to dramatically reduce immigration levels apply the term as an epithet to any sort of legislation that would include the possibility of undocumented immigrants ever becoming lawful residents, even proposals which would require undocumented immigrants to pay a significant fine (by definition, not the free grace of amnesty) and earn permanent legal status through a probationary process lasting a decade or more.

To be clear, my employer, World Relief, and most other evangelical advocates of immigration reform have long been clear that we oppose amnesty (properly defined) because we believe that appropriate legislation should be informed both by a biblically-informed respect for the rule of law and by the many commands to extend welcome and love to immigrants. We have said that immigration legislation should require the payment of a fine for those who have entered without authorization or have overstay a visa (and who have not committed other, more serious criminal offenses, which might merit deportation) and establish a rigorous but clear process by which people could regularize their status and eventually become fully integrated citizens of
our country. Such a response, as pastor and author John Piper has said, both “would give honor to the law and show mercy to the immigrants.” In contrast, a simple amnesty—from the same etymology as amnesia, forgetting that an offense has occurred—would not respect the rule of law.

Amnesty is based in the idea of forgiveness; it’s a synonym for grace, which is a rather important concept for Christians. As people who believe we have been forgiven much—of all of our sins, through Christ’s death on the cross—Christ explicitly commands us to forgive others (Matthew 6:12, Luke 6:37). I believe that those injunctions apply to us as individuals, but not necessarily to governments, which is why I do not believe amnesty is the right public policy response. If a government informed by Christian values had to automatically forgive every offense, we could have no criminal justice system at all: there could be no penalty for murder, theft, or domestic violence. Chaos and injustice would reign. Forgiveness is a good and beautiful thing, but while it is appropriate that there be elements of mercy in our laws, Scripture also makes clear that the government has been divinely established to maintain order for the common good, which precludes it from simply forgiving every violation of law (Romans 13:1-7).

Still, I’m somewhat startled by the contempt for the word amnesty among some Christians. While it may not be the policy the government should adapt, it is very clearly the policy that individual Christ-followers should embrace in our own interactions with those who have violated a law or even who have injured us personally. We ought to respond to those who have violated the law like our Father responds to us, like the beautiful picture Jesus gives us of an eager father running out to embrace his lost, prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Instead, the miserly response that some undocumented immigrants have received from native-born evangelical Christians more closely resembles that of the prodigal’s older brother, who bitterly resents the grace and forgiveness his brother receives from the father. To be sure, grace is a scandalous idea, but without it we have no gospel: we would do well to come to terms with the idea, because Jesus is very clear: “If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15).

I’m also not suggesting that every violation of civil law is necessarily a sin. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were clearly not sinning when they violated the law by refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, for example. I do not think that overstaying a visa to provide for one’s family is necessarily a moral failure, even if it is indubitably unlawful. This distinction between civil law and moral law only further begs the question of why so many American Christians seem to find unlawful presence in the U.S.—which does not require any sort of malicious intent, and in fact is often driven by noble desires—so much more offensive than other violations of law, such as exceeding the speed limit by a few miles per hour, which seems to be quite socially acceptable. Why do people seem so
much more upset about people using a false Social Security card to work and support their family than they do about minors using a fake ID to be able to consume alcohol, which seems to be a far less virtuous motivation but which is common in just about any college town?

While the role of the state may appropriately be to require undocumented immigrants to earn their way to full legal rights and privileges through the payment of a fine, repaying any back taxes owed, and meeting certain other criteria, our role as individual followers of Christ is to extend grace freely, without condition. We are commanded to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). God’s forgiveness is not contingent upon our repaying our debt: we cannot possibly earn salvation by our own merit. We receive it as free grace, through Christ’s costly crucifixion. And then we are commanded to extend that grace, forgiveness and welcome lavishly to others.

The state has its biblically sanctioned role, and we—as participants in a democratic form of government, where being subject to the governing authorities encourages lobbying our elected officials to support just policies—ought to advocate tirelessly for common sense legislation that restores the rule of law, recognizes the inherent dignity and potential of each person, and keeps families united whenever possible. As individuals and as churches, though, we must go beyond that, responding to the immigrants in our communities with grace.

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The Unborn and the Undocumented

POSTED BY MATTHEW SOERENS ON NOVEMBER 12, 2012

At one point in my early life, I was undocumented. Because I lacked a legal document, I lacked the protection of the rule of law. If I was deemed to be inconvenient or potentially dangerous, I could have been eliminated. I was vulnerable.

And then, I was born. I was issued a birth certificate that declared me a U.S. citizen, which meant that I had value and was entitled to protection.

Though I understand why it is a nuanced and complicated issue, and I have many friends whom I respect even though I know they disagree with me, I believe very strongly that we should protect unborn lives from abortion. I believe that being pro-life means more
than only protecting pre-born life: it means a concern for the health and wellbeing of all human life, born and unborn, which requires me to care about the environment, war, education, public health, and a number of other complex political issues. I think that being pro-life must mean more than simply passing laws prohibiting abortions: it also means educating people to minimize the number of unwanted pregnancies in the first place, addressing the conditions of poverty that make abortion seem like the “lesser evil” choice for women facing unexpected pregnancies, and doing everything possible to encourage and de-stigmatize adoption. But, though it is much more than just that, being pro-life also means legally protecting the rights of fetuses in the womb from termination.

**My commitment to life stems from my belief, informed by my Christian faith, that I and other human beings have value because we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).** Human life begins to have value and deserve protection not once it is recognized with a document from a government, but at the moment God conceives of it (Psalm 139:16).

**For the same reason, I believe very strongly that our society—and especially our local churches—should acknowledge the dignity of undocumented immigrants, whose value is also defined by the God who made them in his image, not by a green card or visa that a government may or may not bestow.** That’s one reason I find it so frustratingly inconsistent that defenders of unborn babies and defenders of undocumented immigrants have recently tended to be on opposing sides of our nation’s partisan divide. Those who stand with the unborn and those who stand with undocumented immigrants should logically be on the same team because both are driven by a respect for the *imago dei* in each person.

**There’s a second reason the pro-life and pro-immigrant movements should naturally be allied: we share a common opponent in the population control movement.** Since at least the time of Thomas Malthus, there have been people worried that there are simply too many people on earth; some are driven by a zero-sum economic theory that presumes that more people will imply a smaller share of resources for each person. Others are focused on controlling particular populations of people, believing the eugenicist theory that certain ethnicities are biologically superior to others.

**There are two basic ways to limit population growth within a given country: you can minimize the number of births or minimize the number of immigrants.** Many population control enthusiasts are thus both strong proponents of abortion rights and strongly anti-immigration. For example, Margaret Sanger—best known as the founder of Planned Parenthood, which is now responsible for about 300,000 abortions in the U.S. each year—was also a strong proponent of restricting immigration. A more contemporary example is John Tanton, who helped to found the Federation for American Immigration Reform, NumbersUSA, and the Center for Immigration Studies, all
prominent groups arguing for dramatically lower levels of lawful migration. He also opened the first Planned Parenthood chapter in northern Michigan and speaks positively of China’s one-child forced abortion policy, calling it “unfortunate” that India has not adapted similar policies. While he is certainly entitled to his views, I am always troubled when a pro-life legislator gives me a factsheet produced by one of these organizations (especially because the “facts” are so often false, skewed to fit the population control agenda).

There’s a third reason that I think those who are pro-life should also advocate for immigrants, which was starkly illustrated by last week’s elections: if the party that stands for life is viewed as the anti-immigrant party, its electoral viability is increasingly limited. Though Mitt Romney’s record on the issue of abortion was somewhat mixed and his statements on the topic—even in the final weeks of the election—were somewhat ambiguous, he certainly seems to have been more likely to seek to limit abortions than Barack Obama. But President Obama received the vast majority (71%) of the votes of Latinos, most of whom are Catholic or evangelical Christians, and most of whom (unlike the American population overall) believe that abortion should be illegal in all or most circumstances. Latino voters tend to feel strongly about unborn life, but the issue of immigration—which is very personal for most Latino voters, because most know someone who is undocumented—determined their vote. As pro-life commentator Ben Domenech tweeted, “Politically active Hispanics who marched in the March for Life voted for Obama because Mitt Romney doesn’t care about them.” For many, Governor Romney and the Republican Party platform’s endorsement of “self-deportation” sounded like starving out a parent or grandparent by making their existence within the U.S. as miserable as possible.

Last week, the party that most consistently has stood for protecting unborn lives suffered a dramatic defeat at the polls—an Electoral College defeat that might have been avoided had it embraced immigration reform earlier. In Colorado, for example, a swing state where Latino voters formed a significantly larger share of voters than the 10% they made up nationally, President Obama received 87% of Latino votes. Had Governor Romney supported the sort of compassionate conservative immigration reform policies as did George W. Bush (instead of endorsing “self-deportation” and promising to veto the DREAM Act), he might conceivably have matched the 44% of the Hispanic vote that helped re-elect President Bush in 2004. Had he done so, says researcher Gary Segura, he would very likely be President-Elect Romney today.

As the number of Latino voters grows, it will only become more and more challenging for a pro-life president to win the Electoral College if he or she attracts only about one in four Latino voters. Eventually, the solidly red state of Texas—where a majority of students in schools (who
will be voters in a generation) are Latino already—will shift into the swing category if Republicans do not revert to an immigration policy that can earn the trust of Latino voters.

I’m not necessarily tied to the Republican Party—I’ve personally supported pro-life Democrats as well as pro-immigrant Republicans in the past—but so long as the GOP sets itself up as the pro-life party, its self-destructive embrace of anti-immigrant policies troubles me deeply. Given last week’s electoral results, others are troubled as well: conservative talk show host Sean Hannity said last week that his views had “evolved,” and he now supports a “pathway to citizenship” for most undocumented immigrants, joining many other prominent Republican voices whose views on immigration seemed to be shifting after the election.

As Focus on the Family president Jim Daly bravely acknowledged recently, evangelicals have been slow to support immigration reform because “we were led more by political-think than church-think.” To the extent that evangelicals have not stood up for the undocumented, we need to repent of an inconsistency that was driven by partisan politics, not by biblical teaching. We could learn from our Catholic brothers and sisters, who have steadfastly stood for both the unborn and the undocumented for decades: Cardinal Timothy Dolan spoke up for both, specifically, when he spoke in front of both President Obama and Governor Romney.

It is not too late, though: my hope and prayer is that Christ followers will be united as we engage a new Congress in 2013, heeding the biblical mandate to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves” (Proverbs 31:8), for all those whose voices are not heard in our democracy, whether because they are unborn or because, as non-citizens, they cannot vote. Now is the time to make your voice heard: you could start by figuring out who your Senators and Representatives are in Washington and writing a letter or making a phone call to let them know that, as a Christian, you would like them to act on immigration reform that would permit the undocumented to earn the right and the ability to get on a pathway to citizenship.

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Folding Chair Amnesty

POSTED BY MATTHEW SOERENS ON APRIL 29, 2013

A few weeks ago, in the bulletin at my church, there was an announcement that I felt had been written specifically for me: Folding Chair Amnesty Week—Have you ever borrowed folding chairs from the church? We need them back! Please return any folding chairs to the church this week—amnesty is being offered to all.
The truth is there are four or five of my church’s folding chairs under my couch as I speak. In my defense, these really were borrowed chairs, not stolen. Our church lent them to us sometime around 2009 for a kids’ ministry program that my wife and I and some other folks within our neighborhood run out of our apartment on Sunday evenings. (Of course, we also use them when we have more friends over for a meal than our kitchen table allows and at various other times). The pastor at our church—if my memory serves me correctly—who initially gave us permission several years back has since moved on to plant a new church, and so I’m not sure that the church realizes we still have them, and no one ever really told us when we were supposed to return them. Now, apparently, they need them back. I’m going to make sure we do that before I post this blog, now that I’m incriminating myself publicly.

Let me tell you what I understand by the “amnesty” being offered: we will bring back the chairs, and there will be no punishment. We will not be fined. We will not be refused communion as a punishment or be informed that our church membership will be suspended. No shame, just grace. Bygones will be bygones. Amnesty—from the same etymological root as amnesia—means that our offense will be overlooked and forgotten. In fact, that’s precisely what amnesty means. If that’s what you understand amnesty to mean, and you heard on television, on the radio, or online in the past couple of weeks that a bipartisan group of eight Senators had introduced an immigration reform bill that includes “amnesty for illegal immigrants,” you would probably very reasonably conclude that this bill proposes that the U.S. government should forgive and forget that the estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S. had either overstayed a visa or crossed a border unlawfully.

In reality, the bipartisan Senate immigration reform bill—the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013”—does not offer amnesty to undocumented immigrants: it actually requires accountability. Here’s what the bill (which you can read for yourself) proposes: one year after the bill is signed into law—once the Secretary of Homeland Security has submitted a complete plan with metrics to verify the security of the southern border—immigrants in the country unlawfully (whether they overstayed a visa, which accounts for at least 40% of the undocumented, or crossed the border illegally) who have been present in the United States since at least 2011, would be eligible to apply for “Registered Provisional Immigrant” status. To be eligible to apply, they would need to be able to pass a criminal background (establishing that they have not been convicted of a felony or of multiple misdemeanors and that they are not in any other way a threat to public or national security) and they would have to pay an initial fine of $500 (in addition to processing fees) as well as any taxes that the IRS determines they owe. If granted that Registered Provisional Immigrant status, they would be granted work authorization for a six year period, but they will not be eligible for any means-tested public benefits and the status could be revoked for criminal activity or for various other reasons. After six years, they would be eligible to renew their Registered Provisional Immigrant status only if they pay an additional $500 fine (plus processing fees), pass another background check (ensuring no criminal activity has been committed since the initial approval), and
demonstrate that they (or their spouse or, for minor children, parent) have been regularly employed and that their income is above the poverty level, ensuring they will not become a public charge.

**After ten years, if certain “triggers” are met, these Registered Provisional Immigrants could be eligible to apply for Lawful Permanent Resident status.** Before anyone with this status will be granted a “green card,” though, the U.S.-Mexico border must be secure, meeting specific targets contained within the bill. The Department of Homeland Security must have fully implemented a mandatory “E-Verify” system to ensure that all employers verify the legal status of their workers (and face significant fines if they hire those without legal status). Everyone currently waiting in the backlogged family-based immigration system for an immigrant visa through a petition from a relative must have been admitted into the U.S. with a green card, ensuring that those who were present unlawfully in the U.S. are not granted permanent legal status prior to those who are “waiting their turn in line” (most of those who are currently undocumented were not eligible to even get in that line, since they did not have a family sponsor, but the bill wants to ensure fairness to those who are currently eligible but waiting). And, finally, formerly-undocumented immigrants with Registered Provisional Immigrant status will be required to pay an additional $1,000 fine (plus application fees) before being granted Lawful Permanent Resident status. Three years later—if they can pass a test of U.S. civics and history in English and meet various other existing requirements—those who chose to could apply to become U.S. citizens. (Two relatively small categories of undocumented immigrants, agricultural workers and those who entered the U.S. before their 16th birthday, who presumably were brought by their parents and not of their own volition, would have expedited processes to legal status and citizenship under the bill).

**That’s what some folks are labeling as “amnesty.”** I sure hope they don’t apply that standard to me when I bring the chairs back to my church: I’d probably have to pay a series of hefty fines, be in a “provisional” member status for a decade or more (without the right to vote at church membership meetings, I suppose), and not be allowed to access things like communion, even though I would be expected to tithe consistently. Though I do not believe it is the right public policy—because I think the government has a divine mandate to maintain order that is distinct from the role of the Church—I think Christians, who believe we are saved by grace through Christ’s death on the cross, who could not possibly earn our salvation, and who may occasionally “borrow” chairs from the church and not return them for years, should be slow to use the word amnesty as an epitaph.

**Amnesty is free grace: this bill is not.** The population control groups who explicitly oppose not just unlawful migration but almost all legal migration as well have a strategic reasons to label this bill (and, they made clear in testimony to the U.S. Senate last week, *any* bill that stops short of deporting everyone present unlawfully) as “amnesty.” They want to mobilize public opinion to kill this bill, which would include a new, more market-sensitive visa system, just as they did similar bills in 2006 and 2007, and they know that most Americans oppose “amnesty for illegal aliens.” When they actually know what is in the bill, however the vast majority of Americans, including about three out of four Republicans according to a recent *Wall Street Journal* poll, are...
supportive. Americans (including evangelical Christians) are mostly opposed to amnesty as a public policy, but we are for accountability, which this long-overdue bill provides. Most of my undocumented friends do not want amnesty either. They want to be able to earn legal status and to be right with the law, which is why most immigrant rights groups as well as immigrant churches are hoping and praying this bill will pass. In fact, as the bill’s cosponsor, Marco Rubio, has noted, the only real amnesty on the table is the status quo, doing nothing, where immigrants who have violated the law stay in the U.S. without any penalty for their offense and without any process to get right with the law. And that, if we do not join our immigrant brothers and sisters in speaking up, letting our legislators know where we stand, might be exactly what we get.

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**Child of Promise: Zipporah**

POSTED BY MATTHEW SOERENS ON JUNE 21, 2013

Quick: what’s the first word that you think of when you hear the word “stranger.”

According to wordassociation.org, one of the most common associations is “danger.” I grew up watching public service announcements on children’s television that helped engrain that connotation into my mind. Strangers were people to be afraid of, to avoid, from whom to run away.

Of course, I am all for educating children to protect them from abduction or abuse. But my sense is that our fear of strangers goes beyond protecting children: many carry it into adulthood. To some extent, it’s become a societal value in the United States. We presume that strangers—those we do not (yet) know—are a potential danger, and thus many perceive immigrants—strangers in any given community, at least when they first arrive—as a threat. In fact, most white evangelical Christians, polls find, believe that immigrants present a threat to their customs and values: my category of Christian is actually more likely to believe that than Americans as a whole.

It’s a bit ironic that Christians would be uniquely afraid of strangers, both because (a) our Scriptures teach us that we are “foreigners and strangers” on earth, “longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13-16) and because (b) we are explicitly and repeatedly commanded to welcome and love strangers, which is the precise definition of the word hospitality (in the Greek, *philoxenia*).

Recently I was re-reading the story of Abram (later Abraham), who was visited by three strangers. He was incredibly eager to welcome these passers-by: “When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them” (*Genesis 18:2*), and then he pleads with them to stop, rest, and enjoy some dinner.
with him, for which he kills a whole cow. Abram’s eagerness to extend hospitality to strangers might just be what was expected in his culture—I’ve experienced personally the culture of offering a cup of minty tea or strong coffee to visiting strangers that is still a reality in parts of the Middle East—but I like to think that his reaction might have been informed by Abram’s own experience of having been a stranger. He crossed borders a number of times and experienced both hostile and gracious hosts, so perhaps he was reciprocating the kindness he had received from others to these sojourners.

In any case, Abram welcomed these three strangers, and they turned out to be messengers from God, who informed him that—against all biological possibility for a post-menopausal woman—his wife Sarai would soon give birth to a child. And she did. Had Abram responded with fear and hostility to these strangers, rather than eager hospitality, he might have missed out on an incredible blessing: Isaac, the child of God’s promise. The Bible does not promise that welcoming strangers is always safe. But it does command us to the practice, with the suggestion that, by doing so, we too might be welcoming angels without realizing it (Hebrews 13:2).

A few years ago, a woman named Marie arrived in our apartment complex from East Africa with three children and a fourth just a few months away from being born. We met this new family—Marie spoke very little English, though her kids could communicate with us better—and we did our best to be their friends. We found that they had arrived on tourist visas, but actually were escaping from threats against them in their country; they hoped to apply for asylum and start a new life in the United States. For the time being, though, they had very little, and no work authorization. We tried to do what we would have hoped someone would have done for us if the tables were turned: we helped find some furniture from folks at our church. We helped cover their rent a few times (though they eventually paid us back in full). We helped the kids adjust to school. They joined our church, and when two of the kids decided to be baptized, we were standing right beside them, overjoyed by their commitment to following Christ. My wife was there at the hospital when the new baby was born. When—after all sorts of prayer and fasting, because the process is complex and risky—they were granted asylum, we helped them get driver’s licenses and Social Security cards. And, in the process, they became very dear friends. They weren’t strangers any more.

After more than two years, Marie’s husband was able to come to the U.S. as well; I began to weep at O’Hare Airport as I watched their family reunite, and as Janvier met his youngest daughter for the first time.

A short time later, while over at Marie and Janvier’s for one of many delectable meals, the topic of children came up. They asked when we planned to have kids, and we shared, somewhat reluctantly, that
we had actually been trying to get pregnant for more than a year, and it just wasn’t happening. We were discouraged and unsure if we would be able to have biological children, though we were also very open to the idea of adoption. They wanted to pray for us—they do this a lot, more than we do, frankly—and afterwards, Janvier told us that, while he affirmed the beauty of adoption, he also felt that the Lord was telling him that he would provide us a biological child within a year. We didn’t know quite what to do with that—I’m of a theological tradition that is a bit skeptical of this sort of thing, and we were tired of being disappointed—but we thanked them for their prayers.

A few months later—once more at Janvier and Marie Josee’s for dinner (their sambusas are incredible)—we had the privilege of sharing with them the good news: Diana was pregnant!

I’ll never forget that moment. As soon as they understood, they started shouting: screaming, really, with their hands in the air as they fell to their knees. It was not in English, but there were a lot of alleluias and references to Jesu: it was clear they were thanking God for answering their prayers. They went on to tell us that, for months, they had been rising early every Thursday to pray and fast for us to have a child, demonstrating a level of fervency in prayer for us far beyond our own commitment to prayer for ourselves. And God had heard their prayer.

Had our baby been a boy, we had decided to name him Isaac Gershom: Isaac, because, like his namesake, he would be a child of promise (Romans 9:8-9), and Gershom—the name that Moses gave to his first son, which means “an alien there” (Exodus 2:22)—because our prayer for him would be that he would embrace citizenship in God’s kingdom above any earthly identity.

This past Wednesday, however, Diana gave birth not to Isaac Gershom but to a little girl: eight pounds, fifteen ounces, twenty-two inches long. We’ve named her Zipporah Emmanuelle. Zipporah was Moses’ wife and Gershom’s mom in the Scripture (plus, we think Zip is a really cute nickname), and Emmanuelle (“God is with us”) because we want her to have a constant reminder of God’s presence with her. We’re excited for her to meet Marie and Janvier and their family, people who arrived in our country as strangers but became our neighbors, who have become dear friends and spiritual family to us, and whose fervent prayers may have brought our precious little girl into existence.

I hope that next time you hear the word “stranger,” or the word “immigrant,” you’ll think not of a threat or of a political problem, but of someone who might just be a divine blessing. (And, by the way, I’ve asked Marie and Janvier to pray for immigration reform to pass soon… so I’m pretty sure that’s on its way, too).

Matthew Soerens is the co-author of Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate (InterVarsity Press, 2009) and the US Church Training Specialist at World Relief.
SHRINK

Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture

TIM SUTTLE

Foreword by Scot McKnight
“The megachurch is an attempt to free vulnerability through size” is just one of the astute judgments that informs this book. Church growth strategies are the death gurgle of a church that has lost its way. Suttle helps us see how God in our time is making us leaner and meaner. I hope this book will be widely read.

—Stanley Hauerwas,
Gilbert T. Rowe Emeritus Professor
of Divinity and Law, Duke University

Tim Suttle has written a powerful, passionate, honest word to the church. He critiques a church too much seduced by American can-do culture. His gospel alternative is straightforward:

faithfulness, not success
story, not strategy
virtue, not technique
cooperation, not competition

The book is directed toward evangelicals who lust after megachurches. But I hope his book will spill over into the world of “progressive” Christians where I live. It is a good word, one that the entire church needs to hear. It draws us back to the truth enacted by Jesus.

—Walter Brueggemann,
Columbia Theological Seminary

It takes courage to write a book like this. It also takes courage to read a book like this. Tim Suttle calls for a major shift in how we think about church growth. This conversation is challenging and empowering; unsettling and comforting; convicting and, ultimately, inspiring. That tension embodies the gospel itself, as does this refreshing perspective on congregational leadership. If you’re ready to explore ministry
that is rooted in faithfulness and fruitfulness rather than culturally derived models of “success,” this is the book you’ve been waiting for. *Shrink* is full of life-giving good news for those who want to abandon the hamster wheel of western church culture and lead in the way of Jesus.

— Rev. Erin Wathen,  
“Irreverin,” Senior Pastor,  
Saint Andrew Christian Church, Kansas City

In the tradition of the biblical prophets, Tim Suttle boldly but gently calls us out of our American obsession with bigness and greatness toward a vision of church life rooted in faithfulness. *Shrink* is one of the wisest and most significant evangelical books that I’ve read in the last decade; it is essential reading for every pastor and church leader!

— C. Christopher Smith,  
co-author *Slow Church*  
and founding editor  
of *The Englewood Review of Books*

From the heart of a pastor, the mind of a theologian, and the soul of a prophet comes a word to Christians in North America: *shrink*. Be freed from ambition. Find God’s reign again in the daily faithfulness of living together in his kingdom. Few people could deliver this message with the same depth and piercing insight Tim Suttle has shown. In *Shrink*, he helps us face what we’ve been hiding from. He plows the scorched soil of the American church so we can take roots again and live.

— David Fitch,  
BR Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology,  
Northern Seminary,  
author *Prodigal Christianity*
SHRINK

Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture

TIM SUTTLE

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12. A Practical but Not Pragmatic Conclusion/231
Shrink is an honest book. It is the confession of a pastor who longed for and worked hard toward becoming a “great” leader, taking “successful” pastors as his model. Eventually, he came to recognize that “greatness” is not a Christian aim. To adapt words of Jesus, “there is one who is Great,” and he isn’t anyone’s local pastor. Leadership in the mode of Jesus is not what most think; rather, it is cruciform (to borrow the words of Michael Gorman, one of America’s finest New Testament scholars). Or, in Tim Suttle’s memorable words: “Great is the enemy of good.” Think about that. Tim is turning everything upside down.

Shrink is an important book and here’s why: Tim Suttle wants us to focus on the church—the local church, the kingdom of God at work in the here and now in your local situation. He’s not trying to change the world or invade Washington, DC, with new strategies and finer voting plans. Instead, he wants to see a kingdom-kind-of-life established at the local church level. This may spread all over the land, but spreading over the land is not his passion. His passion is faithfulness in the local church. I love that emphasis because, like Tim, I’m tired of global visions that suck the energy out of the local church, of plans to change the world that ignore the local church, and of hopes to be significant at the expense of being faithful in the context of the local church.

Shrink is an intelligent and intelligible book. Tim Suttle is one of the young pastors I am reading and hearing about who are not reading leadership literature—they are reading the Bible and theologians who are working the Bible hard to make it speak to our world today. So we hear from Walter Brueggemann, Stanley Hauerwas, Jürgen Moltmann, Barbara Brown Taylor, Dallas Willard, Dietrich
Bonhoeffer, N. T. Wright, and—you may have guessed it—Eugene Peterson, who are all thinkers I love and have come to appreciate.

*Shrink*, I'm thinking, will be the go-to book for young pastors who want to jump off the treadmill of bigger, better, faster, and stronger and who instead want cruciform love, justice, peace, and authenticity emerging from the local church. Here smaller just might be the way to go.

Scot McKnight
Professor of New Testament
Northern Seminary
INTRODUCTION

_I could die in peace, I think, if the world was beautiful._
_To know it’s being ruined is hard._
—Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*

I love the church.
I believe in the church.

I believe in the church maybe more than I believe in any other thing in this world. The church is the surest sign I know of that God loves everything he’s created; that God is not done with the world. The church is the singular reality bearing faithful witness to the truth that God has not left us here to struggle all by ourselves. God has come for us, to heal our broken hearts and this precious creation no matter how long it takes.

But the church is facing a huge problem, and it is not a problem of resistance or secularity, nor is it a problem of the culture’s hostility to the gospel. It is a problem of our own making. We have become enamored with size. We have become infatuated with all things bigger, better, stronger, higher, and faster.

Famed American author, poet, and farmer Wendell Berry often writes about the rhythms and cycles of a well-run farm. The problems Berry sees facing the farm and the farming life mirror the problems facing the church in our time. When I read Wendell Berry’s work, I cannot help but think he is teaching me how to be a pastor.
When Berry writes the word land, I think parish. When he uses the word farm, I think church.\(^1\)

In his wonderful novel *Jayber Crow*, Berry tells the story of a father and his son-in-law who had different approaches to farming as well as to life. The father—Athey Keith—worked the land with a sense of pastoral reverence. Athey was an older man by the time the story was told. He'd been learning under the tutelage of the land for all his life. Athey recognized that there was an order to the land; there were patterns and cycles that had to be observed. Those patterns and cycles were determined by nature and should be respected. Athey believed that humans could not impose their own patterns and cycles on the land without damaging it.

On the other hand, the son-in-law, Troy Chatham, was determined to be the picture of a modern industrial farmer. Troy seemed to believe that the farm existed to serve his wishes, not the other way around. Patterns could be imposed on the land, and natural cycles could be altered or ignored. Every inch of land had to be plowed. Limits had to be pushed and expanded. Every dime of capital had to be leveraged or spent. Troy’s goal was always bigger, better, higher, faster, and stronger.

Athey and Troy couldn’t be more different. Their approaches to farming, and to life, stand in stark contrast. As Wendell Berry explains, “Athey said, ‘Wherever I look, I want to see more than I need.’ Troy said, in effect, ‘Whatever I see I want.’ What he [Troy] asked of the land was all it had ... he was speaking as a young man of the modern age coming now into his hour, held back only by the outmoded ways of his elders.”\(^2\)

Sadly, in Berry’s story, time was on the side of youth, and Troy’s approach to farming began to overtake his father-in-law’s. Athey would make his anxious son-in-law walk the land. He’d show him

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1 I got this understanding of Wendell Berry’s work from a similar comment made by Eugene Peterson in his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 131. Peterson says that when Berry writes the word farm he substitutes the word parish.

the outlines of the plow furrows and teach him to appreciate the way the land sloped and how the water should run. He showed him the next year’s cropland, now fallow, and the land slated for the year after that, explaining to him the patterns of the farm he had discovered over decades. Athey tried to teach Troy the value of a good garden, of pasture for the milk cows, and grain for the hogs, and he showed him how to cut firewood from the fence rows without depleting them. Troy’s only response was, “We need to grow more corn.”  

Berry explains Athey’s reaction:

This brought Athey to a stop. The law of the farm was in the balance between crops (including hay and pasture) and livestock. The farm would have no more livestock than it could carry without strain. No more land would be plowed for grain crops than could be fertilized with manure from the animals. No more grain would be grown than the animals could eat. Except in case of unexpected surpluses or deficiencies, the farm did not sell or buy livestock feed. “I mean my grain and hay to leave my place on foot,” Athey liked to say. This was a conserving principle; it strictly limited both the amount of land that would be plowed and the amount of supplies that would have to be bought.

There was between Athey and his son-in-law a fundamental difference in how they viewed the vocation of farming. Berry says, “Athey was not exactly, or not only, what is called a ‘landowner.’ He was the farm’s farmer, but also its creature and belonging. He lived its life, and it lived his; he knew that, of the two lives, his was meant to be the smaller and the shorter.”

Troy did not share this view. Berry writes:

Troy went into debt and bought his new equipment because he didn’t want to be held back by demanding circumstances. He was young and strong and ambitious. He wanted to be a star. The tractor greatly increased the power and speed of work. With it he could work more land. He could work longer. Because it had electric lights

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3 Ibid., 184.
4 Ibid., 185.
5 Ibid., 182.
and did not get tired, he could work at night.... And so the farm came under the influence of a new pattern, and this was the pattern of a fundamental disagreement such as it had never seen before. It was a disagreement about time and money and the use of the world. The tractor seemed to have emanated directly from Troy's own mind, his need to go headlong, day or night, and perform heroic feats.⁶

What Athey—the older and wiser of the two—seemed to understand, which his son-in-law did not, was that it is a sin to disrespect the rhythms of nature and God’s created order. Troy’s deep disrespect of his elders was eclipsed only by his disrespect of the land, which had now become a means to his own ends. Once you make that trade, you place yourself on a collision course with reality as God has created it. And reality will always win, eventually. The earth will lie fallow one way or another until the rhythms of nature and life and humanity are once again respected. What Athey understood was that farming was never meant to be about production, but about stewardship.

What Berry writes about the farm is true of the church. What he writes about the land is true of the parish, because tending a farm and tending a church are similar enterprises. After all, they are both the necessary work of the people who have been asked to care for this world.

The church, like a healthy farm, has limits. The pastor/church leader has certain responsibilities to the health of the church and the community in which it lives. For it is not our creation, it is God’s. The church was here before we got here and will outlast every single one of us. Our job is stewardship: to leave the church better than we found it, and to cause the church to serve the world around us, not the productivity demands of the leadership.

A family farm is a holy thing—a small operation that still knows the value of the land, speaks the language of the land, and understands what the land needs. The church is meant to be a holy thing—which sees the value of the parish, speaks the language of

⁶ Ibid., 184–86.
the neighborhood, and understands what the community needs in order to flourish.

My tribe is the evangelicals. We’ve been the “industry leaders” in developing best practices for the realization of the relevant, the powerful, and the spectacular church. Like industrial farmers, we have been so successful that we have actually moved the dial for the mainstream church as well. We have filled the cities and suburbs with monuments to growth without limits. But we have pushed in the wrong direction, and we have pushed too far. We have confused the very nature of what it means to be a part of the people of God.

If we are going to be wise stewards of the church, we need to learn the lessons Athey Keith tried to teach his stubborn son-in-law, Troy Chatham. We will need to recognize what nearly all of our most celebrated contemporary church leaders have failed to teach us: that the church does not belong to us; it is we who belong to the church. We are not making the church; the church is making us. We cannot determine its success, its mission, or its outcomes.

The church will outlive all of us, that much is certain. If we are going to leave the church better than we found it, we are going to have to rediscover the necessity of margin and the reality of limits. We are going to have to sit in silence for long enough to comprehend finally the word enough. We will have to strain to see the tiny seeds of faith at work in the world and hold them in our sweaty palms, hoping against hope that they will germinate and grow and feed us. And we are going to have to stop our incessant need to make things grow the way we want them to grow, whatever the price. In many ways that will most certainly be uncomfortable and challenging for us, because we are going to have to learn how to shrink.

I am not alone in this belief. Many church leaders are now faced with a fundamental disagreement about time and money and the use of the world. All around me everyday in my church and my city, I work with people who have chosen the way of descent. They labor in beautiful obscurity and have the audacity to imagine a church that depends upon God for its future. These friends forego lucrative careers and the perks of the upwardly mobile in order to serve small
congregations faithfully. They are straining to imagine a different future for the church.

I’m writing this book in honor of those friends, to try and give my thoughts on where we went wrong; to think creatively about how to get back on track; to encourage others—maybe even you—to embrace the vision of the kingdom that this church and this world requires of us.

Tim Suttle, Kansas City—Advent, 2013.
Why I love the Church
By Shawna Songer Gaines

It's time I finally come out with it. I love the church. There, I said it! It's been a rocky relationship at times. I have been hurt, so deeply hurt. But I must confess the blame is mine to share. I have hurt people in the church. Probably at times without even knowing it. I have placed my agenda before the marginalized and the truly oppressed. I have even been arrogant enough to think that as a young female in the church, I am the marginalized, speaking for all of those who stand outside. Yikes! Me! An educated, middle-class, white girl.

God, forgive me. I love you!

Church forgive me. It wasn't just you, it was me too. And I'm sorry. I love you.

Church is messy but it is also the vessel of our salvation. Hear me out. Church is not salvation. Jesus Christ, son of God come to us in vulnerable flesh and resurrected glory is our salvation. And when he breathed on the disciples the Holy Spirit, initiating a new creation, the church was born... with a bit of blood, gore and after-birth. But she is a new creation! The vessel of salvation that brings Christ near to those who are far off and in which we are reconciled to the Father (Eph 2).

We can really make trouble for ourselves when we confuse what the church is and what the church is not.

I recently read DL Mayfield's blog, "Why I don't go to church." Spoiler alert: She does go to church! Sometimes. She has struggled with the institution of church and may spend a Sunday listening to a podcast and praying instead of making her way to a building with a church sign out front.

Her blog strikes a chord with many young adults who are drawn to participate in God-centered activities and loosely hold to church communities. Young people who have been dissolutioned by the structures and, let's be honest, idolatry in many of our churches. Too many of us have experienced communities who gather to worship the music or the video productions rather than to worship the God revealed in the broken body of Jesus Christ. I'm grateful for writers like Mayfield who, hopefully, call the church to repentance.

Mayfield wrote several sentences that hung around my neck for a few days:

"All the Church is are people. We are it. And we are enough."

Her words are very present and seemingly incarnational. It's all about fleshy, messy people. But If she is right about the former, I think that might cancel out the later. If we are it, I would stay home on Sundays too! And I'm a pastor. I know people all too well, and without the Holy Spirit, we are far from being "enough".

Mayfield is so very close to hitting the nail on the head, though. If I could be so bold to put a few more words on her screen: All the Church is are people, enlivened by the Spirit.

I do love the beauty and chaos of very organic forms of church. The spur of the moment potlucks where someones wanders in off the street and joins our meal. The children who dance around the alter during the sermon. Oh Holy Spirit, you are so very wild! But if the Spirit can work in the mess of people, can't the Spirit also be at work in a worship band who truly loves working on whichever song topped KLOVE's chart last week? I don't think the Spirit is withheld from the Sunday School teacher who takes her job so seriously she needs the curriculum 3 weeks a head of time.

One of our leaders said to me recently, "Love the church as she is, not as you want her to be."

And I do love her. We fight and make up. She snores too loud and I leave my dishes in the sink. But I love her because in her I am caught up with Christ, being reconciled to my Creator.
If the Church is the vessel of our salvation, the body of our incarnate Lord come to usher in the new creation, then I will stand with her, for better or worse, richer or poorer, till death... to wait for the resurrection of the saints when the bride of Christ will finally become as spotless as the Groom who loves her.

The Cup of Babylon
By Shawna Songer Gaines

"Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad."
Jer 51:7

Common assumption: to be pure we must sacrifice engagement with the world and to be engaged with the world we must disregard purity.

I am preaching through the book of Daniel right now. It is messing me up in the best way. Living in the King's court in Babylon, Daniel asked that he and his Israelite friends be permitted to eat nothing but vegetables and water. That's ridiculous! He could have requested a kosher diet, maybe even given up wine, but vegetables and water?! That is so far beyond what the Hebrew law requires, it seems absurd. Especially when you consider that part of the reason Daniel and his friends were brought into the King's court was their handsome appearance... and the Babylonians were not into hipster culture. Skinny jeans and skinny men were not desirable. Daniel had not only compromised his position in the King's court, he had endangered their lives.

I think Daniel asked for such a strict diet because he did not want to become drunk on the cup of Babylon. He didn't want to grow fat at the King's table and forget what it was like to be fed by the hand of God in the wilderness. Daniel's resolution is to be set apart for God. And yet, in being set apart, he somehow stands out to the King. Ironically, the same king who is trying to strip these young Babylonian men of their Israelite heritage is impressed with these men precisely because they are faithful to the God of their ancestors.

You could say I'm into holiness. There's the whole, "Be holy as I am holy" thing... seems kind of important to the character of our God. But honestly, these days I am so struck by the missional implications for holy living.

We are set apart from the world in order to be given for the world. Daniel and his friends did not have to sacrifice engagement for purity or vice versa. It was their purity that thrust them into deeper engagement and opened doors for some serious truth-telling in chapter 2. If we are set apart from the world but not given for the world, I'm not sure that is holiness. God defines holiness and God was given for the world, completely and utterly. Likewise, if we are given for the world but not willing to be set apart from it, what do we have to give if we are one in the same? We only offer brokenness upon brokenness instead of grace upon grace.

It’s no secret that the church is losing my generation. Young people are walking away from the church at least in part because the church has failed to balance the relationship between purity and engagement. Young people desire engagement: finding beauty and truth in art, literature, film, music, serving the poor and displaced, protecting the abused, trafficked, neglected: an entire generation begging to be given for the world. Thanks be to God! This same generation, however, struggles with being set apart from the world, chaffing at the idea that good Christians abstain from, well, anything that could be part of a rich and flavorful experience of life. And they have bumped up against a church that they perceive is only concerned with being set apart from and not given for the world. They have found the church to be not only hypocritical, but bland and unsubstantial.
Can you see how badly the church needs young people and young people need the church? Purity without engagement is self-righteousness and engagement without purity is self-indulgence. But purity for the sake of engagement is holiness!

My particular tribe of Christ followers, the Nazarenes, take a really unpopular stance on alcohol. We don’t drink it. At all. Supposedly. To be honest, I used to think this was part of a bland and flavorless tradition, a throw-back to a generation that I didn’t understand. Then I gave my life to welcome God’s kingdom among the broken, desperate and addicted. When being set apart from allowed me to be given for the world, my desires changed. I guess you could say, my heart was strangely warmed, and not by small "s" spirits. Daniel got absurd about purity and it gave way to incredible engagement. I guess Nazarenes have an inclination toward absurdity and that ain’t bad.

But if I could talk to the church for a minute in camera 2... Church, if you are really serious about making a place for young adults, don’t worry so much about young adults. Be holy. Worry about a broken and dying world. All your purity is filthy rags if you are not emptied and poured out for a world in need. Stop rolling your eyes when young adults walk in, covered in tattoos and headed for mimosas after church. Make a space to serve alongside them, get your hands dirty embracing the least of these. Because calling them to purity without inviting them to engagement is a one-sided and vacant conversation.

Young people, meet me at camera 3... If you are really serious about loving Jesus don’t worry about the people you think are rolling their eyes at you in the pew/folding chair because your t-shirt says, “I don’t have my sh*# together”. If you’re really serious about loving the least of these, don’t just like 10 different cause pages on Facebook or retweet someone else's picture about living among the poor. Do it. Sacrifice for it. And I’m not just talking about what you do or don’t drink. When you are serving the people God loves, it will cause you to give up a lot more than your fav cocktail. Holiness is surrendering your life before the God who gave it to you.

Purity and engagement are not at odds. They beautify one another as we reflect the image of a Holy God. The cup of Babylon made the whole earth drunk. The cup of the new covenant restores our sanity, our humanity, the image of a holy God in our lives... and it looks like absurdity to Babylon.
We Love the Church: A Millenial Survey of Nazarene Clergy
By Danny Quanstrom

While we may systematically reject sweeping generalizations about us, I believe there is one true generalization regarding Millennial clergy in the Church of the Nazarene: WE LOVE THE CHURCH! Yes, We do… We truly love the church!

Our generation gets pegged as apathetic. I can’t tell you how often we’re called the “whatever” generation. We’re told our response to so much is “meh… whatever.” And I will grant that we can be apathetic, but I would say that we are selectively apathetic! That is, on issues we’re passionate about, on issues we believe matter, we’re anything but apathetic. And this survey indicates to me that one of the things we’re passionate about is the church. The Millennial generation of clergy do not have a “whatever” stance when it comes to the church. In a survey that I recently sent out to Nazarene clergy born after 1980, 80% completed it (1,133 surveys distributed, 522 total responses, 418 completing the survey). A nearly 50% response rate is HUGE but for 80% of respondents to complete the survey indicates that we Millenials find value in our church.

More evidence is that 69% of clergy born after 1980 “pay attention (in person or online) to the delegations regarding Nazarene polity at General Assembly.” I know that almost all of my clerical friends had the 2013 GA delegations open in their browser as they worked on other projects. We care about what happens at General Assembly.

Furthermore, the write-in responses were incredibly thorough and passionate. I received several emails from respondents wanting to write more than the survey format allowed. (The comments had to be limited for ease of analysis.) One participant skirted the character limit by omitting spaces!

There were also some very impassioned responses to particular questions. For example, “I believe there is a common and consistent understanding of entire sanctification among Nazarene clergy.” Most disagreed with varied comments. From the humorous “No. Just no” to the heavier responses like “ABSOLUTELY NOT! It totally and completely depends on who you are talking to, especially if there is a major age gap between individuals.”

In sum, the thorough and passionate results reveal that we Millenials - WE CARE! We want to express thoughts on theology, polity, and leadership in the denomination because we love our church!

This survey also reveals that we do, in fact, value our theology. I get the impression that many believe the Millennial generation has wayward theological beliefs, but the survey indicates not only that younger pastors put incredible weight on theology, but that younger clergy do actually agree with Nazarene theology.

Some hard data:
- 84% of those polled are in full agreement with the Articles of Faith put forth in the Manual of the COTN.
- 79% believe there is coherence in Nazarene doctrine; that our theology “fits,” and there aren’t glaring doctrinal inconsistencies.
- We generally agree with the doctrine of entire sanctification. 69% either agree or strongly agree with how the manual discusses the doctrine. Only 15% disagree or strongly disagree with 16% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- 95% agree or strongly agree with the COTN’s affirmation of women in ministry.
- 73% agree or strongly agree with the Manual of the COTN regarding human sexuality.
- 93% are satisfied with the Manual of the COTN’s position regarding our relationship to creation and our care for it.
- 91% are satisfied with the Manual of the COTN’s position regarding our ethic of eating.

This data should be encouraging. In conversations I’ve had with clerical friends about why they left the COTN, I have yet to hear they left because of our theology. I’m sure it happens, but significantly less than one might
imagine. For example, many women leave the denomination because they don’t feel supported, not because they disagree theologically. And younger clergy who come back to the COTN from other denominations do so precisely because of our theology. In short, theology is incredibly significant for the Millennial pastor.

And so a few qualifications: We love the church. And we love our theology. This love does not come without qualification, however. We can be a critical generation, but I believe our criticism is more evidence of our love for the COTN than it is contempt towards the denomination. Frustration, or even anger, aren’t the antitheses of love, apathy is. We’re anything but apathetic towards our church and I believe our criticism is not unwarranted.

While we do believe in our theology, while we believe in sanctification and holiness, the most consistent concerns the Millennial generation have pertain to language. When it comes to the Manual, it seems that we would like to amend the ways in which we describe certain theological issues, not the issues themselves. Here are some comments from the survey: “I agree with the theology present, however, they (Articles of Faith) are in dire need of re-wording and better explanation as most of the articles are not clear and difficult to understand for lay people.” And another: “I am in full agreement with the overall sense of the Articles, but not in full agreement with the specific language used to express them.”

When it comes to entire sanctification, our criticism is once again in regards to language. We believe in holiness, that holiness is an essential element of the Christian life, but many believe the language in the Manual is unclear and/or too exclusive. Again, here are some responses: “It’s probably not the way I would describe it to someone, but I don’t disagree with it.” And again: “I’m in agreement with the intent, but as an amalgamated statement, amended by committee over the course of a century, with the implicit intent to satisfy a whole heap of interest groups, it’s probably not really clear what we actually believe.”

Other critiques of the Manual’s statement on entire sanctification were that the language is biased towards a crisis moment rather than process. Our generation doesn’t necessarily want to do away with the possibility of crisis, but we don’t want to say God’s sanctifying work is only actualized in crisis moments. There were many who believe our language should be more inclusive; that God sanctifies in moments of crisis and as part of a process. For example, “Sanctification in the manual is described as only an “aha” moment. This may be the case for some people, but for others it is more of a journey. A gradual understanding of God’s character and how we are to be transformed into the heart and mind of Christ.” Also regarding more inclusive language, “I believe that at the core of our ES (entire sanctification) doctrine there is truth. However I think it is time for us to revisit it’s language and possibly update it. Our people need to understand that entire sanctification happens through the efforts of God and not through efforts put on by ourselves. For this reason diversity of sanctification should be celebrated and not argued.”

Perhaps the strongest criticism in the survey came in response to the Manual’s statement on human sexuality. While there are plenty of respondents who had theological issues, most were generally in agreement with the theology (73%), but not the language. “I agree with the position but I don’t like the wording of the article.” Here’s another response: “Even if we affirm homosexual acts as not God’s intention for humanity, and as sinful, we don’t describe using hallucinogens as a ‘depth of perversion.’ We need to cut this kind of language out. It’s just not helpful. . .” Over and over again respondents take issue with the inclusion of “wrath” here. Survey respondents noted an inconsistency in our language where homosexuality was concerned: it is the only time the “wrath of God” is mentioned in relationship to sinful behavior. Another respondent’s strong language is a case in point: “We’re not condemning any other group of sinners to ‘the wrath of God’ anywhere else in the Manual. This sentence is an abomination, and we ought to ashamed.”

When it comes to creation care and our ethic of eating most (over 90% for both questions) agree with our position. There is a theological affirmation, but the criticism comes in that we don’t believe the language is strong enough or we don’t believe these theological issues carry much weight practically. For example, in regards to stronger language for creation care, “I think it could be even stronger. Yay for creation care!” Again, “[Yes], however, our stewardship is more than preservation, it is cultivation.” And again, “I believe there is an eschatological component to our relationship to creation. We ought to work for the flourishing of creation, not just the sustaining of it.”
In regards to putting creation care into practice: “The position is good, but we could do a lot more to actually practice sustainable living and caring for creation.” Again, “Strong words. But we need to do better at backing them up!” With a bit more strength, “I am satisfied with the COTN’s position, but I do believe that we as a denomination have not taken a more active role. The members of the COTN need to think more holistically about stewardship in general. . .”

I am grateful for the passionate and thorough responses of so many of my clergy colleagues to this survey and, in sum, I am happy to report that Millennial Nazarene clergy do, in fact, love our church! Though we do see some issues that need to be addressed, it became apparent to me that the criticism we have for our church comes from a deep love for her, her history, her theology. Again, I believe that our desire to address these issues points to an honest love for the church.

For more information about the survey, please go to: https://dquanstrom.wordpress.com/about-the-survey/