New Life at House of Bread

*Ryan Eikenbary-Barber, lead pastor at Bethany Covenant Church,*

*Mt. Vernon, Washington*

House of Bread Covenant Church in Mill City, Minnesota desires revitalization.[[1]](#footnote-1) The congregation was in gradual decline for thirty years. The congregation was rightly concerned that a smaller group of people was taking on a larger burden of responsibility. There was an increasing temptation to look inward as the church shrank. The congregation was in danger of prioritizing self-preservation above evangelism, outreach, compassion, mercy, and justice. Such a church would be out of tune with what God was already doing in the neighborhood.

House of Bread sought revitalization over the past four years by following the Congregational Vitality Pathway created by the Evangelical Covenant Church. The Congregational Vitality Pathway aims to help churches become healthier and more missional. John Wenrich is the Director of Congregational Vitality for the Evangelical Covenant Church and the creator of the Congregational Vitality Pathway. In the vitality materials, Wenrich defines “healthy” as “pursuing Christ” and “missional” as “pursuing Christ’s priorities in the world.”[[2]](#footnote-2) These definitions beg the questions, what are Christ’s priorities and how shall we pursue Christ’s priorities in the world?

House of Bread Covenant Church has changed over the past four years. There are signs of new life. People are making new commitments to God. Attendance, membership and giving have increased. The staff has expanded to fill new needs. The congregation launched an additional, contemporary worship service in 2012. Several small group Bible studies were formed. The congregation began an outreach ministry to Bhutanese refugees. The church recently voted to plant a Spanish speaking fellowship in the church building. There is a palpable sense that the Holy Spirit is moving at House of Bread.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway provoked House of Bread Covenant Church to look beyond self-interest and consider how we might more fully participate in what God is already doing in the neighborhood. The process was broad and democratic. We examined how the neighborhood is changing and we discerned that House of Bread was not changing with it. The Vitality Pathway gave the congregation permission to challenge old patterns. We tried new things. We sang a new song to the Lord. Many believe that God is blessing the vitality process. Numbers aren’t everything, but the congregation is right to celebrate our first growth spurt in decades.

Van Gelder and Zscheile write,

To begin with, the horizon for church renewal is not just attracting more people into the congregation or even church “health” as defined by certain lists or criteria. It is God’s coming reign, as embodied and proclaimed by Christ and manifested partially in the here and now through the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is a decidedly *theological* focus to missional church renewal that is often lacking in other approaches. [[3]](#footnote-3)

I appreciate that God’s mission cannot be reduced to increased attendance or even the Covenant’s Ten Healthy, Missional Markers that are highlighted in the Congregational Vitality Pathway.[[4]](#footnote-4) I certainly don’t want the missional conversation to be co-opted by the church-growth movement or its stepchild the church-health movement. I desire a more theologically-formed approach to missional-church renewal that is not all about the numbers but, likewise, is not embarrassed by outreach and evangelism. I want to help invite my neighbors and congregants into a growing sense of God’s coming reign with practical consequences in the here and now. To that end, I have sought to evaluate the extent to which the Congregational Vitality Pathway is a helpful tool for the renewal of missional church life.

Research Question

My research question is,

To what extent and in what ways has the Congregational Vitality Pathway impacted health and missional identity at House of Bread Covenant Church?

The Congregational Vitality Pathway was a multi-year journey towards revitalization that culminated in a strategic plan. The church discerned four critical success factors: reading the Bible, dependence on the Holy Spirit, small groups, and demonstrating faith/taking risks. I sought to learn if any or all of these factors have helped to nudge House of Bread Covenant towards vitality. I also wanted to learn if there is something inherently healthy and missional about reading the Bible, depending on the Holy Spirit, small group discussion, and taking leaps of faith. Mostly, I wanted to understand if the Covenant’s Congregational Vitality Pathway genuinely fosters health and mission at House of Bread Covenant Church.

Variables

The independent variable in my study is the Covenant Church’s Congregational Vitality Pathway. My dependent variables are congregational health and mission at House of Bread Covenant Church. The Congregational Vitality Pathway aspires to help congregations “pursue Christ” and to “pursue Christ’s priorities in the world.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The underlying assumption of the Vitality Pathway is that participating congregations will become healthier and more missional. I anticipated that the Congregational Vitality Pathway would have some impact on congregational life. What remained uncertain is whether the Covenant’s Congregational Vitality Pathway genuinely helps churches become healthier, more missional, or both.

There are important intervening variables that came into play in this research. I interviewed several leaders and members of House of Bread Covenant Church to discern what God is doing in the congregation. There have been a lot of changes at House of Bread recently. Perception of those changes is affected by the age of the interviewees, the longevity of participation at church, gender, and the frequency of worship attendance.

A more complicated intervening variable is my call as senior pastor at House of Bread Covenant Church. We began traversing the Congregational Vitality Pathway a year after my installation. It seems impossible to detangle the impact of the Congregational Vitality Pathway from my service to the church. The Covenant’s Director of Congregational Vitality John Wenrich emphasizes that the revitalization requires healthy and missional clergy and lay leadership. I sought to discern what impact clergy and lay leadership had on the renewal of House of Bread Covenant Church.

Importance of the Research Question

This research focuses on the fellowship of House of Bread Covenant Church in Mill City, Minnesota. I am hopeful that this research will benefit the Covenant denomination and perhaps the larger church. I examined House of Bread’s story so that others might hear and perhaps respond appropriately to the mission of God.

Hundreds of congregations in the Covenant Church have taken steps along the Congregational Vitality Pathway. House of Bread Covenant Church is the first congregation in the denomination to complete the revised Congregational Vitality Pathway with the strategic planning component. House of Bread was therefore in a unique position to examine the perceived impact of the Vitality Pathway. My second motivation for studying the Congregational Vitality Pathway was to determine if this is an effective journey to cycle through again as House of Bread continues to seek health and missional revitalization. Third, I researched the Congregational Vitality Pathway because I wanted to study a topic that might be beneficial to the larger denomination. Two recent doctoral of ministry theses have focused on Veritas, the first step in the Congregational Vitality Pathway.[[6]](#footnote-6) To my knowledge, no one has done research on the whole pathway. Finally, I was motivated to explore this topic through the encouragement of John Wenrich. The Congregational Vitality Pathway is a new development that deserves careful attention and evaluation.

Literature Review

My research is informed by three bodies of inquiry: leadership theory, conflict management, and organizational change. Each of these literatures influenced the construction and implementation of the Congregational Vitality Pathway. More importantly, these literatures directly informed and impacted House of Bread Covenant Church as we traversed the journey to revitalization.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway promotes good leadership. The pathway is designed to assist denominational figures, laypeople, and clergy as they lead congregations towards renewed health and mission. I looked at two subgenres of leadership theory. James Kouzes and Barry Posner’s transformational leadership argues that good leadership changes lives for the better.[[7]](#footnote-7) Robert K. Greenleaf’s work on servant leadership models the leadership theory of Jesus who taught his disciples to take charge by washing feet.[[8]](#footnote-8) Transformational and servant leadership reflect the best practices of the Congregational Vitality Pathway as well as the revitalization journey at House of Bread Covenant.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway warns congregations that there is pain associated with change and growth. Good conflict was an essential step for House of Bread Covenant Church as we sought revitalization. I studied Speed Leas’ work on conflict management to understand the dynamics of congregational conflict. Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus assert that church conflict is normal and potentially life-giving.[[9]](#footnote-9) Leas also articulates a helpful diagnostic of the five levels of congregational conflict.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The Congregational Vitality Pathway teaches congregations how to change their organizational structures. The people of House of Bread Covenant Church knew that something needed to change but they were not confident about how to proceed. Five sub-categories of organizational change related to the Congregational Vitality Pathway and the revitalization journey of House of Bread Covenant Church are: adaptive change, cultural change, congregational change, the healthy church, and the missional church. [Ronald A. Heifetz](http://www.amazon.com/Ronald-A.-Heifetz/e/B001IGQZIG/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1376962210&sr=1-1), [Martin Linsky](http://www.amazon.com/Marty-Linsky/e/B005HE2LYM/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1376962210&sr=1-1), and Alexander Grashow’s work on adaptive change recognizes that some challenges are too complex for technical fixes, requiring instead a thoughtful process of trial and error.[[11]](#footnote-11) Edgar Schein’s cultural change model seeks deep transformation by challenging the foundational stabilizing forces of the community.[[12]](#footnote-12) Gilbert R. Rendle’s congregational change focuses on the unique challenges of leading change in churches.[[13]](#footnote-13) Peter Steinke redefines the healthy church as an institution of integrity, not just a growing organism.[[14]](#footnote-14) The missional church is guided by the Holy Spirit, the witness of scripture, and the present context, to discern what God is up to and how congregations might participate in the *missio Dei*. My research is framed by the missional thinking of Craig Van Gelder, Dwight Zscheile, Alan Roxburgh, and Fred Romanuk.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Biblical and Theological Lenses

The story of Abraham and Sarah informed my research. God blessed an old, childless couple with the gift of life. No one could have anticipated that Abraham and Sarah would ever experience the miracle of new life. The story serves as a reminder to House of Bread and other centenarian Covenant churches that there are no age limits for revitalization. The missional hermeneutic of Christopher Wright informs my understanding that the blessings of God are a free gift that can come at any time and can be lost if we fail to honor the gift.[[16]](#footnote-16)

This research is framed by theology of new life as exemplified in a trinitarian understanding of God, Pietism, and the ecclesiology of Darrel Guder. The triune God is a living God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are alive and active in the world. There is no revitalization without engaging the living God. The theology of Pietism, particularly the pious desires of Philipp Jacob Spener, inform my research.[[17]](#footnote-17) The Covenant’s Pietist heritage which emphasizes the importance of the new birth greatly influences the Congregational Vitality Pathway and the revitalization of House of Bread. The church is a living organism born of the living God. Darrell Guder contends that the church must be in continual conversion into the image of God.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Methodology

I implemented a mixed-methods, sequential exploratory-QUAL/QUAN study of the Congregational Vitality Pathway at House of Bread Covenant Church. I wanted to know to what extent and in what ways the church has become healthier and more missional while traversing the Congregational Vitality Pathway. I began with three focus groups that discussed the health and missional identity of House of Bread Covenant Church. The first group was made up by congregational presidents who led House of Bread in various stages of the revitalization process. The second group was comprised of members of the Vitality Team and subsequent Strategic Planning Team. The third focus group was populated with active members of the congregation who did not participate in the leadership of the revitalization process. Our focus group participants understood the process from the inside and out. Some were sympathetic participants while others brought a critical, external perspective.

I concluded my research with a random sample survey of the membership. The questionnaire further explored the health and missional identity of the congregation. I surveyed the congregation with questions that grew out of the focus group conversations. I was ultimately able to get both a deep and broad understanding of revitalization at House of Bread Covenant Church.

Results

The Congregational Vitality Pathway played an important role in developing the health and missional identity of House of Bread Covenant Church. The Holy Spirit inspired House of Bread to traverse the Vitality Pathway and showed up throughout the process. My research demonstrates that the Spirit moved through the conflict, change, and growth of the congregation. House of Bread was an especially conflict-averse congregation that was inspired to engage conflict in a more redemptive fashion. House of Bread worked hard to maintain stability at the expense of congregational health and participating in the *missio Dei*. The Spirit used the Vitality Pathway to help us lead change and renegotiate the church culture. House of Bread was in thirty years of decline. The Spirit showed up in the vitality process to help us grow in markers of both congregational health and missional identity. Please see Figure One below for a pictorial summary of the research results.



Figure 1: Theoretical Development/Pictorial Summary of Results

Conflict

The Congregational Vitality Pathway stimulated an honest conversation about the church’s present reality and where the church was ultimately headed. The vast majority of people wanted House of Bread to be healthier and more missional, but the congregation was divided about the best way forward. There was tension over the creation of a contemporary worship service. That pressure finally boiled over when a leader suggested moving the grand piano up to the chancel. It was not a mean-spirited debate, but it was the loudest public squabble in forty years. The piano stayed put but the congregation moved forward. Publicly airing our disagreements positively impacted the church.

Two of the three focus groups were quite enthusiastic about the legacy of that church fight. Cindy Harvin summed up the positive reappraisal of conflict by declaring, “I would like to say that we are more honest with each other. Some of us might not like to hear some of the things that others have to say. At least we are open and I don’t think that we can say that we always were before.” Nancy Newton agreed, “Just that willingness to feel safe, expressing something really important to them. I think that’s a really good thing and I don’t know that we have always been there.” Rachel Green claimed that “Ten years ago we wouldn’t have [thought] okay, that’s a good thing.”

Bjorn Olafson affirmed that conflict management is not just dealing with the squabbles that come up naturally. Sometimes leaders have to deliberately stir the pot to get things bubbling. “A missional church forces the issue of some kind of goal or some kind of a way that we want to further the Kingdom with by challenging us and making us feel a little bit uncomfortable.”

The larger congregation agreed with the perception of the focus groups that we are better at communication and managing conflict. Seventy-one percent of the surveyed active membership agreed that House of Bread was better or significantly better at communication. Fifty-five percent of the surveyed active membership agreed that House of Bread was better or significantly better at conflict management. I think this number would be even higher if we had not recently finished a church quarrel. Eighty-six percent agreed highly or very highly that healthy, missional churches are able to constructively manage conflict.

Church consultant Peter Steinke teaches that conflict is normal and even essential for churches.[[19]](#footnote-19) Steinke encourages leadership to actively instigate conflict by challenging accepted norms. By gently prodding the congregation and backing off at the appropriate moment, the leadership of House of Bread helped navigate a treacherous path. We ceased defining the congregation solely on classic hymnody and started singing a new song to the Lord.

Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus agree that church conflict is healthy and normative.[[20]](#footnote-20) They encourage conflict-averse churches like House of Bread to quit wasting energy and creativity on avoiding squabbles and actually have a good fight. Conflict is actually a good way to set new boundaries and reestablish identity. It is liberating to release pent-up frustration and actually move forward. Most church conflicts are not as scary as we imagine them to be. Sure enough, House of Bread was finally able to let off some steam and subsequently renegotiate boundaries after the fight. The conflict was ultimately more constructive than destructive.

Speed Leas identifies five levels of conflict: productive conversation, self-protection, prioritizing winning, hurting opponents, and destroying enemies.[[21]](#footnote-21) House of Bread’s piano fight was a level two conflict where parties were protective of their own self-interest. A level five conflict would certainly be damaging to a congregation, but such church fights are rare. It is better to risk conflict than to lose honest dialogue by pretending that there are no disagreements in the congregation.

Abraham was not naturally gifted at conflict management. He didn’t want to risk a fight with Pharaoh, so he tried to pass his wife off as his sexually available sister. He tried the same perverse tactic of conflict-avoidance with King Abimelech of Gerar. Abraham did not put up a fight when Sarah told him to expel Hagar and his first son Ishmael. He passive-aggressively told his nephew Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred” (Genesis 13:8). Abraham would rather split up the family than deal with conflict. Abraham had to learn how to do conflict by arguing with God Almighty for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

God seems to prefer people who are willing to argue: Job, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, David, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the contentious Apostle Paul. Christ the Lord wasn’t afraid of conflict. Jesus flipped tables and swung a whip. He called a friend “Satan,” a woman “dog,” and the Pharisees a “brood of vipers.” Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household” (Matthew 10:34-36). The perichoretic union of the Holy Trinity was not broken when Jesus talked back to the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). God can handle conflict, and his church can too.

The Holy Spirit uses conflict to disrupt the status quo. The Book of Acts tells the story of the impasse between Jewish believers and Gentile converts. Some legalists insisted that Gentile believers receive circumcision. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem with stories of lives transformed by the Gospel. The Council of Jerusalem resolved the matter by deciding to spare Gentiles from the culturally inappropriate burden. They wrote, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication” (Acts 15:28-29). The Spirit redeemed the conflict with a new path forward for new believers.

It should be noted that Paul and Barnabas split up immediately after the Holy Spirit unified the disparate elements of the early Christian Church. Paul could not abide with Barnabas’ decision to bring along John-Mark on their missionary journey. Not all conflicts end happily, but the Spirit can redeem any struggle. When Paul and Barnabas separated, Paul’s ministry impact grew miraculously. God found a way to bring something positive out of a painful squabble between church leaders.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway should be understood as a well-orchestrated conflict. Veritas is about telling the truth about revitalization, even if it means that the church finally acknowledges that it does not have the vision, intention, and means to continue on in ministry. Churches are encouraged to create a behavioral covenant at the beginning of the pathway. This behavioral covenant sets the rules for all future conflict. The PULSE survey exposes the congregation’s strengths and weaknesses. An outside vitality coach offers recommendations for the pastor and congregation. Pastors have the opportunity to avail themselves of CO-OP, a more intensive coaching process. Not every pastor is capable of leading their current church towards health and missional vitality. CO-OP is a safe place for clergy to sort out what comes next.

Change

Congregational revitalization is a pious desire. The Covenant Denomination is rooted in the Pietist movement which sought new birth for the individual, revivification of the church, and transformation of society. Philipp Jakob Spener advocated spiritual practices and participation in the mission of God, not as means to salvation, but as a consequence of the grace we have already received.[[22]](#footnote-22) Christians are resurrection people. Our devotional lives, communal gatherings, and public activity should reflect the transformative work of the living God. Pietists welcome change: changed hearts, changed congregations, changed people. It is uncharacteristic for Pietists to settle for the status quo.

The church must be in continual conversion if it is going to reflect the mission of God. Church revitalization begins with the movement of God’s Spirit, is guided by the witness of scripture, spreads the Gospel message within the church, and ultimately extends the Good News to the larger community. Together, the Word and Spirit evangelize the church, expose our habitual reduction of the Gospel, inspire us to address our cultural context, and send us forth to participate in the *missio Dei*. The church has to be constantly changing if we are to reengage the living God and pass the Almighty’s blessings on to the whole world.

Leadership

Change begins with the Holy Spirit inspiring good leadership. God raised up leaders throughout scripture to help his people adapt to new realities. The Bible often highlights heroic individuals, but every David needs compatriots like Samuel, Jonathan, Nathan, Abagail, Hushai, and even the much maligned Bathsheba. Jesus taught that leadership is service and greatness is humility. The perichoretic nature of God inspires Christians to lead vulnerably and collaboratively. Change demands leadership, and Christian churches demand Christ-like leadership.

Abraham is a curious example of a leader. He is not a risky entrepreneur until he receives divine inspiration. He is not a bold visionary until God speaks directly to him. He waits until he is seventy-five years old to leave home. Abraham has the courage to walk away from civilization when God beckons him into the unknown. Even then, Abraham does not leave home all by himself. He brings along his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot. Abraham and Lot had hundreds of slaves. There were so many dependents that they felt compelled to part company. Abraham is not a solitary, heroic figure. He is a husband, father, uncle, and the leader of what will one day be a great nation. Abraham learns to serve and lead people by following God.

Much has changed since the time of Abraham, but Christian leaders still must learn how to guide others by following God. The literature and my research suggest that good leadership both serves and transforms. Building leadership skills is not another accomplishment to achieve, but a way to serve and transform the world for the purposes of God.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner advocate that contemporary leaders must be transformative: they must change their constituents’ lives for the better.[[23]](#footnote-23) Kouzes and Posner have an affinity with Philipp Jakob Spener. They share the common belief that organizations can be improved by making lives better. Kouzes and Posner have their own pious desires: that leaders and their constituents will collaborate for the public good; that leaders will give up their self-interest for the people they serve; and that ethics and moral standards will guide the revitalized community.

Kouzes and Posner suggest five leadership practices that have informed the revitalization of House of Bread Covenant Church. First, the leader should model the way by casting a moral vision. The Strategic Planning Team met every other week for a year to discern the Spirit and guide the congregation through the renegotiation of our moral vision. Second, the leadership must inspire a shared vision. The Strategic Planning Team collaborated with the Spirit and membership to implement the expressed values of the congregation. Third, leaders challenge the process by disrupting the status quo. Disruption means initiating the right conflict at the right time. The Strategic Planning Team sought to identify the proper challenges to help reawaken the congregation to the purposes of God. Fourth, leaders enable others to act. The Strategic Planning Team empowered the congregation to implement the spiritually and communally discerned vision. Finally, transformative leaders encourage the heart. The Strategic Planning Team fostered enthusiasm by celebrating the large and small victories that followed the new vision. Kouzes and Posner’s desire for transformation and especially their heart language makes them sound like a couple of Pietists! They do have a companion volume that applies their findings specifically for a Christian audience.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Robert Greenleaf is the leading proponent of the secular literature on servant-leadership.[[25]](#footnote-25) He believes that servant-leadership improves individuals and the larger community, especially the least privileged in society. Greenleaf tends to affirm natural-born servant-leaders rather than working to develop the conscience of already established leaders. He is stating facts more than preaching for conversion. Still, there is a transformative theme that runs through Greenleaf’s writings. He hopes that committed servant-leaders will be empowered to change their communities.

The revitalization process at House of Bread has avoided pronouncing hierarchical dictates by intentionally serving the congregation. The strategic planning process was a long and arduous service project on behalf of the congregation. It was not an opportunity to dominate the masses. The Strategic Planning Team kept communicating with the church body, learning from them, putting their ideas into action, challenging their thinking, and negotiating the practical applications. At the end of the process, the congregation was not resistant or dumfounded like Peter and the disciples when Jesus explained that he was about to wash their feet. The congregation was keenly aware that the Vitality and Strategic Planning Teams had been serving their interests for two long years! The congregation was well-prepared to step into the future at the culmination of the process.

The focus groups identified leadership as an important theme in the revitalization process. First, they affirmed my own pastoral leadership. “Now we have a leader,” Jack Holmgren declared. “The pastor has got to go ahead … whatever happens.” Second, they affirmed the communal process of leadership. Rachel Green suggested that it can’t just be the pastor or one or two people leading the charge. “It really needs to come from the strong members who will be respected.” Paul Davidson summed up both affirmations. “I’ve heard that the pastor plays a large part in church revitalization. And it was mentioned that all the ideas shouldn’t come from the pastor or shouldn’t be presented by the pastor. That’s true, but the pastor does make a difference.”

The surveyed membership corroborated the insights of the focus groups. Ninety-six percent very highly or highly agreed that healthy, missional churches require a healthy, missional senior pastor. Ninety percent very highly or highly agreed that healthy, missional churches require healthy, missional lay leaders. The congregation was most supportive of the leading of the Holy Spirit in healthy, missional congregations. Ninety-six percent very highly or highly agreed that healthy, missional churches require the leading of the Holy Spirit. The surveyed membership affirmed the importance of the senior pastor, the lay leadership, and the Holy Spirit in the revitalization process.

Such high approval suggests that the surveyed membership felt extremely positive about the leadership employed in the revitalization effort. The numbers would have been quite different if the congregation felt bullied into action. As demonstrated earlier in the results chapter, the congregation has been changed by the transformative leadership in the Congregational Vitality Pathway. Members are reading the Bible more, there is greater involvement in small groups, there is increased dependence on the Holy Spirit, and there is a heightened willingness to take risks of faith. The congregation apparently feels blessed by the servant-leadership modeled by the senior pastor and the Strategic Planning Team.

Adaptive, Cultural, and Congregational Change

It took a collaborative effort for the Spirit, senior pastor, and lay leadership to guide the congregation through adaptive change. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky remind us that there is not a technical fix for every problem.[[26]](#footnote-26) Organizations must learn to wander through unexplored territory before arriving at their surprise destination. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky teach that leaders must create disequilibrium by disorienting the organization, exposing the underlying conflict, and challenging the conventional wisdom. The Strategic Planning Team stepped away from the hustle and bustle of church life to get a balcony view of what was really going on. The team offered their interpretation to the congregation. The team then collaborated with the church leadership to design action items that address congregational change. Some action items were simple technical fixes while others demanded imaginative exploration by the larger congregation. House of Bread is still path breaking through new territory, but we are discovering greener pastures and still waters.

Abraham didn’t have a clue what would happen on his adventure with God. He risked everything that mattered to him, including Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac. The childless man went on to have six more sons with his second wife Keturah. The journey never ended, not even with Abraham’s death. The descendants of Abraham have become numerous like “the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (Genesis 22:17). The death and resurrection of Abraham’s descendant Jesus Christ has created an unexpected adaptation. “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). God fulfilled his promise that Abraham would be blessed and that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through him. No amount of technical fixes or controlling behavior could have accomplished all that God has done for the family of Abraham. Christian faith is always an adventure into unexplored territory.

No organization experiences genuine transformation without changing the culture. Edgar Schein is a leading scholar on culture change.[[27]](#footnote-27) Schein teaches that culture has a subtle but foundational influence on our lives. Culture is always changing as it interacts with new stimuli. Schein identifies three levels of cultural meaning: artifacts, espoused beliefs, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the clearest and most superficial markers of culture such as architecture, language, style, clothing, and ceremonies. Espoused values are cultural cues that are embedded deeper in organizational culture. Ideals, goals, values, aspirations, and rationalizations are examples of espoused values. The deepest and most stubborn expression of cultural meaning is found in the underlying assumptions. It is hard work to confront and change the basic assumptions of a community.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway has been a helpful tool in addressing cultural change at House of Bread Covenant Church. The Pathway was built on the assumption that if you have not changed culture you have not changed anything. John Wenrich initially told congregations that it takes at least four years to change culture. Now, John suggests that changing culture takes seven years or even more.[[28]](#footnote-28) My own experience suggests that there is no definitive timetable on cultural change. Changing the artifacts might take months, changing the espoused values might take years, but changing the assumptions might take generations. Leaders traversing the Pathway should be warned that genuine culture change will take more time and deliberation than they could ever foresee.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway does not offer prepackaged tweaks to congregational artifacts. There are no lame suggestions to revitalize the church by abandoning robes, neckties, and traditional hymnody. The Congregational Vitality Pathway aims at the deeper realities of espoused values and underlying assumptions. The Veritas Seminar teaches congregations to tell the truth about revitalization by evaluating their own vision, intention, and means.

The Strategic Planning Team helps the congregation reevaluate espoused values. It took quantifiable data, confessional speech, and vocal leadership to begin to confront underlying assumptions, such as the idea that the majority of the congregation was against a contemporary worship service, or the idea that the neighborhood was unique in that younger people who lived here actually preferred traditional worship, and that starting a second service would inevitably split the congregation into competing factions. We have deliberately made decisions that contradict those false assumptions, but the legacy of those entrenched positions lingers on. It will take several more years to replace those assumptions with new ones that affirm the importance of our contemporary worship service. Cultural change is happening, but it does not resolve swiftly.

Abraham was a product of his culture. Seventy-five years in Ur of the Chaldees must have had an impact on the artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions of Abraham and his kin. God leads Abraham and Sarah into the wild lands for a transformative experience. False idols were religious artifacts endemic to Ur and the Middle East. Sarah and Abraham followed a living God instead. Abraham valued stability in Ur for seventy-five years. The journey to Canaan upended that espoused value. Abraham and Sarah had the basic assumption that if they were going to have children that they would have to do something about it. God led them through the wilderness with the promise that he would give them children. Sarah and Abraham believed, but they also resorted to the cultural norm of employing a slave as a surrogate mother. God surprised Abraham and Sarah with laughter, fear, and delight as he reversed their cultural assumptions and gave them the gift of new life. It took one hundred years for God to transform the cultural artifacts, values, and assumptions of Abraham. Culture change requires much stimulus and a massive investment of time.

Gilbert R. Rendle suggests four realities about congregational change.[[29]](#footnote-29) First, leading change in a church is an adaptive practice. Second, conflict is an essential part of congregational change. Third, churches must learn through trial and error. Fourth, leading congregational change is a spiritual practice. Rendle’s first three points depend upon and focus the arguments of Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky regarding adaptive change as well as Steinke’s, Leas’, and Kittlaus’ work on conflict management. Rendle’s unique contribution to this research is the assertion that congregational change is a spiritual discipline. Interacting with God is essential to revitalization. No amount of human engineering can accomplish the work of God.

The revitalization of House of Bread Covenant Church depends on the movement of the Holy Spirit. The leadership and congregation have needed to step out in faith as we intuit the leading of the Spirit. We are not alone in this process. We are not in control of the journey. We are interacting with the living God. The larger congregation has picked up on the importance of God’s leading through the process. We have changed our language, espoused values, and even our underlying assumptions regarding the work of the Holy Spirit at House of Bread Covenant Church.

Abraham needed a century of spiritual transformation. He survived famine, war, bareness, a conflicted marriage, emotional distress, the abandonment of his son Ishmael, the near sacrifice of his beloved Isaac, the death of Sarah, and always the mysterious leading of an inscrutable God. Abraham was changed in the wilderness just as the Hebrew slaves would one day be transformed by their exodus from Egypt. Setting a new path, dealing with conflict, trial and error, and most of all dependence on God changes individuals as well as Christian communities.

The focus group interviews affirmed that House of Bread Covenant Church is changing for the better. Angie Sherman addressed the adaptive nature of the process. “I think that it is so important to start without end results in mind.” Larry Jones summed up the tension of wandering into the unknown. “A number of times I felt like Moses wandering in the desert. I didn’t know where we were going but you have to keep moving.”

The consensus was that starting a contemporary worship service was the biggest risk so far. Larry Jones said, “I think, through this whole process, probably the greatest risk that I have observed is trying to bring about the contemporary service.” Nancy Newton added, “Adding the second service has certainly been a culture change.” The contemporary worship service certainly has challenged the artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions of church culture.

Lindsay Wilson was excited that House of Bread was willing to engage congregational change. “A lot of the time people are resistant to change, so that here there is a body of people that were open to change: pretty fantastic.” Jack Holmgren saw congregational change as a spiritual matter. “We had to just let it happen. Let the Spirit guide us.” Bjorn Olafson concurred. “You’re not really in control of anything.”

The survey of the active membership validated the positive responses of the focus groups. Ninety-one percent of those questioned agreed or significantly agreed that House of Bread has changed for the better in the past three years. The congregation saw change as a spiritual matter. Ninety-one percent of the surveyed active membership agreed that the Holy Spirit has breathed new life into House of Bread.

House of Bread once resisted instability and change. Now the congregation overwhelmingly approves our pious desire to become healthier and more missional. The Congregational Vitality Pathway helped us navigate our way through new realities. We began to seek the continual conversion that Darrell Guder advocates.[[30]](#footnote-30) House of Bread employed both servant and transformative leadership styles to help guide the congregation forward. We were inspired by Heifetz’s, Grashow’s, and Linsky’s teachings on adaptive leadership.[[31]](#footnote-31) We sought deep cultural change instead of cosmetic tweaks. We understood congregational change to be a spiritual practice, not just an exercise in human autonomy. Conflict led to change which ultimately led to growth. That step is documented in the pages ahead.

Growth

The missional church literature is suspicious of growth strategies rooted in technique. Missional theology has been used to confront the theology of glory uncritically embraced by the church growth movement. Indeed, congregations of all sizes often behave as if they have the worldly wisdom, power, and strength to navigate their own way to resurrection. The missional church literature often reflects Luther’s theology of the cross: that humanity can add absolutely nothing to the righteousness of the crucifixion. Luther makes an important point about the totality of Christ’s sacrifice, but he never intended congregations to sit idly by while their populations wither and die. In the most extreme manifestations, some churches delight in their misfortunes, as if their shrinking and dying was in some way saving the world. I am just as troubled by this death-affirming, messianic complex as I am of the more commonly criticized excesses of the church growth movement. There is only one Messiah and it is not the Bride of Christ. Jesus died for the world but he also rose from the dead. The way forward is a comprehensive missional theology that begins at creation, suffers the cross, and ultimately finds God-given new life.

Philipp Jakob Spener had a pious desire for new life in Jesus Christ.[[32]](#footnote-32) He was a committed Lutheran who helped revitalize his church. Spener was not content to be stuck on the cross, nor did he skip the cross on the way to glory. He recovered the biblical concepts of new life in Christ, the Spirit working to sanctify the soul, and the regeneration of believers. In other words, God helps the faithful grow. Christians are Easter people. Resurrection is not just in the hereafter. Revitalization happens in the present moment. Spener’s Pietist movement changed the face of Lutheranism and all of Western Christianity by provoking the faithful to reconsider the piety of their lives. People started to believe that things can actually get better.

We should not be surprised that the modern mission movement arose out of German Pietism. Contrary to the stereotype, the Pietists were not just interested in saving individual souls. The Pietists believed that evangelism, compassion, mercy, and justice make a genuine difference in the world. They revitalized churches, planted new congregations, took care of widows and orphans, and helped improve society. The Gospel spread beyond its historical boundaries because of mission-minded Pietists. Western missional theology is incomprehensible without the new life theology of Philipp Jakob Spener.

Christopher Wright suggests that “Mission is what the Bible is all about.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Reading the Bible with a missional hermeneutic helps us thread the needle from creation to crucifixion to resurrection without getting stuck hanging on the cross or trying to skip the cross in the vain search of personal glory. God always intended the very best for humanity: abundance, fruitfulness, fertility, long life, prosperity, prominence, and all manner of synonyms for growth. Humanity cannot earn the best things in life. Such wonders are gifts from God. The gifts are free but they come with the expectation that the recipient will pass along the blessings they have received. Contrary to Luther’s theology of the cross, our behavior genuinely matters. Contrary to the American variant of the theology of glory, the blessings of God come with the expectation that we pass them along to others. Individuals, congregations, and society can grow by receiving and sharing the blessings of God.

Wright’s missional hermeneutic affirms that God offers us life and growth, but we must pass God’s gifts to others in service, by giving up our fortunes, and picking up our crosses to follow Jesus. We can trust God to grant us new life, new brothers and sisters, and a new mission. We do not purchase our salvation by self-sacrifice, but whatever we surrender for the sake of the Gospel will pale in comparison to the blessings we receive by participating in the *missio Dei*.

A missional reading of the near-slaughter of Isaac opens up the terrifying story in remarkable ways. Abraham was given a miracle child at age 100 through no great effort of his own. Then God asks Abraham to sacrifice his long-awaited son. No explanation is given. No complaint is recorded. Parents squirm in agony and question the goodness of God when they read this story. A missional hermeneutic helps us grasp that God never intended Abraham to sacrifice his child or his future. God always had big plans to send Isaac and his descendants into the world on a mission. The point of the story is that God never asks us to sacrifice life itself, only our control of the blessings that we have received. We can trust God with every good gift. After all, God is the One who gave the gifts in the first place.

The crucifixion of Jesus helps complete our understanding of the enigmatic story of Abraham and Isaac. God allowed his own Son to die on Mount Moriah. Not because God required a blood sacrifice to obviate sin, but to communicate the enormity of his love to all humanity. There is nothing remotely loving about a human parent allowing his child to die, but God can be trusted with life. The Father raised the Son from the grave three days later. Jesus promised that whoever believed in him would have eternal life. That is a blessing that no one can possibly earn by their own efforts. All believers are sent on a mission to baptize and teach and serve others in Christ’s name. The early church grew dramatically and the contemporary church continues to grow rapidly around the globe. A missional reading of scripture invites us to receive the abundant blessings of God, to offer up our need to control, and to find a greater abundance than we ever knew before. This is how we grow.

Peter Steinke compares healthy churches to healthy human bodies.[[34]](#footnote-34) Healthy churches are able to respond with integrity to a wide variety of stimuli. Some healthy churches continue to grow while others have reached the end of their natural growth cycle. Healthy churches know what is good for their intestinal fortitude and what would make them ill. Steinke has a typical mainline disposition towards the assets of history and stewardship while I would gravitate towards more Evangelical markers of health such as future vitality, attendance, and personal transformation. The point is that healthy churches have the holistic integrity to survive. Vitality gives congregations the means to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Craig Van Gelder’s missional ecclesiology is rooted in the Trinity. The Spirit creates the church to reflect the triune nature of God. The Father creates, the Son redeems, the Spirit empowers, and the church follows the *missio Dei*. “The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Van Gelder encourages congregations to figure out what God is already up to the in community and to join in God’s ongoing purposes. Missional congregations understand God’s mission by reading scripture and interacting with their theological tradition, understanding cultural context, discerning communally, and creating an action plan. Missional churches attend to culture, assert options, agree to a course of action, act on the choice, and then assess the outcome. The mission begins with God, not in the imaginations of church leaders.

Roxburgh and Romanuk echo some of Van Gelder’s clues to discerning what God is up to in the neighborhood.[[36]](#footnote-36) They suggest that missional congregations must seek to ride the Holy Spirit through awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment. Roxburgh and Romanuk suggest that their Missional Change Model takes thirteen to twenty-four months to complete, about the amount of time it took House of Bread to traverse the Congregational Vitality Pathway. There is no secret formula to controlling the Spirit or comprehending the triune God. The church just has to be the church while reflecting the identity of God.

The Congregational Vitality Pathway seeks to boost both the health and the missional capacity of congregations. I was skeptical at the beginning of my research project that churches could do both at the same time. I expected there to be more tension between internal health and external mission at House of Bread Covenant Church. We were worried about long-term survival. I wasn’t sure that the congregation would catch a larger vision of the purposes of God. Congregations find vision and intention in the mission of God, but the means to execute the *missio Dei* emanates from the health of the congregation. The Congregational Vitality Pathway gave House of Bread Covenant Church the encouragement to grow in both health and missional identity.

The members of House of Bread Covenant Church rejected the false dichotomy between health and mission. Many of the focus group participants believed that there was a dependent relationship between congregational health and mission. Cindy Harvin spoke for many when she declared, “We can’t be a missional church without being healthy and we can’t be healthy without being missional. They are tied together.”

Health was generally understood as institutional strength. Some of the expressions of congregational health given in the focus groups were our nice building, long life in the neighborhood, increased visitor flow, a growing membership, staff growth, paying our bills, and congregational comfort. These blessings harken back to the creation narrative where God intends his people to experience his abundant blessings. After thirty years of gradual decline, House of Bread felt reinvigorated and healthy because of the gifts of God. The blessings of God are not to be hoarded and kept away from the world. God always intended his blessings to further his mission in the world.

The focus groups understood mission as having a decidedly external direction. Missional churches are not just fixated on their own health and vitality. They seek to pass the blessings of God along to the larger world. Janet Patera had a helpful understanding of the missional church. “I think that a missional church has a purpose. What I really appreciate is our purpose is not just to pursue other people, but Christ-centered.” Janet comes reasonably close to describing the *missio Dei*. The other focus group participants chimed in with missional practices going on at House of Bread Covenant Church. Some of the missional activities listed were: small group Bible studies, the commitment to biblical literacy, serving at a soup kitchen, our Child Care Center, Meals on Wheels, foreign missions, community evangelism, contemporary worship service, our outdoor worship in the park, and our service to Bhutanese refugees. House of Bread Covenant Church is participating in the *missio Dei* as it seeks to get involved in what God is already up to in the neighborhood and beyond.

The quantitative data support the qualitative data. Ninety-eight percent of active membership agreed moderately, highly, or very highly that the church is healthier than it was three years ago. Ninety-eight percent agreed that our current financial strength is a sign of health. One hundred percent agreed that more children at church is a sign of health. Ninety-nine percent agreed that our growing attendance is a sign of health. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. The active membership affirms that stronger finances, more children, and a growing membership are important parts of this healthy transformation.

Ninety-eight percent of active membership agreed moderately, highly, or very highly that the church is more missional than it was three years ago. Eighty-nine percent agreed that reaching out to the Bhutanese refugees is an important part of our missional identity. Ninety-eight percent agreed that reaching out to Child Care families is an important part of our missional identity. One hundred percent agreed that seeking God’s will is an important part of our missional identity. Ninety-six percent agreed that the once controversial contemporary worship service is an important part of our missional identity. Ninety-nine percent agreed that sacrificial giving is an important part of our missional identity. The active membership affirms that our outreach to refugees and Child Care families, seeking God’s will, the contemporary worship service, and sacrificial giving are all important components of our missional identity.

The surveyed membership had no problem affirming both the signs of health and the signs of missional identity. Investing money in ministry to refugees might have met more resistance if we hadn’t been blessed with surplus cash at the end of the year. The contemporary worship service might have engendered more resentment were it not for all the new children at the church. Sacrificial giving might not have garnered such a positive response without all the new members helping to cover expenses. The increased health of the church has expanded our capacity to do mission. God has lavished blessings on House of Bread Covenant Church and the congregation has faithfully passed those blessings on to others.

House of Bread Covenant Church has a much broader understanding of growth after traversing the Congregational Vitality Pathway. God has granted us the largest membership in church history, a forty-two percent increase in attendance, and four years of surpluses. We have greater institutional health and strength than we did at the beginning of the process. We have also learned on this journey that the gifts of God are to be shared with others. We recently had an overwhelmingly positive vote to partner with a Spanish-speaking core group in order to plant a Spanish language church in our building. Now we are sending our people to the fringes of our neighborhood to seek out refugee children and their friends. Now we are reinvesting our budget surpluses into external ministries. Yes, the church has experienced numerical growth, but we have also experienced spiritual growth along the Congregational Vitality Pathway. The church is both healthier and more missional at the end of the journey.

Generalizability

No other church should expect a journey along the Congregational Vitality Pathway quite like ours. Churches are diverse as sets of fingerprints. No two churches can traverse the exact same pathway on the journey to revitalization. Like all case studies, this research has limited generalizability. I examined a particular church at a unique moment of time. Another researcher employing a sequential exploratory analysis of the Congregational Vitality Pathway in another context would assuredly have their own unique discoveries.

All churches seeking revitalization would benefit from considering this research. Our journey cannot and should not be duplicated. Context cannot be ignored. Still, our story is an inspiring reminder that God is still breathing new life into old congregations. I recommend that dying, struggling, and stable Covenant churches explore the Congregational Vitality Pathway. Even the healthiest and most missional congregations might be blessed by the process. There is no magic in the Vitality Pathway, but it was a helpful way to work through conflict, change, and growth at House of Bread Covenant Church. Non-Covenant churches might also benefit from hearing our story of revitalization. The Covenant’s Congregational Vitality Pathway might be a helpful process to explore their own health and missional identity.

Closing Words

John Wenrich suggests, “There is no growth without change and no change without pain.” A great amount of the pain at House of Bread Covenant Church came from learning how to manage conflict. My conclusion at the end of this case study is that there is no growth without change and no change without conflict. House of Bread fought a fair fight, experienced pain in the change process, and emerged at the end of the Vitality Pathway with God-given new growth.

The theme of conflict deserves more explicit attention in the vitality materials beyond the composition of conversation guidelines. Many churches must learn how to fight fair before they renegotiate their vision statements and budgets. The Congregational Vitality Pathway has the potential to teach the Evangelical Covenant Church and other interested denominations how to talk through their differences in productive and helpful way.

1. House of Bread Covenant Church and Mill City are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the people who participated in this study. All names of places and persons are changed to pseudonyms unless the individual is a well-known denominational leader. Published materials with the congregation’s true name in the title have been altered to reflect the given pseudonym. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Wenrich, *EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Change Workbook* (Department of Church Growth and Evangelism. Evangelical Covenant Church, 2008), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Department of Congregational Vitality of the Evangelical Covenant Church defines the Ten Healthy, Missional Markers as: (1) Centrality of the Word of God, (2) Life-transforming walk with Jesus, (3) Intentional evangelism, (4) Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries, (5) Global perspective and engagement, (6) Compelling Christian community, (7) Heartfelt worship, (8) Sacrificial and generous living and giving, (9) Culture of godly leadership, (10) Fruitful organizational structures. John Wenrich, *EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Change Workbook*. (Department of Church Growth and Evangelism. Evangelical Covenant Church, 2008), 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John Wenrich, *EPIC: Empowering People, Inspiring Change Workbook*. (Department of Church Growth and Evangelism. Evangelical Covenant Church. 2008), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Corey Johnsrud, “Healthy Missional Churches: An Exploration of the Impact of the Veritas Seminar on Congregations” (Doctor of Ministry, Luther Seminary, 2013); Charles Wahlstrom, “An Analysis of Factors Affecting Revitalization of Evangelical Covenant Churches” (Doctor of Ministry, Biola University, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Robert K. Greenleaf and Robert K. Greenleaf Center, *The Servant as Leader*, Rev. printing [with added material] ed. (Westfield, IN: Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 2008); Robert K. Greenleaf and Larry C. Spears, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Speed Leas, *Moving Your Church through Conflict*, Alban Institute Publications (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002); Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed., The Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series 2 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007); Craig Van Gelder, Richard H. Bliese, and Terri Martinson Elton, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009); Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*; Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*; Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, Seminar Editions (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Leas and Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Leas, *Moving Your Church through Conflict*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Spener, *Pia Desideria*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Greenleaf and Center, *The Servant as Leader*; Greenleaf and Spears, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. My own personal recollections of conversations with John Wenrich. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Spener, *Pia Desideria*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative,* 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit,* 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)