

PROSPECTUS

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The Project as an Act of Ministry

My proposed project is to help some of the members of Jones Chapel United Methodist Church better integrate and apply the weekly sermon into their individual lives and the life of the church. I plan to do this by using the Wesleyan small group model to discuss potential ways of applying the biblical text and sermon with about a dozen members of the congregation. The details of the project will be explained in a later section of this work.

At Jones Chapel U.M.C., we have many different programs and ministries that take place throughout the course of every week. However, there is but one weekly event in which the entire church family gathers in the same room and fixes its attention on the same subject. This event happens at eleven o'clock each Sunday morning, and we call it a worship service. The purpose of this event, as its name would suggest, is to come together and focus our mind's attention and our heart's affection upon God. The format for the service is typical of most United Methodist congregations. The first half of the service is comprised of various acts of worship, including songs, litanies, prayers, confessions of faith, Scripture readings, and the collection of an offering. The second half of the worship hour is principally devoted to only one thing—the reading of Scripture and the sermon that follows the reading.

The people of Jones Chapel refer in their conversation and their public prayers to the preaching event as their opportunity to “hear the Word of God.” As the Pastor of the church, it is my charge to stand before the congregation week after week and speak to them a message that draws their attention, both as individual Christians and as a corporate body, to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The words that come out of my

mouth during those twenty or twenty-five minutes are, according to both our theology and our vocabulary, somehow connected with the Word of God for his people and for the world. This being so, the weekly sermon is in my view one of the most significant acts of ministry for both me as the preacher as well as the congregation that listens to the words that I speak. The act of preaching plays a major role in the congregation's overall commission to bear witness to the Word of God and the gospel of Christ. At this point it would be appropriate to examine the proclamation of God's Word as an act of ministry shared by God, the Church, and the minister.

The Church has been commissioned by Christ to make disciples for him as we live our lives in this world (Mt. 28:18), and we have been promised that through the gift of the Holy Spirit we will be able to do even greater things for the sake of the Kingdom than Jesus himself was able to accomplish (John 14:12). Thus, a model of ministry for the Church and its vocational ministers should be, to borrow a title given to Jesus himself, that of a faithful witness (Rev. 1:5). It is our charge to proclaim through our word and deed the salvation that God has made possible through Christ.

It is vitally important to note that the Church nor its preachers have to rely upon their own power and ingenuity to faithfully bear witness to the Gospel in the world. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us in this endeavor. As Roelf Kuitse writes, "Many times the Spirit is far ahead of the Church. The Spirit continues to challenge the Church to be what the Church, according to God's intention, should be."¹ It is ultimately the responsibility of God's Spirit to provide for the needs of

¹Roelf S. Kuitse, "Holy Spirit: Source of Messianic Mission" in *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations*, Wilbert R. Shenk, ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 115.

his Church and to convict people of their sin so that they will respond to God's offer of salvation. Thus, the Church is not called to be a group of spiritual salespeople. Instead, we are simply called to be witnesses through word and deed of the deep love and concern that God has for all human beings. As the preaching of the Church faithfully points to Jesus Christ and the salvation that he brings, it fulfills the purpose for which God has created and called it.

Much of the theological basis in Scripture concerning the purpose and mission of the Church is derived from the writings of Paul in the New Testament. Paul did not limit his understanding of being in communion with Christ to a personal level. It was a social experience as well. The Greek Word that is translated "Church" is *ecclesia*. This word literally means a group of people who are "called out." Thus, according to Paul, the mission of God and the proclamation of his Word should take place within and through the community of all of those who have been called out for this purpose. Put another way, the Church collectively is charged with the commission of living in the light of and declaring the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. As Hunter writes, "What Paul has in mind is changed men and women living in a changed society, with Christ as the author of the change in the individual, and Christ the living center of the new environment in which they live."²

Paul understood the Church to be the body of Christ, in which Christ was the head (1 Cor. 12:12-27). According to Robertson, "What Paul means is Christ as the Head of the Church has a body composed of the members who have varied gifts and functions like the different members of the human body. They are all vitally connected with the Head of the body and with

²Archibald M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to St. Paul* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 34.

each other.”³ According to Pauline thought, believers were practically useless if they were disconnected from the larger body of the Church. On the other hand, within the context of the Church, believers were able to be used by God in bearing witness to his salvation. Simply put, Paul did not believe that any aspect of the Christian life, including its proclamation, was intended to be an individual effort. Rather, he insisted that it should take place within the corporate context of the community of believers who were justified by faith in Christ and who were continually allowing Christ to set them apart for the glory of God. Within and through this community, according to Pauline thought, the faithful witness of the gospel is to be primary.

The model of the Church as a faithful witness is certainly not a new concept. Karl Barth calls for the Church to fulfill its role of witness by offering the model of a herald, which is very similar to the model that I am describing.⁴ The focus of his model is on the Word of God and the Church’s commission to proclaim it to the world, which harkens back to the Reformation emphasis upon preaching and teaching the Scripture. Describing Barth’s model, Dulles writes, “The model is kerygmatic, for it looks upon the Church as a herald—one who receives an official message with the commission to pass it on. The basic image is that of the herald of a king who comes to proclaim a royal decree in a public square.”⁵ According to Barth’s theology, the gospel occurs in the proclamation itself, and the Sacraments are a type of visual proclamation. The Word of God gathers

³A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1931), 170-171.

⁴ The following information concerning Karl Barth’s model of the Church as herald was taken from Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Double Day, 1974), 76-88.

⁵*Ibid.*, 76.

the Church together and calls it to repentance and reform. The Word is empowered by God himself, and it brings salvation to those who believe.

The Church, in this model, does not have a very high view of itself. It does not call people to the institution of the Church but to Christ. The role of its preaching is simply to summon people to faith. Quoting Barth, Dulles describes the role of proclamation within the local congregation in the herald model by writing, “The Church is not the object of faith, we do not believe in the Church; but we do believe that in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event.” The Church in the herald model does not build God’s Kingdom or even extend it. Instead, the Church’s role is merely to announce the presence of the Kingdom and call people into it. Quoting Hans Kung, Dulles writes:

It is the reign of God which the Church hopes for, bears witness to, proclaims. It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God . . . , but its voice, its announcer, its herald. God alone can bring his reign; the Church is devoted entirely to its service.”⁶

The pastoral leadership in this model is charged primarily with keeping the community of faith “attentive to God.”⁷ The primary way that clergypersons are expected to do this is by preaching or visually proclaiming the gospel through administering the Sacraments. It is not the role of the pastor or anyone else to convince people to accept this offer. That work belongs solely to God.

If the Church is to witness faithfully in the world, it must realize who the ministry of proclamation belongs to in the first place. Merwyn Johnson writes, “The ministry is

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 2.

God's above all, and God graciously allows us to participate in that ministry."⁸ The Scriptures, and supremely the incarnation of Jesus Christ, teach us that God is actively involved in the world that he created. God has not left us on our own. The Holy Spirit continues to move in gracious and mysterious ways to draw people into the Kingdom. The redemption that was accomplished in Christ continues to be offered to sinful men and women. This all is the business of God, and God is certainly faithful to accomplish his purposes in his way and in his time. The role of the Church, and specifically that of the preacher, in all of this is to participate with God in ministry by simply bearing witness to God's character and activity. Johnson puts it like this, "We ministers have the primary task of recognizing the signs of God's presence and calling attention to God's activity in our midst."⁹

Inevitably, the question will be raised concerning why our participation with God in his ministry is necessary. The simple answer is that it is not. God can accomplish his purposes in the world apart from our participation. However, the nature of God's grace prompts him to invite us into ministry along side of him. This is not merely our task; it is our privilege. To be on mission and in ministry with the living God is the heartbeat of the Christian experience. Johnson writes:

For, if the joy of our salvation is to be and to do where God is at work saving the lost, the heathen, etc., then where do we want to be and what are we going to do? We're going to go where we perceive God is and do what we perceive God is doing. That's where the action is! That's where salvation is! That's where the life is! That's where the joy is! That's where the urgency is! But we're going to be there not because there is

⁸ Merwyn S. Johnson, "Whose Ministry Is It?" (Due West, 1997), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

something pushing us from behind. We're going to be there because something in front of us is pulling us into it.¹⁰

Perhaps the greatest aspect of this approach to ministry is the freedom that it brings to the minister. Since ministry ultimately belongs to and is done by God, the Christian preacher does not bear the overwhelming burden of having to preach the Word of God depending only upon his or her own strength and ability. Our charge is simply to point people's attention to the activity of God that is always ongoing in the midst of the world. We do not have to do God's work for him. In fact, we cannot. As Johnson puts it:

As participants ministers are free from the responsibilities and pretense of doing God's work for God. The ministers are free to be merely human, operating within human limitations, and relating as human to human without any other pretensions. . . . They simply participate in what God alone can and will do."¹¹

What then, in summary, should the Church and its preachers be and do? We should be in ministry with God by faithfully bearing witness to the gospel of Christ and the Word of God. All the while, we should realize and proclaim that ministry itself belongs to God and God alone. Perhaps Karl Barth captures best the essence of the ministry of the Church in proclaiming the Word of God when he states:

If it cannot do what (Christ) does, and it should not pretend it can, it may and should follow Him in what He does. It may and should be obedient to His command. It exists to do this, and therefore to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to its own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise.¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 779.

The act of preaching is an act of ministry because of God's activity within it. However, the Church, represented by local congregations, shares in this act of ministry in unique and important ways.

The local congregation also plays a significant role in the preaching event. For starters, the Church, represented by the local congregation, provides the minister with his text. The Bible is the book of the Church, and the Church, as an act of faith, acknowledges the message of the Scripture to be true. Were it not for this reality, the sermon would have no objective basis of authority. It would simply be an exercise in public persuasion. Secondly, the congregation gathers to hear the sermon that is being preached. Without a congregation, the preaching event could not take place. However, in the context of the congregation, a sermon is addressed to a particular group of people gathered at a particular place at a particular time. While the preacher may well bring the sermon to the people, it is the people of the congregation, through their prayerful hearing and consideration, who truly give the sermon life. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the congregation responds to the sermon. It is ultimately up to the congregation to reject or affirm the words spoken by the preacher. Though this response initially comes with a verbal or visible response (i.e., singing a hymn of response, praying at the altar, speaking to the preacher as you exit the sanctuary, etc.), the more significant response of the congregation comes in the lives that they live. When the people of God respond to the proclaimed Word of God by living their lives obediently for God, they validate the act of ministry known as preaching.

In a significant way, the world is also involved in the act of preaching. Though the Church has been set apart from the world, the reality is that every member of the

Church lives in the midst of the world. The triumphs, tragedies, and challenges experienced in the world are necessarily experienced by the Church. Therefore, the preacher, whether he/she wants to or not, must in some manner address the “kingdom of this world” while proclaiming “the Kingdom of God.” The notion of separatist Christianity cannot find a basis in Scripture. The individual Christian and the corporate congregation are both called to live in the world, and the faithful preacher is called to offer the Word of God for the context of the world of humanity. Preaching that fails to do this is vague at best and irrelevant at worst.

Finally, there is a significant tradition at work in the act of ministry known as preaching. For instance, the tradition of the local congregation that I serve tells the people that they are to sit silently and attentively while “listening” to the sermon. They often pray that God will “give the preacher the words that they need to *hear*.”

The tradition of the United Methodist Church, founded upon the theology of John Wesley, teaches that people are to focus upon experiencing God’s salvation in their lives through sanctification, or as it is more often termed, “growing in grace.” Thus, the congregation of United Methodists to whom I preach expects a sermon to have significant relevance concerning their individual relationships with God through Jesus Christ. Sermons that focus exclusively upon social action or conversion would be out of place in my congregational setting because they have little to do with the individual Christian’s personal relationship with Christ.

Finally, both of these traditions, that of my local congregation and that of our denomination, emphasize the importance of the preaching event. The fact that approximately half of our weekly corporate gathering is centered around the reading of

Scripture and the preaching of a sermon speaks loudly concerning the significance of the proclaimed Word in our tradition. Whether the congregation is conscious of it or not, one of the primary reasons that they sit and listen to the preacher every week instead of demanding another style of worship is because their tradition tells them that is what they are supposed to do.

In summary, the proclamation of the “Word of God” ultimately belongs to God. In both the Old and New Testaments, God is depicted as one who wishes to make himself and his will known to people. God could certainly choose any number of ways by which to accomplish this purpose, but he has chosen his Church as the primary means through which he carries out his mission. Within the Church, God has called preachers to “equip the saints” (Eph. 4:12) and herald the gospel to the world.

While God is certainly capable of communicating his Word to people apart from preachers, he graciously allows the preacher to participate with him in this act of ministry. God has always operated in the midst of history and people, and he still does today. The minister’s task in the preaching event is not to be successful in the sense of making sure the congregation “gets” the message. Instead, the preacher is simply called to be faithful to hold the truth of the Scripture, and ultimately Jesus Christ, before the people. Preachers should not feel compelled to plead or argue as they bring their message. Instead, they should simply proclaim it, and trust God to use that proclamation in whatever ways he desires in the lives of his people.

The Project Location, Setting, and Situation

Jones Chapel United Methodist Church in Danielsville, Georgia is a congregation with a rich history.¹³ No one in the current congregation is sure exactly when the church began or why it carries the name Jones Chapel. The church has records that date back to the 1860s, but based upon some of the dates on headstones in the church's cemetery, it is generally thought that the church was first organized in the 1830s.

Jones Chapel U.M.C. is made up of both new members as well as people who have been a part of the congregation for their entire lives. The membership totals just over three hundred people, with a little less than two hundred being active members. The church is located in northeast Georgia between the small towns of Danielsville and Royston, and it is about fifteen miles from the larger city of Athens. The area around the church is fairly rural, but many of the residents are professional people who drive into Athens each day for work. There are not any heavily populated residential subdivisions close to the church. Instead, most people live off of a number of side roads that are cut off of the main highway (U.S. Highway 29). During the most recent election, the poll assistant reported that there were only about one thousand registered voters in the district, which holds its voting at one of the church buildings.

Jones Chapel has a very balanced congregation in terms of age, gender, and mentality. There are people of all ages in the congregation ranging from three recently born children to several people in their eighties and nineties. There are a number of middle-aged and young adults in the congregation, and the leadership of the congregation is increasingly coming out of this age group. The church also has active youth and

¹³ The majority of the information concerning the history of Jones Chapel UMC has been taken from a recent brief history that was done by Laura Bowen, a member of the congregation. This history was presented to the church in the Charge Conference of 2002.

children's groups, both of which are lead by part-time paid staff members. Both men and women are in important positions of leadership. The church currently has one full-time position (Pastor) and three part-time positions (Youth Minister, Children's Minister, and Music Minister).

The congregation has grown steadily over the past few years, with more than fifty new members joining since the beginning of 2002. The attendance at the principle worship service has grown by nearly fifty percent since 2000 to its current average of about one-hundred and thirty. These additions in membership and attendance have been generally well received by the members of the church who have been at Jones Chapel for a long time. Most people would report that it is an exciting time in the life of the church.

Jones Chapel United Methodist Church is a wonderful congregation of people. The church is warm, fairly progressive, and very compassionate. Most of the people at Jones Chapel give generously and participate actively. However, the congregation is by no means perfect. One of the areas in which I have challenged the congregation has to do with their use of theology. Most of the church's active members attend Bible study classes, and a high priority is given to the weekly sermon. However, there seems to be a chasm between the "spiritual" and the "administrative" elements of the church. My challenge to the congregation (especially to the leadership in the church) is to reflect theologically upon the decisions we make and the things that we do as a church.

As I prepare to do my D. Min. project in this congregation, I hope to discover and implement a way to help better integrate the Scripture that is read and the sermon that is preached on Sunday morning into the overall life of the congregation. The church is

already very active, but I want to do what I can as Pastor to help them make sure their activity is centered around following Jesus Christ and making disciples.

The Project's Purpose

The purpose of my project is simple. *I hope to enable participating members to better integrate the message of the weekly sermon to both their personal lives and the corporate life of the church.*

The Project's Goals

The goals of this project flow directly out of its purpose. One of these goals are aimed at members of the congregation who participate in this project, and two others are focused upon myself as a minister/preacher of the gospel. At the conclusion of the project, I will attempt to measure and evaluate each of these goals. The goals are as follows:

Goals for the Congregation

1. I want the participating members to be able to articulate how they can apply at least some of the instruction, exhortation, and/or challenge offered in the biblical text and sermon to the context of their lives and the life of the church.

Goal for Myself (the Minister)

1. I want to measure the effectiveness of the small group and the provided listening sheets in accomplishing the project's purpose.
2. I want to preach sermons that can be easily applied to the lives of congregation members and the overall life of the church.

Details of the Project

In order to achieve the above purpose and goals, I have developed an idea that will take shape in a small group setting. I will discuss with the Church Council, which is the governing body of the congregation that I serve, the idea of developing a “Sermon Response Group” that will meet weekly and prayerfully discuss the Scripture and the sermon from the preceding Sunday. We already have several other groups that meet on Wednesday evenings after our church-wide meal, so this seems to be a workable time. When I begin attempting to form this group, I will personally recruit several church leaders and ask them to make a four-week commitment to come and be a part of this project. I will also recruit several of our church’s newest members. Then, I will announce the formation of the group from the pulpit and open it to any adults within the congregation. The group should number between twelve and fifteen people, and it will be representative of the congregation in terms of gender, age, and background.

This project will take place during the months of October and November, 2004. I will design a four week sermon series centered around issues of Christian stewardship, which I will preach during this time period. Whenever someone joins the United Methodist Church, they make a vow to support the ministry of Christ through his Church by giving of their prayers, presence, gifts, and service. I intend to preach a sermon on each of these subjects with the hope of increasing the sense of stewardship within the congregation.¹⁴ However, the actual content of the sermons that I am preaching is of secondary importance to the project. The project is designed to help congregation

¹⁴ Outlines of these sermons may be found in Appendix One.

members apply the message of any sermon and any biblical text to both their individual lives and the life of the church as a whole.

Members of the Sermon Response Group will be provided with a listening sheet each Sunday morning of this four-week series that will be intended to help guide them through the major points of the sermon.¹⁵ The listening sheet will also provide members of the group with several questions to reflect upon during the course of the week. When the group gathers on Wednesday evenings, we will use the sheet, and the questions listed on it, to guide our discussion.

The Sermon Response Group will meet each Wednesday evening during this four-week time period. The discussion of the group will center around issues of application, namely how we as a church and as individual Christians can apply the message of the biblical text and the sermon to our daily experiences as well as to the overall life of the congregation.

Each of the four sessions will follow the same format. After an opening time of prayer, I will begin our time together by reading the passage of Scripture used during the previous Sunday's worship service and briefly reviewing the main points of the sermon that was preached about it. Then, we will have an open discussion concerning any issues, concerns, or questions that may be on the minds of any of the participants. After this time, we will consider the specific questions that I raise on the listening sheets. We will conclude our time together by discussing specific ways that we could apply the message to our lives and to our congregational life. Finally, we will close in prayer. The group should usually meet for about one hour.

¹⁵ Copies of these four listening sheets may be found in Appendix Two.

Evaluation of the Project

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this project in relation to the members of the congregation who participate in it, I have designed a survey to give to these people.¹⁶ This survey will attempt to measure how helpful this project has been in enabling the participants in it to understand better and apply the Scripture and the sermon. Further, I will bring the group together for an informal interview in order to get their verbal feedback. Finally, I have designed a more formal interview for one of the church leaders involved in the group as well as for one of the group members who is not currently in a position of church leadership in an attempt to gauge the impact this project may potentially have in the corporate life of the congregation.¹⁷ I will present the results of my findings in both written and verbal form to the Church Council at their regular monthly meeting. Further, I will make available a summary of the findings of the survey to the group that took it.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of my preaching in terms of its points of application for both individual members as well as the congregation as a whole, I will ask the participating members to complete a second survey regarding my preaching.¹⁸ I will also video tape a sermon that is representative of my style of preaching and ask a group of my colleagues to view the tape and give me an honest evaluation. A summary of this evaluation will be included in my dissertation.

¹⁶ A copy of this survey may be found in Appendix Three.

¹⁷ A copy of these interview questions may be found in Appendix Four.

¹⁸ A copy of this survey may be found in Appendix Five.

The Literature Search

This project is focused upon helping United Methodist Christians better apply the preaching they hear each week to their lives and the life of the church. The normative aspect of this project centers around the theology that lies behind the Church's proclamation of the "Word of God." The function that is central to this project is the act of ministry called preaching. The context in which this project will be done is a local congregation of the United Methodist Church. Therefore, a basic understanding of the Wesleyan tradition will also be important to carrying out the project. At this point, a summary of relevant works in each of these three areas will be offered.

Perhaps no theologian has contributed more to the theology of the "Word of God" than Karl Barth. It is Barth's theology that lies at the heart of this project. In the section of *Church Dogmatics* entitled "The Ministry of the Community,"¹⁹ Barth contends that Christian ministry has one central purpose—to proclaim the Word of God to the world through its word and deed. Due to this "limited and definite purpose," all the ministerial efforts of the Church should be centered around it. According to Barth, this is the reason for the Church's existence. Thus, when the Church fails to declare the Word of God through its speech and activity, it fails in accomplishing its God given purpose. Barth goes on to assert that this ministry is full of promise because it is vitally connected to the ministry of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is present with the one who witnesses, and he is the subject of the witness. Due to this reality, the Church's ministry of witness is both a service to humanity and a service to God.

Barth goes on to claim that the "two great and distinctive elements" of ministry are the word and deed of the Church. The speech of the Church is the declaration of

¹⁹ Barth, 830-901.

God's Word. The deed or action of the Church must correspond to its speech in such a manner that the world will be able to see within the Church a likeness of God's Kingdom. Barth contends that the speech of the Church must come first. It is through its speech that the Church hears the Word of God and has reason and motivation for its action. However, the speech of the Church is never intended to remain merely conceptual. Instead, the Church is called to action through its speech, and its action becomes in and of itself a declaration of the Word of God in the world. Barth holds that the Church's speech and action must never be separated from one another. He writes, "If we ever come across a form of the Church's ministry in which there is neither speech on the one side nor action on the other, it may be affirmed with certainty that at least this is not a basic form."²⁰ Since the speech of the Church must drive its action, it does stand to reason that the speech precede the action. However, in the ongoing life of the Church, its word and deed should be connected in such a way that each of them continuously draws from and inspires the other.

Avery Dulles provides a summary of Barth's model of the Church as a herald. He asserts that the Church and the preacher in this model have no responsibility other than to proclaim the gospel of Christ and the Word of God. The herald model, according to Dulles, has a strong biblical basis, and it gives the Church a clear sense of identity and mission. He goes on to write that its focus upon God's sovereignty and rich theology of the Word of God are solid theological concepts. Some of the potential weaknesses of this model, according to Dulles, include a tendency not to place enough focus on the incarnational aspects of the Christian Gospel and a temptation to place too much focus on

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 864.

verbal witness at the expense of focusing upon the service or action of the Church. However, when this model is properly understood and followed, both the incarnational aspects of the Christian faith as well as the service and action of the Church are themselves viewed as vital ways of bearing witness to the Word of God and the gospel of Christ.

Merwyn Johnson's article "Whose Ministry Is It?" discusses the issue of who is ultimately behind any act of ministry. Johnson's clear conclusion is that though ministry involves the vocational minister and the Church, God is the true agent of all authentic ministry. God graciously allows people to participate with him in his mission in the world. Thus, when it comes to the subject of preaching, it is the preacher's responsibility to prepare and deliver the sermon, and it is the responsibility of the congregation to hear and respond to the message. However, it is ultimately only God who can speak his Word to the hearts and minds of his people. This great theological truth provides the drive of this project.

The function of preaching is central to the life of the congregation. Libraries contain a great deal of information that has been written about what preaching is and how it should be done. Over the next few paragraphs, a brief summary of several of these works will be offered.

In his book, *Who Will Go For Us?*, Dennis Campbell asserts that preaching is one of the key ways that one's ordination to the gospel ministry is fulfilled. He writes that there are several things that every minister should realize about preaching. First, the gospel by its very nature is compelling. It does not need a good sales pitch. Secondly, the call to preach is a call from God. It brings with it supernatural power. Thirdly,

preaching is a gift that can and should be developed. Though God can and does speak through the worst of sermons, the faithful preacher should be a good steward and work to develop his or her skills. Finally, the effectiveness of preaching ultimately depends on the grace of God that comes to us through the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit.²¹

Eugene Peterson's article entitled "Communicating the Message," which is found in the collection entitled *The Pastor's Guide to Effective Preaching*, stresses the necessity of obedient application in response to biblical preaching. Peterson writes that simply increasing our knowledge about God or the Scriptures is of little use to the Christian. Instead, Christians are summoned to internalize the Word of God and put it into action in their everyday lives.

In Fred Craddock's book entitled *Preaching*, one finds a wealth of information centered around the subject of homiletics. Craddock asserts that the preacher is the one who is charged with helping the congregation to make sense of the biblical text for their individual contexts. He writes that effective sermons should enable members of the congregation to identify with the Scripture in a manner that will help them hear and apply God's Word.

Craddock offers another insight concerning preaching in his article "Preaching What the People Want to Say," which can be found in the book *Ministry and Mission*. He asserts that the role of the preacher is not to say something new, but to say again something that the congregation should already know. Craddock contends that the preacher is charged with being the mouthpiece for the congregation when it comes to preaching, and he argues that the preacher should say for the congregation members what they should want to say for themselves.

²¹Dennis Campbell, *Who Will Go For Us?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 94-97.

James Earl Massey's article "Application in the Sermon" can be found in the volume entitled *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*. Massey writes that application "involves the work of linking the import of the truth stated in the text and sermon with a hearer's situation and need."²² He goes on to state that application in sermons must be related both to what has been said and to those who have heard it, it must summon the hearers to decisive action, and it should motivate and persuade the hearer to act in a certain manner.

In their book, *Preaching that Connects*, Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson seek to help preachers deliver sermons more effectively by applying the generally accepted rules of journalism to the preaching of sermons. The issues they discuss include creativity in sermons, the use of illustrations and stories in sermons, the importance of good introductions and closings to sermons, and the structure of the sermon. In order for the message of preaching to be applied by those who listen to it, it must first connect with them. Galli and Larson offer valuable insights to preachers who desire to achieve this goal.

Safiyah Fosua, who serves as the director of Invitational Preaching Ministries for the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church, has written an article entitled "Invitational Preaching." In this article Fosua insists that the Church is called to invite people to be a part of its life. In like manner, he asserts that preachers within the Church should constantly strive to be invitational within their sermons. Fosua writes that preachers should invite people to wholeness, to strive to be more like Jesus, and to

²² James Earl Massey, "Application in the Sermon" in *The Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, Michael Duduit, ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 209.

service in the world. He concludes that these invitations are powerful because they ultimately come from God.

In his article “The Decline of the Text,” David Larsen urges preachers to serve as a “bridge” between the text of Scripture and the life of the congregation. He insists that the task of preaching revolves around helping Christians discover what a text means and how it speaks to contemporary life. However, Larsen is quick to point out that a preacher’s sermon must always be driven by the biblical text and nothing else. He concludes that the biblical text often times is subordinated in a sermon and becomes merely supporting material for a point of application. Larsen insists that the text should always lead to points of application rather than the other way around.

In his three-part article entitled “Application of the Sermon,” Jess Hall, Jr. writes that preachers are charged with making the gospel and the Bible relevant to contemporary listeners. He asserts that a failure to do so demonstrates infidelity to the text itself. However, he admits that good application within a sermon is a difficult task. It requires insight, creativity, and courage. Finally, Hall concludes that application should not be an afterthought to a sermon, but it should be the destination to which the sermon should be heading from the beginning.

This project will take place within a United Methodist Congregation that has a history dating back to the mid-1800s. This group of people are a part of the Wesleyan tradition of understanding the life of faith. At this point, a summary of three significant works regarding the Wesleyan tradition will be offered.

When one wishes to know the official position of the United Methodist Church on any given issue, the place to look is *The Book of Discipline*, which is the book of

covenant and order for the denomination. It describes sanctification (i.e., the life of faith) in this manner:

The wonder of God's acceptance and pardon does not end God's saving work, which continues to nurture our growth in grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to increase in the knowledge and love of God and in love for our neighbor. New birth is the first step in this process of sanctification. Sanctifying grace draws us toward the gift of Christian perfection, which Wesley described as a heart "habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor" and as "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked. This gracious gift of God's power and love, the hope and expectation of the faithful, is neither warranted by our efforts nor limited by our frailties."²³

In *The New Creation*, professor Theodore Runyon discusses the relevance of John Wesley's theology for today. The Introduction to the book states Runyon's basic understanding of Wesley's theology, which is that God has made possible the renewal of his creation through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Human beings, who were originally created in God's image, may now have that image renewed in them. This, according to Runyan, is the heart of Wesley's understanding of salvation. We are not merely forgiven by God's grace; we are also to be transformed because of it.

The heart of Runyan's book focuses upon the various understandings of grace in the Wesleyan tradition. He begins by writing about the grace that comes before any conscious decision on a person's part. This grace, which was termed "prevenient grace," enables and sustains human life and draws people toward a response to God's activity in their lives and in the world. According to Wesley, prevenient grace was the porch on which all of humanity finds itself. The door to which that porch leads is what Wesley called justifying grace.

²³ Harriett Jane Olson, et al., eds. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 47.

Justification according to Wesley is how God makes right the relationship between himself and humanity through Jesus Christ. This grace is offered universally, but it does require an acceptance by each person. This grace forgives and reconciles, and it enables a person to live with God's power in their lives. If justification is the door through which one enters into a right relationship with God, sanctifying grace is the room in which a forgiven sinner dwells.

Sanctifying grace changes both one's status and nature. Immediately upon receiving God's justifying grace, a person is set apart as God's child. However, God's grace does not merely change our status before him; it also enables us to live according to his will. Sanctifying grace empowers a person to be filled with the love of God and neighbor and to follow after the model of Christ in the way they live their lives. It will ultimately lead to final salvation at which time a person's salvation will be made complete and the image of God in them will be fully restored.

The Wesleyan tradition holds that the Christian community is vital in the life of a believer because it is the instrument through which God has chosen to provide the means of grace. Corporate worship, Bible study, prayer, and the Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper were all viewed by Wesley as means by which people could experience the grace of God. The Church should also serve as a source of instruction, encouragement, and accountability for individual Christians.

Perhaps Wesley's most significant contribution to Christian theology was his emphasis on personal experience in the life of a believer. Christianity, for Wesley, was not simply a way to view or understand the world. Instead, he understood it as the way in which God enabled people to experience a renewed relationship with him and live

according to his will. This experience with God should lead the Christian to right belief (orthodoxy), right behavior (orthopraxy), and a right experience of peace and wholeness (orthopathy).

In John Pollock's biography of John Wesley, which is entitled *John Wesley: Servant of God*, the author seeks to describe the life and spiritual development of the founder of Methodism. After being raised in a strictly religious home, with much of his learning coming from his mother, Susanna, John Wesley went away to college at Oxford. During this time, he began to read some of the classic works of Christian spirituality including works by Thomas a' Kempis and Jeremy Taylor. These readings prompted Wesley, who was spiritually restless at the time, to begin a society that would focus upon helping its members grow in holiness. This society, which was later referred to by Wesley as the "First Rise of Methodism," devoted its time to prayer, Bible study, reading of devotional literature, and good deeds such as visiting the imprisoned and sick. The members of the society included John's brother Charles Wesley along with William Morgan, Bob Kirkham, and eventually John Clayton. This devoted and dedicated group became known as the "Holy Club" among their fellow students because of their disciplined pursuit of holiness. In time, some began to derisively call them "Methodists" because of their methodical way of living the Christian life.

After graduating from Oxford, John and Charles Wesley sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on a mission trip to Georgia. While in Georgia, they began the Frederica society in what is now Saint Simons Island. Upon arriving back in England, John Wesley and some other friends including Peter Bohler began the Fetter Lane Society in London. This society emerged around the same time that Wesley had his famous Aldersgate

experience, in which he experienced God's love and grace in a unique and personal way. Wesley would later refer to the Frederica and Fetter Lane Societies as the Second and Third Rise of Methodism respectively.

During Wesley's lifetime, the gospel spread in a revived way throughout England and the colonies in America. This allowed Wesley and others to begin many societies in many places. The intent of the societies was the same as the very first society that Wesley was a part of at Oxford. They were to help Christians achieve Scriptural holiness in their lives by keeping one another accountable in their respective lives of discipleship. It is this "society" model that will be used in this project.

The Time-Table for the Project

1. Approval of Prospectus: October 15, 2004
2. Conducting of the Project: October-December, 2004
3. Researching Relevant Literature: September-December 2004.
4. Writing the Dissertation: January-April, 2005
5. Approval of Dissertation by Advisor and Reader: April 10, 2005
6. Submission of Final Copies of Dissertation: April 20, 2005

A Proposed Structure of the Dissertation

1. **A detailed introduction to the project and setting**
2. **The Biblical-theological foundations of the project** (Barth's theology of preaching combined with Wesley's theology of sanctification).
3. **A survey of relevant literature**

4. **A detailed description of the project**
5. **An evaluation of the goals of the project**

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Appendix One

Outlines of Sermons to be Preached as Part of this Project

SERMON ONE:

SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR PRAYERS

****Introduction to Series:** Everyone who is a member of Jones Chapel UMC has made a vow to participate faithfully in the church's ministry by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service. I take the vows very seriously, and I hope you do as well. Of course, we made these promises to one another, but I believe that we should first and foremost view them as our response to Jesus Christ. Every Sunday when we gather for worship, we celebrate the reality of Christ's resurrection. Since we know that Christ is alive and here with us, we are called upon to share in his ministry. The New Testament teaches us that we do this as we faithfully participate in the ministry that he gave the church.

****Focal Passage: Matthew 6:5-13**

****Introduction:** Discuss the vital importance that we place upon prayer in our Christian experience. It is prayer that allows us to commune and communicate with God at all times during our lives. However, Jesus began his teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount by offering some words of caution concerning improper prayer. Thus, before we look at Jesus' model prayer, let us hear his instruction concerning how not to pray. Jesus offers two basic warnings concerning prayer. First, we must not pray in an attempt to impress others. This does not mean that all public prayer is improper. Instead, it means that all prayer should have God and only God for its audience. When we pray publicly, whether it be in our worship service or at our family dinner table, let us always pray to God. *God demands that our prayer be sincere.* Secondly, we must not pray in an attempt to impress God. God wants open and honest communication with us. When we use words or phrases that have little meaning to us in an attempt to impress God with our religious vocabulary, God is not impressed! *God demands that our prayer be authentic.* So, how then should we pray? Jesus did not leave us in the dark here. He gives us a model by which to guide our prayer lives.

****How should we pray?**

1. Sincere and authentic prayer should always be prayed in the light of God's unique relationship with us (vs. 9a).

-God is God regardless of people's response to him. God's rule and power over the world is true regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not. God created everyone, and everyone will ultimately stand before him and exalt him as God. However, for those of us who receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, God is our Father because we become joint-heirs with Jesus as Paul writes (Rm. 8:15-17). Thus, when we pray, we should always have the deep assurance that we are talking to the one who knows us best and loves us most. God loves to hear from us just as a loving father loves to

communicate with his son or daughter. God wants us to come to him, to trust in him, and to rely upon him. When Christians pray, no matter what the circumstance, we are talking to our heavenly Father. May we never forget that.

--*illus.* Read Fredrick Buechner's writing on the Lord's Prayer.

2. Sincere and authentic prayer should include our praise of God (vs. 9b-10, 13b).

-Praising God includes both honoring him for who he is and submitting our lives to his will. The word "hallowed" means to give something unique or special status. In this case, it means to regard something as holy and pure. The word "name" refers to someone's identity. The Hebrews understood the word "name" to infer not just someone's identifying title, but also their nature, character, and personality. To speak of someone's name is to speak of their identity. Thus, "hallowed by thy name" means something like "we acknowledge your unique holiness that is demonstrated by your nature and character." When we genuinely pray this phrase, we are offering God our praise simply for being who he is. It means that we are showing a proper reverence for God. *In order to treat God with proper reverence, we must realize that he is, we must realize who he is (his characteristics), we must realize where he is (with us at all times), and we must realize what he wants (our obedience and worship) and give it to him.* Thus, the only suitable line to follow "hallowed be your name" is "your kingdom come, your will be done." If God is properly revered in our lives, we will give him control over who we are and what we do. In other words, we'll allow him to call the shots. Finally, this model prayer is concluded with yet another word of praise. Jesus states that the kingdom (control), the power (ability), and the glory (credit/praise) belong to God forever.

--*illus.* My mother's famous line when we talked back to her when we were kids—"Do you know who you're talking to?" Of course, that meant that we better change our tone and show proper respect. I think the same question can and should be asked of us when we pray. Do we really know who we're talking to? If so, praise must be the first word from our mouths.

3. Sincere and authentic prayer should lift our daily needs before God (vs. 11).

-The genuine Christian learns to trust God to provide for his needs but not necessarily his wants. The prayer ask for bread not prime rib! Sometimes when we get the things we think we want, we discover that we are worse off because of it. However, when we trust God to provide for our needs, we can be assured that he will provide for us. Scripture teaches that God takes care of the lilies and the sparrows (Mt. 6:25-30). Thus, we may know that he will take care of us as well. Further, Jesus teaches us to ask for our needs for the day. Worrying about the future is not the business of the Christian. We should instead ask God to take care of us day by day and trust him to do so.

--*illus.* The man who bought the Rolls Royce and demanded to know how much horse power it had. The C.E.O. of the company faxed back a response that read simply "Adequate." As Christians, we must know that God has adequate power to take care of his children.

4. Sincere and authentic prayer should lead us to repentance (vs. 12-13a).

-True repentance includes the seeking of forgiveness for sin, the seeking of grace to forgive others, and the seeking of deliverance from sin. The Bible teaches us that the victory over our sins accomplished by Christ is permanent. Thus, we don't have to worry about our salvation being lost every time we sin. However, we should take care to confess our sin daily before God and seek his forgiveness. The reason for this has nothing to do with our eternal destination. Instead, it has to do with our relationship with God right now. We need God to cleanse us from the stain of sin in our lives. We need regularly for God to renew the joy of our salvation. Sin messes up our relationship with God. Confession, which is a vital part of repentance, allows God to make it right again. As we repent, we must not only seek God's forgiveness in our lives, but we also must seek his grace to help us be forgiving toward others. A Christian cannot have a healthy relationship with God while withholding forgiveness toward others. Grudges and bitterness can ruin the Christian heart. (*ex. The story of the woman who had been bitten by a dog. While she awaited a result of a rabies test, she began to list the people she wanted to bite before she died.*) As we experience God's forgiveness, we are called to practice it toward others. Finally, true repentance calls us to leave sin behind and live each day for and with the Lord. Christ has not only made possible our forgiveness, but he has also made possible our deliverance from sin. Thus, we should pray that God will aid us in times of temptation and ultimately deliver us from the presence of evil in our lives. Repentance is best defined as turning from sin to God. It needs to be a part of our prayer lives every day.

****Conclusion:** How can we share in the ministry of the risen Christ? How can we faithfully participate in the ministry of Christ's church? A first answer is by being faithful in our prayers. It is in prayer that we pay attention to God. It is in prayer that we communicate with him. It is in prayer that our praise is offered, our needs are lifted, and our repentance begins. Prayer is not optional for the Christian. It is fundamental. It is essential, so much so that the New Testament teaches that we ought to do it all the time.

**SERMONS TWO:
SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR PRESENCE**

****Focal Passage: Hebrews 10:23-25**

****Introduction:** If someone were to ask you, “What if Jones Chapel United Methodist Church?,” you would likely reply, “That’s where I go to church.” Of all the many things this church is to us, perhaps the most basic is the reality that it is where we come—to worship, to fellowship, to grow in Christ. Today, as we continue our series on Christian stewardship, we will look at what it means to be present within the church.

****What does our presence in the church require of us?**

1. We are called to remind each other of God’s faithfulness by confessing our hope together (vs. 23).

-One of the key purposes for the church is to remind individual Christians who we are and whose we are. There are times of doubt and fear in life, times when we might not feel like being a Christian. There are naturally times when we find ourselves confused, when we may genuinely believe that God is no where to be found. In times like these, we must look to our fellow Christians for a reminder of who we are, of who we worship, and of what we believe. Our hope as Christians is certain because it rests upon God’s faithfulness to us rather than our faithfulness to him.

--*illus.* In our worship service, nearly everything we do is in some way a confession of our hope in Christ. In our covenant of love, we remind one another of our commitment to help each other along life’s journey. In our music, we sing of God’s character, faithfulness, and activity on this earth and in our lives. In our Scripture readings, we hear from God’s Word of his faithfulness in times past and of his promises to us for both the present and the future. In our prayers, we bring God our praise, our confession of sin, our burdens, and our needs, knowing that he hears us and loves us beyond all measure. In our creed, we stand up week in and week out and we say out loud what we as Christians believe. In our collection of tithes and offerings, we acknowledge God’s provision in our lives, and we are given the opportunity to give thankfully back to him. In our sermon and our Children’s sermon, we hopefully receive instruction, encouragement, and challenge for life as disciples of Christ. In the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, we celebrate the reality of God’s presence among us. Nearly everything we do and say together each Sunday in our worship service is done to remind ourselves that we are the family of God, we are the body of Christ, and we are one in the bond of love.

And all this is possible simply and only because God is faithful!

--*illus. 2:* Tell the story of the child going through confirmation classes and struggling with the creed. When the boy protested by saying he didn’t believe the creed, the pastor replied, “Say it any way.” When the boy protested again, the pastor replied saying the same thing. Finally, when the boy protested a third time, the sincere pastor looked him in the eye and said, “Son it’s not your creed! Now say it any way!”

2. We are called to “provoke” one another to love and good deeds (vs. 24).

-In verse 24, we are actually told that part of our responsibility as the church is to provoke one another. When we typically use the word provoke, we are referring to provoking an argument or a fight. Needless to say, that is not the instruction here. Instead, we are called to provoke one another to love and to good deeds. Love is a matter of the attitude and the will. Love affects the way we approach our relationships with other people and our lives in general. The word *agape* is used for love here, which refers to the type of love that God displays and gives to those who relate to him. The biblical writer is telling us here to cause one another to love with God’s kind of love. Secondly, we are told to provoke one another to good deeds. This obviously refers to our action. The things that we do or refrain from doing should reflect a genuine goodness. As the church, the way each of us views the world and the way that we choose to live within it is the business of all—not because we are nosy or gossipy, but because we are called by God to help each other become more loving and more holy.

--*illus.* The story of the farmer who ordered a lot of greasy food at a café and told the “inquiring” waitress that his dad lived 98 years. When the waitress responded by saying, “Your Dad lived 98 years eating food like this,” the coy old farmer replied, “No ma’am, he lived 98 years by keeping his nose out of other people’s business.” This may be a generally good rule for life, but when it comes to our individual walks with Christ, we are one another’s business. We are called to provoke one another to love and good deeds through both admonition and accountability.

3. We are called to “meet” together (vs. 25a).

-At the beginning of verse 25, we are given a simple yet profound instruction concerning our responsibility as the church. We are called to meet together. We are called to be with one another on a regular basis. If someone ever asks you where in the Bible does it say that Christians need to go to church, this verse would be a good starting point. We need to be present for our corporate worship together. We need to be present in smaller group settings so that we can fellowship together and enjoy one another. We need to share meals together and have fun together. Christians are not called to live as lone rangers. We are called to live in community. We are to teach each other, we are to pray for each other, we are to help each other, we are to forgive each other, we are to share one another’s joys and sorrows, and we are to relate to each other as the family of God. All of these things require that we gather together regularly.

--*illus.* Simply coming to a Sunday morning worship service does not provide us with enough “together time.” I’ve had that conviction since I’ve been here, and that is why we have worked together to start our Wednesday evening meal and programs and our monthly Sunday evening meal and communion service. Both of these events are open to people of all age groups within the church. However, there are many other small groups that meet throughout the course of the month at our church. I want to challenge all of you to be a part of at least one of these groups. Of course, you can be a part of as many as you’d like (many of you already are), but I think it is essential that everyone be involved in at least one. These groups include:

1. *Sunday School classes for all age groups that meet at 10am on Sunday*
2. *MYF for 6th-12th grade and Friends for preK-5th grade (meet Wed. and Sun. evenings at 7pm and 5pm respectively)*
3. *Our adult choir meets Sunday evenings at 5pm.*
4. *Our Pairs n' Spares senior adult group meet the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm.*
5. *Our United Methodist Men meet the second Monday of the month at 7pm.*
6. *Our Women's Prayer Group meets the second and fourth Tuesday of the month at 7 pm.*
7. *Our United Methodist Women meet the fourth Monday of the month at 7pm.*
8. *Our adult Bible study group meets each Wednesday at 7pm.*
9. *Our LRE outreach group meets each Wednesday at 7pm.*
10. *Our Disciple Bible Study groups usually meet from Sept.-May each year.*

4. We are called to encourage one another (vs. 25b).

-The word translated “encourage” in this verse literally means to stand along side and strengthen. Some translations render it “exhort,” which means to build up. And this is what God wants us to do for one another in the church. We are called to help each other grow stronger in the faith. When times are hard, we are to be there with words of comfort and assurance. When times are great, we are to be there to share in the joy. And, as is most often the case, when times are just kind of ordinary, we are to be there to speak words that will help our brother or sister in God’s family keep on going. Encouragement comes in many different forms—a sincere hug around the neck, a genuine smile, a sympathetic tear, a kind word written on a note or spoken over the phone, a pat on the back, and yes, sometimes a kick in the rear. All these things require some effort and some initiative. They require us to approach others and perhaps leave our comfort zone. But these types of things are what God has called us to do for one another. And as times get more and more difficult to maintain our faith (as the Day approaches), we are called to do them all the more.

***Conclusion:* When we become a part of this community of faith, we promise to be supportive of the church with our prayer and our presence, our gifts and our service. Presence seems to be the one that is easy to shrug off or overlook. We may think that it just means that we promise to show up at church. But I think that it is much more than that. I think it is a vow to continually help each other to hold to the hope of God’s faithfulness, to help each other become more loving and more holy, to help each other stay connected by being together often, and to help each other along life’s journey through words and deeds of encouragement. This is what being present in the church means. This is what God has given us to be and to do for one another.

**SERMON THREE:
SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR GIFTS**

****Focal Passage: Matthew 23:23**

**** Introduction:** Discuss the meaning of the word “hypocrite”: It comes from the Greek word that means “mask.” Thus, a hypocrite is a person that puts on one “mask” in one situation and another “mask” in another. In a religious sense, a hypocrite is someone who is a fraud. “They talk the talk, but do not walk the walk.” This is not to be confused with a sinner, which we all are. A sinner misses the mark or falls short of the goal. A hypocrite is never concerned with truly glorifying God in the first place. In this passage of Scripture, which is one of the harshest in the New Testament, Jesus again and again refers to the Scribes, who were interpreters of the OT law, and the Pharisees, who were teachers of the OT law, as hypocrites. In the middle of his harsh criticism, Jesus offers us an important insight concerning the types of gifts that God wants and expects us to bring to him.

****With what gifts should we share in the ministry of Christ?**

1. We should give our tithe.

-The word tithe literally means one tenth or ten percent. The notion of giving to the Lord one tenth of one’s income was modeled by the patriarch Abraham (Gen. 14:20), it was given as a command directly from God to Moses when he was on Mount Sinai (Lev. 27:31ff; Num. 18:24ff; Deut. 12:6ff), and it was demanded by the prophets (esp. Malachi 3:8-10). This one verse and its corresponding passage in Luke are the only places in the Gospels that Jesus addresses the subject of tithing. And Jesus does not change the command to tithe one bit. He does offer a caution to those who might think that God’s favor can be purchased with their money by making clear that God desires that we offer him a transformed life that is characterized by justice, mercy, and faith as well as our gift of the tithe. But he tells the Scribes and Pharisees to practice these characteristics while still giving their tithe faithfully (“Practice these without neglecting the other,” he says). What does the command to tithe mean for us? Simply put, it means that God calls us to give at least ten percent of our income to the continuing work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is clear that the work of Christ continues through the Church, which is given the label “the body of Christ.” Some of us already practice this discipline. However, I know that for some this idea seems impossible. Let me say two things about tithing to you before we leave this subject. *First, Tithing for the Christian is first a matter of trust and obedience in response to the grace of God.* When we give ten percent of our income to the Lord’s work, we are demonstrating obedience to his Word and trust in his provision for us. *Secondly, tithing is a matter of priority in the life of a Christian.* People manage their personal budget by taking care of what they view as the most important things first. No one in their right mind would opt to purchase an exciting vacation package before they bought groceries. Logic tells us that it is more important to eat than it is to have fun. In like manner, mature Christians understand that the work of Christ in the

world through the church is the most important thing imaginable. Thus, we should make it top priority to give our tithe to the Lord in obedience to his command.

--*illus*. Tithing is the means by which we provide nourishment for the body of Christ. Without proper nourishment the body cannot function as it should. The worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and evangelism of a church are all fueled by the tithes and offerings of its members. When we give our tithe, it goes to fund the ministry of the local church by covering its ministry and operational expenses and the salaries of its staff, it funds the work of the church at the district level, which includes ministries that provide for the hungry and homeless, it funds the work of the church at the conference level, which includes ministries that provide for the indigent, the elderly, neglected and orphaned children, and much more, and it funds the work of the church at the general, world-wide level, which includes funding for mission work all around the globe. When we place our gift into the offering plate each Sunday as an act of worship, every cent of that money goes to fund the ministry of Christ through his church!

2. We should give a life characterized by justice.

-The idea of justice calls for a wisdom to know what is right and a willingness to do what is right. To practice justice means that we do not seek to exploit or take advantage of people. Those who are concerned with justice must be unselfish. Justice demands that the lives of all people in the world be lived with basic needs met and basic rights granted. Justice calls us to give to the poor and hungry. Justice calls us to stand with the persecuted and oppressed. To know right and to do right are basic Christian values, and Jesus describes them as weightier matters of God's law.

--*illus*. I once got a check from my theology school for a sizeable amount of money. This money was sent to them by an organization that had awarded me a scholarship for my schooling. Apparently, the amount was credited to my account, and then, somehow, a check for the amount was also sent by the school to me. I had a decision to make. I could have simply deposited the check into my account, dismissed my financial concerns, and said with a great degree of honesty that the school would never miss it. Heck, I could have even stood up in church and talked about the "mysterious ways" that God provides for his children. I went through this rationalization process again and again, and as I was just about ready to take a trip to the bank, I remembered those pesky words of Jesus, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul" (Mt. 16:26)? The conclusion of the matter—the school got its money back, and I never missed a meal.

3. We should give a life characterized by mercy.

-To be merciful requires us to be kind to people. It demands that we practice forgiveness rather than revenge. It means that we do not treat people as they treat us, but as Jesus taught, we treat them as we *would have* them treat us. To be merciful means that we give someone what they need instead of what they deserve. Why should we do this? Why shouldn't we always call for fairness? The answer is simple. Because God does not treat us fairly. God does not give us what we deserve. Instead, through Jesus Christ, God gives us what we need. Thus, those who receive mercy should practice it toward others.

--*illus.* Clarence Jordan story: The founder of Koinonea Farms once told a story illustrating the command Christ issued concerning not seeking revenge. He asked a friend if his mule bit him would he bite his mule back. His friend replied, "Of course not, I would hit him over the head with a board." Jordan replied, "In like manner, Christians should not allow others to decide our weapons for us. They may use violence and hate, but we should choose love, mercy, and compassion."

4. We should give a life characterized by faith.

-Faith in Christ gives us the substance, the confidence, the foundation that we need to live the life that God has called us to live. Our faith enables us at all times to say with assurance that God will make a way somehow. Our faith is at its best when our self-dependence is at its lowest. When we have no choice but to rely on the grace and goodness of Christ, we are in the best possible scenario. Our responsibility in such situations is simply to trust and obey him.

--*illus.* The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

****Conclusion:** The word "woe" literally means an intense unhappiness. In this passage Jesus conveys his deep grief and anger at the life the Scribes and Pharisees lived. Of course, we are not Scribes or Pharisees, and it is pretty easy for us to hear these harsh words that Jesus spoke about someone else. But I do wonder when Christ looks at our lives, would he be more apt to say "Woe!" or "Well done!"

**SERMON FOUR:
SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR SERVICE**

****Focal Passage: James 1:19-27**

****Introduction:** Tell the story of many teachers in college: They would spend six weeks discussing many subjects in detail. Then, the day before the test they would review the “basics” of what they had been teaching. The intention of this review was to hit the high points again that we had already discussed so that they would be fresh in our minds as we were tested. Today we are challenged by such a review in James’ letter. The apostle reviews for us some of the essential tenets of basic Christian service.

****What are we called to do as servants of Christ?**

**1. Christian service calls us to be in control of our communication and attitude.
(vs. 19-20)**

-James offers us three basic instructions concerning our behavior in these verses. As we obey these instructions, we will bring honor to God, and we will safeguard the credibility of our witness for Christ. Additionally, we will put ourselves in a position to be used by the Lord as his minister.

A. Christian service calls for a willingness to listen. As followers of Christ, we should strive to be good listeners. Paul Tillich wrote, “Listening is love’s first duty.” If we want people to know the love of God through our love for them, we must be willing to take the time and make the effort to listen to what they want to tell us. Listening is one of the greatest acts of ministry that we can offer people. Listening also helps us to better understand one another, it promotes unity, and it builds relationships.

--*illus.* Teenage prostitutes, during interviews in a San Francisco study, were asked: "Is there anything you needed most and couldn't get?" Their response, invariably preceded by sadness and tears was unanimous: "What I needed most was someone to listen to me. Someone who cared enough to listen to me."

B. Christian service calls for disciplined speech. One of the most dangerous threats to our witness and ministry is a loose tongue. We can usually say something later that we leave unsaid now. However, we cannot go back and unsay something that we have said. There does come a time in which we should stand up and make our position clear. To be slow to speak does not imply that we should be cowardly when we must take a brave stance under difficult circumstances. However, it does mean that we should prayerfully consider when to stand and speak and when to simply let it go.

--*illus.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his friend were sitting in a German restaurant during the height of the Nazi regime. When a Nazi fight song came over the loud speaker in the restaurant, his friend folded his arms in resistance and was just about to speak a word of protest. However, Bonhoeffer (who was a leader

in the anti-Nazi movement among German Christians) hopped to his feet and began to sing along. When questioned about his loyalty, Bonhoeffer replied by saying something like, “There will be a time to speak words which will cost me my life, but I will not die over my protest to this stupid song!”

- C. **Christian service calls us to not harbor anger.** Then, he goes on to state that our anger does not produce the righteousness of God in us. When we harbor grudges or bitterness toward a person (whether they “deserve” those feelings or not), we are not causing them very much harm. However, we are inflicting serious damage upon our relationship with God. The key to growth in Christ is not “righteous anger.” It is Christ-like forgiveness.
 --*illus.* The terrible tragedy of a person killing an abortion doctor due to their zealous opposition to abortion. The proper way to stop wrong in our world is through love and forgiveness, not through acts of vengeance, hatred, and wrath.

2. Christian service calls us to hear and *do* the Word of God. (vs. 21-26)

-James instructs us to receive the “implanted/engrafted word” in a spirit of humility. The word translated implanted means something that is growing within. Clearly the word to which James refers is the Word of God that is alive and active in the life of believers. It is this word that serves as the fuel that prompts our ministry. What is the Word of God? The Bible offers two clear answers: 1) The Word of God incarnate is Jesus Christ. He is the supreme revelation of God, and he is alive and active in the lives of his followers. 2) The Word of God is the Scriptures, which reveal to us how we should relate to God properly. So how should this “Word” impact our lives? James is crystal clear on this point. We should not simply hear it with our ears or know it in our minds. The Word of God must be evident in the way we live. By being *doers* of the word, Christ can be magnified in us, and we can be assured of God’s blessing. Who we work for determines how we work. When we work for the Lord in our service and ministry, we are motivated to do what we do to his glory rather than to earn accolades for ourselves. The Word of God must be the impetus for our Christian service, and service only happens when we get busy *doing* something.
 --*illus.* Tell the story about the little girl who was missing a tooth: I asked her if the tooth fairy had come to visit her, and after she told me that he had left her a dollar, I asked her to punch me in the mouth and knock a tooth out so that I could get a dollar too. Without hesitation, the little girl clinched her fist and hit me square in the mouth! While I never recommend hitting the preacher, or anyone for that matter, in the church parking lot, I must confess, I was impressed by the girl’s obedient spirit. She was not merely a hearer of my words, she became a doer. God wants that for all of us.

3. Christian service calls us to care for those in need instead of playing by the world’s rules. (vs. 27)

-In verse twenty-six, James warns us against a religion that is based solely upon lip service. If we simply talk “Christian” talk without living a changed and changing life, we are fooling ourselves, and we are living with a useless religion. On the other

hand, pure religion, which is found in relation with Christ, should prompt us to compassionate action aimed at those who need it the most. If we truly know Christ, we will bear his fruit (John 15:5). What is Christ-like fruit? A life centered upon helping and loving people, especially those who need help the most, and keeping ourselves out of the world's mentality (i.e. "You should get what you deserve;" "You made your bed, now lie in it;," etc.)

--*illus.* Remind the congregation of Jesus' parable of the "Judgment of the sheep and the goats." Those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, provided shelter for the homeless, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned were commended for doing all of those acts of service for Jesus himself (Mt. 25:31-46).

****Conclusion:** It is recommended that people go to the doctor every so often for a physical, or a "check-up" as it is sometimes called. The purpose of this visit is to prevent potential problems and discover and fix existing problems. Today, I want to challenge you to give yourself a spiritual "check-up." Are you living in a manner that exercises restraint and moderation in your behavior? Are you being a good listener? Are you speaking too much without enough prayer and consideration as to what you are saying? Are you allowing anger, bitterness, or hatred to dominate you instead of love and forgiveness? Are you spending time in God's Word, and are you allowing his incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, to be in control of your life? Are you *doing* something everyday to show God's love to others through your life? Finally, are you using your talents and resources to help those in need? Are you regularly giving of yourself to people as though you were helping Jesus himself? If these questions lead us to conclude that we are being proper Christian servants, let me encourage you to keep it up. If our conclusion after hearing this message is that we need to improve in some areas of our lives in order to be the best servants of Christ we can be, let me encourage you to make the necessary change.

Appendix Two

Listening Sheets to be Provided to Participating Members of this Project

LISTENING SHEET FOR “SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR PRAYERS”

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-13

****How should we pray?**

1. **Sincere and authentic prayer should always be prayed in the light of God’s unique _____ with us (vs. 9a).**
--Notes/Insights:

2. **Sincere and authentic prayer should include our _____ of God (vs. 9b-10, 13b).**
--Notes/Insights:

3. **Sincere and authentic prayer should lift our daily _____ before God (vs. 11).**
--Notes/Insights:

4. **Sincere and authentic prayer should lead us to _____ (vs. 12-13a).**
--Notes/Insights:

Questions to Consider (use back of paper or extra paper):

1. What questions or comments do I have about this passage of Scripture or the sermon? In what *specific* way(s) can I apply this Scripture and sermon to my everyday life? In what ways were I instructed, exhorted (built up), or challenged concerning my relationship with Christ today?
2. Why is it important that we are not just praying to “God” but to our “Heavenly Father?” Why do we have the right to relate to God in this way?
3. Why should some element of praise be a part of every prayer. Define the following terms in your own words: reverence, submission, and acknowledgement (of God’s attributes). How should each of these effect our praise of God?
4. What types of needs should we bring before the Father in prayer? Why is it important not to “get ahead of ourselves” in our prayers?
5. What is the role of prayer in repentance? What must we seek from God is true repentance is to occur? Why is our forgiveness from God directly linked to our willingness to forgive others?

**LISTENING SHEET FOR
“SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR PRESENCE”**

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23-25

****What does our presence in the church require of us?**

**1. We are called to remind each other of God’s faithfulness by _____
our hope together (vs. 23).**

--Notes/Insights:

2. We are called to “_____” one another to love and good deeds (vs. 24).

--Notes/Insights:

3. We are called to “_____” together (vs. 25a).

--Notes/Insights:

4. We are called to _____ one another (vs. 25b).

--Notes/Insights:

Questions to Consider (use back of paper or extra paper):

1. What questions or comments do I have about this passage of Scripture or the sermon?
In what *specific* way(s) can I apply this Scripture and sermon to my everyday life? In what ways were I instructed, exhorted (built up), or challenged concerning my relationship with Christ today?
2. Think about the different aspects of our church life (especially our worship service). Reflect upon how each of these aspects reminds us of the hope we have in Jesus Christ as well as the faithfulness of God.
3. In what ways can we help one another to grow deeper in our commitment to an attitude of love and a lifestyle of holiness (good deeds)?
4. Why is it important for Christians to be together often? Do you have any new ideas about groups or programs that can be started to help with this?
5. What does the word “encourage” mean to you? What are some creative ways that we can provide encouragement for one another?

**LISTENING SHEET FOR
“SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR GIFTS”**

Scripture: Matthew 23:23

****With what gifts should we share in the ministry of Christ?**

1. We should give our _____.

--Notes/Insights:

2. We should give a life characterized by _____.

--Notes/Insights:

3. We should give a life characterized by _____.

--Notes/Insights:

4. We should give a life characterized by _____.

--Notes/Insights:

Questions to Consider (use back of paper or extra paper):

1. What questions or comments do I have about this passage of Scripture or the sermon? In what *specific* way(s) can I apply this Scripture and sermon to my everyday life? In what ways were I instructed, exhorted (built up), or challenged concerning my relationship with Christ today?
2. When we use the word “tithe,” what exactly do we mean? How is a “tithe” different from an “offering?” How does our tithe demonstrate our dependency upon God and our support of his church? When we place our tithe in the offering plate, what does it fund?
3. What does the word justice mean in its New Testament sense? How does this definition differ from the one usually given to justice in our contemporary culture? In the church, we sometimes use the term “social justice.” What does this mean, and why should it be important to us?
4. Define mercy. How is mercy the “other side of the coin” of grace? How has God shown us mercy, and how, specifically, can we extend mercy to others?
5. What does faith mean in the New Testament? How does this definition of faith differ from the way we sometimes use this word in the church? The Bible says that “without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). Why do you think this is so?

**LISTENING SHEET FOR
“SHARING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST—OUR SERVICE”**

Scripture: James 1:19-27

****What are we called to do as servants of Christ?**

1. Christian service calls us to be in control of our communication and attitude. (vs. 19-20)

a. We are to be quick to _____.

b. We are to be slow to _____.

c. We are to be slow to _____.

--Notes/Insights:

2. Christian service calls us to hear and _____ the Word of God. (vs. 21-26)

--Notes/Insights:

3. Christian service calls us to _____ those in need instead of playing by the world’s rules. (vs. 27)

--Notes/Insights:

Questions to Consider (use back of paper or extra paper):

1. What questions or comments do I have about this passage of Scripture or the sermon? In what *specific* way(s) can I apply this Scripture and sermon to my everyday life? In what ways were I instructed, exhorted (built up), or challenged concerning my relationship with Christ today?
2. Consider your own skills/willingness to listen patiently, speak wisely, and keep your temper in check. Where are you strongest, and where do you have room for growth and improvement? Why is it so important to guard our communication and our attitude so closely?
3. What is the purpose of Bible study? Once we experience and hear God’s Word, how can/should we put it into practice in our lives?
4. What are some of the “world’s rules” concerning those who do not have their essential needs met? What does the Bible teach us about giving people what they deserve? What should ultimately be our basis for helping others as Christians?

Appendix Three

Survey Measuring Goals for Participating Congregation Members

Please answer each question as honestly as you can. You need not sign your name.
Please note that the term “this project” refers to the “sermon response” group that has met on Wednesday evenings as well as the listening sheets provided each week for them.

1. How often have you been able to attend the “sermon response” group on Wednesday evenings?
 - a. Every week
 - b. Nearly every week (1 miss out of the 4 week series)
 - c. Two or fewer times

2. How helpful have you found the discussion group to be in your understanding and application of the Scripture and sermon?
 - a. Very helpful—I can better understand the content and better realize ways to apply it to my life and our life together in the church.
 - b. Somewhat helpful—I can understand the content a bit better and sometimes gain new insight into applying it.
 - c. Not helpful at all—I cannot tell a difference in my understanding of the content or my insight into applying it.

3. How often have you used the listening sheets provided for the sermon on Sunday?
 - a. Every week
 - b. Nearly every week (1 miss out of the 4 week series)
 - c. Two or fewer times

4. How helpful have you found the listening sheets to be in your understanding and application of the Scripture and sermon?
 - a. Very helpful—I can better understand the content and better realize ways to apply it to my life and our life together in the church.
 - b. Somewhat helpful—I can understand the content a bit better and sometimes gain new insight into applying it.
 - c. Not helpful at all—I cannot tell a difference in my understanding of the content or my insight into applying it.

5. Which of the following is true for you?
 - a. The discussion group has been more helpful than the listening sheets.
 - b. The listening sheets have been more helpful than the discussion group.
 - c. Both the discussion group and the listening sheets have been about equally helpful.
 - d. Neither the group nor the listening sheets have been helpful.

6. Are you in a leadership position within the church (i.e. Do you hold an office or serve on a committee?)
 - a. Yes (If so, answer only question # 7a. Then, precede to question #8.)
 - b. No (If so, answer only question #7b. Then, precede to question #8.)

- 7a. Do you think that this project has helped you as a leader within the church apply the content of Scripture to the life of the congregation? In other words, do you think that this project better enables you to apply the content of Scripture and the sermons to your decision making in your church office/committee?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 7b. If you were asked by the nominating committee to serve in an office or on a committee, do you think this project would help you apply the content of Scripture to the life of the congregation through your work in that office/committee?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

8. Has this project prompted you to spend more time personally studying the Bible and reflecting upon the meaning of its teachings in your life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. Has this project provided you with an opportunity to learn more about the Bible that you did not previously have?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

10. Has this project provided you with a group to whom you are accountable in the study and application of Scripture?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

11. Would you like for this project to continue?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix Four

Interview Questions for Church Leader and New Member

Interview of Group Member Who Is a Church Leader

1. Has this project been helpful to you as a leader within the Church? If yes, how so? Would you remain a part of it should it continue?
2. Do you think that this project has prompted you to reflect more deeply upon the biblical text in both your personal life as well as in your role as a Church leader? If yes, how?
3. Can you better articulate the instruction offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.
4. Can you better articulate the exhortation/encouragement offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.
5. Can you better articulate the challenge offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.

Interview of Group Member Not Currently in Leadership Position in Church

1. Has this project been helpful to you as a member of the Church? If yes, how so? Would you remain a part of it should it continue?
2. Do you think that this project has prompted you to reflect more deeply upon the biblical text in both your personal life as well as in your role as a potential future Church leader? If yes, how?
3. Can you better articulate the instruction offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.
4. Can you better articulate the exhortation/encouragement offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.
5. Can you better articulate the challenge offered in the biblical text and sermon as a result of this project? Explain why or why not.

Appendix Five

Survey Measuring Goal for Minister

Please indicate the general degree to which you are able to realize points of application regarding the following aspects in the Biblical text after hearing the sermon on a week to week basis. Do this by placing a number in the blank provided at the end of each question(s) below using the following scale.

1-None 2-Occasional 3-Frequent 4-Almost Always

1. Concerning the instruction offered in the text/sermon:

- a. What does the text mean in the context of its biblical book and in the context of the Scripture as a whole? _____
- b. What does the text/sermon teach us about God or Jesus? _____
- c. What is the relevance of the text/sermon for the life of the church and individual Christians today? _____
- d. How do we see the truth of the text illustrated in world/church history, the Methodist tradition, our personal experiences and observations, or the lives of others? _____
- e. What can we *do* with the message of the text and sermon? How can we apply it specifically to our lives or the life of the church? _____
- f. Do we see ourselves in the text/sermon? If so where, and what does it communicate about us? _____

2. Concerning the exhortation offered in the text/sermon:

- a. How does this text/sermon encourage or build up the individual and the church? What does it say about our identity? What does it say about our mission? _____
- b. Does the text/sermon offer words of comfort for hurting, suffering, grieving, doubting, fearful, or anxious people? If so, what is that message? _____
- c. Does the text/sermon offer a compassionate message? If so, what? _____
- d. How is the love of God for his people reflected in the text/sermon? _____

3. Concerning the challenge offered in the text:

- a. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call people to worship/glorify God? _____
- b. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call God's people to evaluate themselves? _____
- c. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call people to repent? _____
- d. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call people to be on mission with Christ in the world? _____
- e. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call people to a specific response to God? _____
- f. In what ways if any does the text/sermon call people to reconciliation with each other and with God? _____