

Session 5 MOVEMENT

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A Lazarus Church is not intended to be a simple institutional or organizational revitalization. Instead, it is meant to be the *resurrection of a congregation* vitally connected to its community and the reestablishment of a movement of Methodist Christians as part of *missio Dei*. Such a movement will offer new life in Christ in profound, transformational ways. This is a renewal of a people and a grassroots movement, therefore can't be accomplished if you attempt to maintain all of your current programs and approaches of the last chapter of ministry. Instead, you and your disciple team are called to a new day! You are called to a new life! The old must pass away before the new can be born. The congregation is called to die to itself and to focus upon God and the call to follow the way of abundant life which Christ has shown.

Most UMC's don't traditionally stop doing anything. Yet we are called to follow Jesus today. I believe this means we must stop and find new life in some true priorities. This approach gives permission to stop many things, to say the benediction over them, to say that last prayer and let it die. As we hear God, and our community, and our call to be a community of faith today, we respond in a new and different way. We hear a call to life! Such a church movement will take place with urgency and focus within a particular context while being alive to the present *missio Dei*. This is our opportunity as a Lazarus Church in our community.

It is expected to finish "*one chapter of ministry,*" turn the page, and launch into an exciting next chapter. It is exciting to be part of a movement, part of the salvation drama that is still alive, and active participants in the redemption of God which is yet alive in our communities in the lives of our neighbors.

Think about **Jesus and the early disciples**. Whether the Christmas story, or the Easter story, or anything in between, read Scripture closely and notice the various people groups who encounter *missio Dei* and then become part of the partners in the spread of the living kingdom of God. This is the church you want to be and it is up to each participant for this to be reality.

Reflect on Peter, Paul, and the *early church* on the move. Watch that movement in Acts and in the early church as it moved through communities and cultures. This is the church you want to be and it is up to each participant for this to be reality.

Consider Wesley, Asbury, Hosier, Allen, Otterbein, and the multitude of circuit riders and leaders of the Methodist way. Recall the "heroes" and "sheroes" of faith from the history of your congregation. Who are those leaders today who are helping to create the church of tomorrow? This is the church you want to be and it is up to each participant for this to be reality.

Now imagine for *your congregation* taking your place in the *current stream* of the vital movement of God which is being established in your community. It's part of our theology, our history, and our calling as a Methodist Christian people. It demands personal engagement and leadership in the practices of faith and requires group expectations and expression. No church can any longer afford to

have certain people do certain jobs and not commit to the whole practice of following Christ. A person can't choose to attend worship and be on the finance committee and that is all they do for the church. We can no longer have some who only serve as trustee or teach or sing. Nor can we perpetuate the idea that to attend worship and drop a little something in the offering plate is the highlight and expectation of membership. Instead, we must have people of all ages who commit to being disciples of Christ and finding their place in this larger faith movement. This may be easier for people outside the church to live into than those who have been church leaders of the last decade/s. Following Jesus every day, in every way, and maturing in that following is our call to all people in a Lazarus Church.

My friend Marsha has been working in a tough neighborhood in a declining church since 2007. Think of the neighborhood in your area that is usually in the news for high poverty, few jobs, failing schools, serious crimes, and you are thinking of the old mill village Marsha is called to serve.

The thing is she has a calling to that place that keeps her active in the church and community. She's as active in one as the other and serves as a bridge between the two. If she's inside the church building 50% of the time she is just as active out in the community. And she lives in the community, and shops, and goes to restaurants there. The church seldom has enough workers, or funding, or supplies. They do have kids from crack homes, and students from the nearby medical and dental schools, and a wild variety of artists and business people and the local poor. Over these years the church has begun to look more and more like the community. There are some church members who have sold their homes and moved into the old mill village to participate more deeply in the community ministry.

They've also found a wonderful response from the neighborhood and the city of people who want to make a difference, change a life, or change the world. They have some who respond to a church that is actively helping with racial reconciliation. They have the "locally grown" food movement and a variety of "foodies" who are drawn to the place. The church is a vibrant living body which we hoped for some years ago, but never could have completely imagined. It happened day by day, relationship by relationship, and is easiest to declare that only God could connect such a variety of people together.

A movement occurs as families and tribes of people come to faith and to practice that in a community of faith. Instead of merely holding our institutional stability, we desire -as much as we have within our power- to create and sustain the conditions of a living church body and for a movement. We don't want managed or throttled, but to tap into what God is doing, to join alongside God, and to welcome those with whom God is working in and through.

This employs a *different church strategy* than the approach of the last 50 year of many middle class congregations relying on staff to run programs which will attract people. This embodies the congregation as a mission outpost and acts in partnership with the work of God, is deeply engaged with families and people groups of the community, and responds in adaptive ways of mission and ministry to the kingdom of God alive in their midst. This has all of the Methodist people as a sent missional army engaging their community every day in many different ways.

- a Methodist approach to *worship* that relates to practical life and everyday Christian living-oriented to the local culture or sub-culture style including specific music and language
- Methodist preference of *spiritual formation* through discipleship and small groups- such consistent participation has been a historic key to the movement all over the world. See

<http://umcdunes.org/wp-content/uploads/VIETNAM-REPORT-2014.pdf> for one example of an indigenous movement using the historic practices with small groups being a key element.

- *active outreach* of individuals and the whole church in a community to build relationships and meet needs- emphasis on women, children and teens, disenfranchised, the oppressed, and the Samaritan, with focus on areas of meeting human need, education, health, etc. These aren't usually given over to agencies or specialized ministries, but are a primary function of the congregation and may be done in close relationship with a 50/50 partner in the community. The key is mutuality as a church meets needs and helps people know God's love and find their home in the congregation as a sign of God's acceptance and act of grace. Those we serve are part of the family of God to the extent that we claim them as our own (biblically speaking we are adopted into the family by God and so are those we serve!).

What would it look like for your church to be alive in such ways in your community?

Study, dream, pray, and discuss what it means for the Body of Christ, your congregation, to be active in specific ways in your community. This is Good News made visible, contextually appropriate, relational, practical, and transformational for both the servant follower of Jesus and for those served as it combines word, deed, and power through incarnational ministry.

Scripture: There are numerous passages on this sense of movement, some are the old "tried and true" verses which everyone has memorized yet we might still struggle to enact, so choose wisely where your church might best focus. Two especially strong sections which might be worth study and discussion as you think about the Jesus movement/ *missio Dei* movement in your community may be 1) *Luke 9-10* with the focus on following Jesus and then how quickly the followers were told to GO!, and 2) the ministry of reconciliation in *2 Corinthians 5* (excellent application for both individuals and the whole church). Of course, the Great Commission, the greatest commandment, and most of the Book of Acts continue this theme which is hard to miss throughout scripture.

Except, be certain that *we confess* that we have too often failed to follow and go ourselves. We have looked to others, given lots of reasons why it isn't for us, and haven't taken seriously the individual and corporate call to be messengers, ambassadors, workers, servants, followers like Jesus seeks. This way of following Jesus is for every church and for every Methodist Christian with no exceptions. It is time again for Methodism to be this sort of strong missional, laity movement.

This reminds me of a song I love, but which I quibble and fuss over one word. Do you know the song "*Here I Am Lord*"? It's a favorite in many UM churches and often used at the end of a worship service as the song to send people of faith on their way.

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard My people cry. All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save. I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright. Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night. I will go Lord, **if** You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart.*

My family, and friends, and some of the churches where I've spent time **know that there is no IF!** This one word too often lets us off the hook! God doesn't work like that as the call is to follow the

way Jesus has shown. This is not conditional. That one word doesn't fit scripture at this point, nor does it fit church history, nor is it true to the Christian life. It is not IF God leads us, but **when** or **where** or **how**. So, my people that know me, if we're standing in vicinity of each other singing this song, will look toward one another with expectation, and eagerness, and a twinkle in our eyes wondering which word one another will use to make the hymn more alive for Good News in our lives. How will we make it more personal, and make it both a prayer and a proclamation, a wonderful transforming anarchy as we substitute one word that will help us follow Jesus this next week.

What about you and your church? Can you scratch out something that doesn't quite work and replace it with something better? What will help you and your company of believers better live the adventure of following Jesus this week? What little anarchy will you practice which creates a new song and invites others into the movement?

As you look at the whole *life of Jesus what is missing in your life?* Your congregation? What acts of Good News in your church and community would reinforce and empower the proclamation and teaching of Gospel that you share? What power might come from this? What is missing?

A *movement of God* has elements of both individual and team forward progress. A movement will be aware of the principles lifted up in the different sessions of Lazarus Church. Review those and see how they fit together well in your church: Missio Dei, Focus, Context, Urgency, & Movement.

A *fitting conclusion* (can you celebrate an ending AND a new beginning?) to the study could include communion, including the liturgy, in a setting that reinforces what it means to be in the current Jesus movement. Elevate communion beyond the merely individualistic into the larger calling to follow Jesus and be a church which enacts the Body of Christ in your specific community. Lean into the sense of what the church is called to be, and the next steps of faith as a congregation, as you hear the call to be a Lazarus Church.

Video option: 3 minute TED Talk humorous video on "how to start a movement."

https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement?language=en Importance of following well. Importance of leadership & visibility in community.

TEDtalk "Antidote to Apathy" While not focused on church there is a lot that can be learned about the 7 barriers to a movement. Does your church actively discourage engagement? What can you learn about church leadership from this video? How do you view your neighbors? Notice the emphasis on Redefine/Identify/Dismantle as a way of overcoming apathy. 7 minute video

https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_meslin_the_antidote_to_apathy?language=en

6 minute TED talk on the "subtle power of everyday leadership" & a call to action.

https://www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership?language=en