



Post Script

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Welcoming or engaging *change* is not an easy process! Perhaps that is why so many churches prefer the relative safety, and monotony, of programs, status quo, and seeking to not rock the boat.

In many respects this is merely a *beginning* of the journey. Can you imagine the first days after Lazarus emerged from the tomb with a second lease on life? While much would be familiar and consistent with “before” his death and new life, there would be much that would be different. The difference that a Lazarus Church will experience includes a broadening of relationships and focus that places God, and then the community, at the center of living rather prioritizing the rituals and expectations of the congregation. This abundant living which involves following the way Jesus offers a dramatic re-orientation which will have a ripple effect in everything a congregation does.

What if at least *half of the time* you expect of every church member in their service to the congregation (their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness) of every member is expected to be lived out in your community? This has radical implications for most congregations as we’ve become institutionalized in ways that so much is defined by our brick and mortar location and work within those club walls.

What if you intentionally assist members in knowing their spiritual gifts in a holistic way that is part of the Body of Christ, and this is understood as primarily for the community? This reorientation doesn’t allow any of us to claim too small and defined a role, i.e. I only do prayer, and instead helps us all to know that we are to follow the way Christ has shown and that includes being a **SENT** church. The great news is we are not alone, but have one another and Holy Spirit as we live into this and live it out.

How do we maintain the priorities of the historic Methodist Christian church and get rid of some of the clutter of the congregation which may be more about the last 25 or 50 years rather than the **next 5 years**? This may be our greatest challenge, but it is essential that we develop a clear read on who we are called to be the church for in our current community. This isn’t to suggest we blindly grab the latest

fad or program. As a matter of fact, this missional approach is more contextual and specific to our neighborhood. This intent is more relational, more incarnational, and demands more of every active church member and Christ follower. It is also permission giving. It is okay for a congregation to go a new way. It is expected that to follow the living Christ in sharing God's love in our community today we may not do things like we did 5 or 10 or 20 years ago. We can say the benediction over some of our previously beloved ministries and move on. We can bury some of our old approaches, with fond memories and great stories, yet know that God will lead us to effectively know and love our neighbors today in ways that enliven the congregation.

What are the *church priorities*? Worship, discipleship/small groups, outreach (mission and evangelism), and what else? How are those priorities best lived out and made real in the community today? Said another way, if we were to start a new church in our community today, what would that look like? What would the new birth look like? What resources and people are available, both in the church and community, to make this vibrant new congregation a reality? This is the opportunity in a process and movement which we have called a Lazarus Church.

How do you successfully navigate the "old" life and church culture, and likely yearning of the people in the wilderness to return to what they have known, with the call of God to keep moving forward on the *journey toward the Promised Land*? How do you integrate the new and the old? How do you keep tension of change alive without being consumed by too much conflict? How do you successfully integrate a new and different people into the life of an existing congregation and in that find new life as a local church?

These are the *type issues* that should be discussed during the sessions and then practiced and lived into as you become a Lazarus Church. Many congregations are experiencing this. Sometimes they are overcoming generational divides between the existing congregation and an engagement and integration of the community into the church. Some are successfully overcoming racial differences between an existing congregation and what the community has now become as they become more of a local church of the present. Some are overcoming the variety of socio-economic, political, and theological differences to between a new, more vibrant church which reflects the neighborhood.

This journey requires *many steps*, plenty of time, a flexibility and comfort for the "ups" and "downs" of it, and a larger team than the congregation by itself. Your conference Connectional Ministries office, District Superintendent, bishop and many others stand with you in prayer, encouragement, and support. The Connectional Ministries office, in particular, stands ready to help through coaching, training, and networking as we assist the Methodist movement in your congregation and in many churches and communities throughout North Georgia and beyond in our missional relationships. May you continue to hear the voice of the living God as you follow the way Christ has shown and rely upon the Holy Spirit. May you find the best days ahead of your congregation as you arise to new life as a Lazarus Church!