

**THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT AS CHIEF MISSIONAL STRATEGIST:
A PARTICIPATORY TRINITARIAN VISION**

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Dissertation Abstract

The District Superintendent as Chief Missional Strategist delves into the crucial role of district superintendents in the United Methodist Church. The study compares the Trinitarian theology of John Wesley with the current reality of district superintendents' roles, highlighting the need to recapture the missional essence of the Methodist movement.

The study reveals that fostering Trinitarian relationships between leaders, laity, and district superintendents can cultivate a culture of openness, vulnerability, trust, reliance, support, and encouragement. This culture strengthens relationships with God and others within and beyond congregational walls. Ultimately, these relationships enable the United Methodist Church to fulfill its mission statement of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, faithfully and fruitfully.

Furthermore, the study critiques the episcopacy and the superintendency, offering recommendations to optimize the role of district superintendents as missional strategists through Trinitarian relationships. By doing so, the United Methodist Church can recapture its missional essence and align its practices with its mission statement, ensuring faithful and fruitful operations.

This study is a call to action for the United Methodist Church to prioritize and recapture its missional essence through Trinitarian relationships. By heeding this call, the United Methodist Church can fulfill its mission statement, profoundly impacting the world and its communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is rarely easy. To be the keeper of an institution's mission carries a great deal of responsibility. Additionally, good leaders realize that those they lead are not merely cogs in the proverbial wheel that enable things to "get done"; instead, those following the leader are people. They are people divinely created in the image and likeness of God. They are of sacred worth.

Leadership, in a healthy system, has two components that work in tandem—Responsibility and Authority. The military can be an excellent example of these components working together appropriately. In the Gospel of Mathew, a story is recounted of a Roman officer seeking the healing of a paralyzed servant. Jesus offers to accompany the officer to where the servant is. However, the officer understands authority that Jesus finds uncharacteristic in Israel. "Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this,' they do it."¹

Nevertheless, authority can be a tricky thing. Later in Mathew's Gospel, the reader finds Jesus' authority questioned again. "When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came to him. They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"² Rarely do people question someone's authority when they agree with what the person is doing. However, when a disagreement arises, so do questions about one's authority to do what the person has been doing.

The United Methodist Church has a classification of ministerial leader called an elder. When a person is ordained an elder, the bishop places hands on the person and, after stating the person's name, says, "Take authority as an elder...." The Book of Discipline lists the following concerning the authority entrusted to persons as a part of the Order of Elder:

Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service. By the authority given in their ordination, they receive authorization to preach and teach the Word of God, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the Church for the service in mission and ministry. The servant leadership of the elder, in both parish and extension ministries, is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer, by leading persons to faith in Jesus Christ, by exercising pastoral supervision, and by ordering the Church in mission in the world.³

Bishops are elected to the episcopacy from among the ranks of the Order of Elders in the United Methodist Church.

¹ Matthew 8: 8-9, NLT.

² Matthew 21: 23, NLT.

³ *The United Methodist Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016, ¶ 332.

The bishops shall be elected by the respective jurisdictional and central conferences and consecrated in the historic manner at such time and place as may be fixed by the General Conference for those elected by the jurisdiction and by each central conference for those elected by such central conferences.⁴

As stated, bishops remain ordained elders with the same responsibilities and authority due to being consecrated but on a broader scale. Most bishops are primarily responsible for an annual conference. However, due to decline and financial restraints, some bishops are finding themselves over more than one annual conference. With such a large area to oversee, assistance is needed, and Article IX provides for such: "In each annual conference there shall be one or more district superintendents who shall assist the bishop in the administration of the annual conference and shall have such responsibilities and term of office as the General Conference may determine."⁵

It is the role of the district superintendent that this dissertation is seeking to address. Even more specifically, this dissertation will concentrate on the first stated responsibility of a district superintendent, "The Church expects, as part of the superintendent ministry, that the superintendent will be the chief missional strategist of the district..."⁶ This dissertation contends that recapturing the district superintendent's role as chief missional strategist of the district is integral and paramount to the revitalization of the United Methodist Church. When Methodism was a movement and not primarily an institution, such a connection of this responsibility and authority existed in the position of the presiding elder.

An additional bedrock understanding connecting authority and responsibility derives from the source of one's authority. The gospel account referenced above continues, "'I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question,' Jesus replied. 'Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven or was it merely human?'"⁷ Jesus quickly gets to the heart of the issue concerning authority. Do those questioning his authority recognize the One authorizing him as authoritative? If they do not, then Jesus has no authority either. Since John the Baptist's authority and Jesus' come from the same source, then if John's authority was valid, so is Jesus'.

The authority of an elder in the United Methodist Church comes from the same source expressed in Matthew 21. It is the presumption of this dissertation that for district superintendents to remain faithful and fruitful to their responsibility; they will embody being branches connected to the Vine,⁸ which is the source of the district superintendent's authority, power, and discernment. The connection referenced from John's gospel is a picturesque expression of entering into the perichoretic activity of the Trinity and living in evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Throughout this dissertation, one should visualize the Vine and branches imagery when reading evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory

⁴ Ibid., ¶ 46.

⁵ Ibid., ¶ 53.

⁶ Ibid., ¶ 419.1.

⁷ Matthew 21: 24-25a.

⁸ This imagery is taken from John 15: 5, "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing" (NLT).

Trinitarian relationships. Conversely, when Vine and branches imagery appears, one should translate the imagery into the theological wording of evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships and enter the perichoretic activity of the Trinity. As Colyer profoundly states:

This encounter with the Triune God in the gospel is *participatory*: via the Spirit we come to participate in the Love of God the Father through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This participation is *evangelical*: it comes to us from the love of God the Father through the grace of Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit that sets us free. This participation is also *doxological*: we are set free to respond in Spirit in faith in praise and worship of, the Son and the Spirit along with God the Father.⁹

If the United Methodist Church on the macro level and the district superintendent on the micro level desire to fulfill the stated mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, then "the presence and activity of the economic Trinity is the vital transformative reality at the center of Christian faith and life."¹⁰

Therefore, if this connection to the Vine does not have a continual flow of Trinitarian spiritual respiration, then the role of the district superintendent risks instrumentalization. In such instances, relationships become commodities, and guiding principles serve as manipulative techniques. Only as the district superintendent remains connected to the Vine via evangelical ontological doxological economic Trinitarian relationships is true life nurtured and experienced. To settle for less than our Triune God's presence and power is a poor substitute and does not lead to the ushering in of the Kingdom of God—more will be said about this in the following chapters.

This dissertation proposes that district superintendents in the United Methodist Church are most effective and faithful to their calls as they intentionally live out the "Chief Missional Strategist" aspect of the position, and this potential increases exponentially as one engages in evangelical, ontological, doxological, economic, participatory Trinitarian relationships. Colyer writes, "...the essence of Christian faith is participatory and Trinitarian. Restoration to loving fellowship and union with the Triune God that entails justification and new birth is participatory, and it sustains the life of God in the human soul throughout the Christian life."¹¹ Living a participatory economic Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration is thoroughly Wesleyan. "For Wesley, there is no solution to the human dilemma apart from restoration to participation in the life and fellowship of the Trinitarian God, a solution that involves the economic activity of all three Trinitarian persons in the gospel."¹² Living and ministering via Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration is consistent with (and I would postulate the reason for) the tremendous growth of the earlier Church and the Wesleyan Movement. The early Methodists and Wesley "wanted preachers who really knew the love of God the Father through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and lived sufficiently in union and communion with the Triune God that their affections and tempers were

⁹ Elmer M. Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension of John Wesley's Theology*, Nashville: New Room Books, 2019, 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹² *Ibid.*, 100.

transformed and therefore manifested holiness in all manner of their conversation."¹³ In other words, the early Methodists and Wesley wanted preachers who were branches that embodied the authority, power, and discernment of the Vine.

Chapter one of the dissertation will give a synopsis of the history and evolution of the role of district superintendent from the founding of Methodism to the present day. It will also lay the foundation of why a Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration way of leading has the potential to be more faithful and fruitful concerning fulfilling the United Methodist Church's mission "to make disciples for the transformation of the world."

The lyrics of a song produced by Hill Song entitled "Breathe" capture the concept of Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration, "This is the air I breathe. Your very presence living in me." This perspective and understanding closely match what John Wesley believed, taught, and lived. As "Wesley launched into his account of grace as God 'breathing' life into our souls, and our souls breathing back prayer and praise: fellowship with the Father and the Son via the Spirit is what sustains the life of God through sanctification toward Christian perfection."¹⁴

A significant leadership difference is possible as people soak up the reality of the Hill Song lyrics above, "This is the air I breathe. Your holy presence living in me." Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration is soaking in the Triune God's presence and life such that what comes out in a person's life when pressed is the Spirit of Christ.

Much like a sponge, that in which a person is consistently soaking will be that which comes out of the person amid the pressures of life. For example, Christians and non-Christians often express that "God is love." Thus, it stands to reason that if one is soaking in God, then when pressed, what will come out in one's life is love. This reality can be as natural as breathing.

Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration is not something people create nor cause to happen. Such a way of living falls under what the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast."¹⁵ The best humanity can do is participate in this breath of God's reality. As leaders and followers participate with our Triune God in this way, "the love of God the Father flows to us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, reconciling us to God and awakening new life and faith in us so that in the communion of the Spirit we enter into fellowship with the Father through the Son and begin to live a life hidden with Christ in God."¹⁶ A more in-depth exegesis of Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration will be the content of chapter two—"Scripture Is Our Guide." For now, it is paramount to be aware that "for Wesley, there is no solution to the human dilemma apart from restoration to participation in the life and fellowship of the Trinitarian God, a solution that involves the economic activity of all three Trinitarian persons in the gospel."¹⁷

When people attend district superintendent training at Lake Junaluska, NC, they will repeatedly hear that the district superintendent cannot be the pastor to the pastors. However, district superintendents have a "pastoral" role. Nevertheless, one must

¹³ Ibid., 312.

¹⁴ Ibid., 148.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2: 8-9, NRSV.

¹⁶ Colyer, 94-95.

¹⁷ Colyer, 100.

remember that the role of the district superintendent is primarily supervisory. However, as the instructors talked about the role of a district superintendent, they were attempting to communicate that a district superintendent cannot be a chaplain to the pastors under one's care. Instead, to be a Chief Missional Strategist, the district superintendent needs to lead the pastors and congregations in caring (or pastoral) ways that usher in the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, this endeavor is too often attempted primarily through human means and effort. Such a way of functioning is what Alan Roxburgh terms "Modernity's Wager." Modernity's Wager "consists of the belief that all life can be lived well without the need for God's agency. The practices and beliefs of the modern West were shaped by the conviction that the future lies in our own hands. Human agency became the primary driver of social, cultural, political, and economic life."¹⁸ An alternative to such an approach is for district superintendents to be "branches connected to the vine" and thus empowered by God to usher in God's Kingdom in the district to which the superintendent is assigned!

The pull between Modernity's Wager and living in the perichoretic activity of the Triune God is embodied in the reality that every person has at least two theologies—one the person believes and the one the person lives. There is typically a gap between them. So, for example, it is a typical Christian belief that God is everywhere. However, Christians often live as though God cannot see what they are doing. Hence the gap. A primary responsibility of a spiritual leader is to assist people in closing the gaps between their believed theology and their lived theology. Such an endeavor will create a "stress point" within a person's or congregation's life, which is functionally similar to what appears in systems theory. "Whenever there is a gap between our goals and our current situation, there are two sets of pressures: to improve the situation and to lower the goals. How these pressures are dealt with is central to the discipline of personal mastery."¹⁹ Likewise, a district superintendent is wise to create such pressure points amongst the pastors and congregations. This place of uncomfortableness is fertile ground through which our Triune God can work. Pastors and congregations will realize that they have two primary options for lessening the tension experienced between their believed and lived theologies—either raise the lived theology or lower the believed theology. As a Missional Strategist continually connected to the Vine, this is a beneficial model to assist pastors and congregations seeking to usher in God's Kingdom. More will be said about this in chapter three, "Anticipation the Role of District Superintendent," and chapter four, "Embodying the Role of District Superintendent."

The fifth and final chapter of the dissertation will synthesize the learnings from the experience of implementing a Trinitarian Spiritual Respiration way of leading and the ways it assisted or detracted from the district superintendent being the Chief Missional Strategist within the district. Results from completed surveys from Pastor-Staff Parish Committee members and those appointed and assigned will support the findings. While the sample size will not be large enough to scientifically assure the success or failure of the project, the stories and experiences shared will provide a level of anecdotal support.

¹⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh & Martin Robinson, *Practices For The Refounding Of God's People: The Missional Challenge of the West*, New York: Church Publishing, 2018, 1.

¹⁹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, New York: Doubleday, 2006, 107.

In addition to knowing something happened, it is essential to know where and with whom it happened. In the United Methodist Church, persons are appointed or assigned to a Charge. A Charge consists of one or more congregations. Those designated pastors (ordained or licensed) in the United Methodist Church receive appointments by the Bishop to a Charge for a year. Laypersons who are open and willing to serve receive assignments to a Charge by the Bishop for a year. A district superintendent is appointed to supervise and watch over the ministries within the bounds of one's specific district. The ministry setting for this dissertation was the Embarras River District, located within the bounds of the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference. The Embarras River District was in Effingham, Illinois. Its territory encompassed Scotland, Illinois, in the Northeastern corner to Flat Rock, Illinois, in the Southeastern corner. It went from the Indiana border as far west as Hillsboro, Illinois.

This ministry area included fifty-five charges consisting of eighty-eight churches and one extension ministry. Within the United Methodist Church are several designations of persons empowered to lead within a Charge. Elders are ordained. Local Pastors are licensed. These two designations have sacramental rites. Elders can officiate weddings and administer the sacraments wherever they are, while the license for Local Pastors limits their authority to officiate weddings and administer the sacraments within the bounds of the person's appointment. The Embarras River District superintendent supervised fifty-three people who helped lead the fifty-five charges. Of the fifty-three, fifteen were elders in full connection with the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, two were probationary elders with the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, two were elders from other denominations, and one was an elder from another Annual Conference. Additionally, there were two full-time local pastors and eleven part-time local pastors. The remaining twenty consisted of four retired elders, one retired associate member, five retired local pastors, one certified lay minister, and nine supply.

Of the fifty-three persons serving within the district's bounds, there were forty males and thirteen females. The average age was fifty-eight, and the average compensation was \$30,807.63. The average worshipping attendance per congregation was forty-two.

Chapter 1

The Role of District Superintendent within the UMC

According to the 2016 *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*,²⁰ the district superintendent is an extension of the bishop, and this arrangement has its roots in the early Church. "From apostolic times, certain ordained persons have been entrusted with the particular tasks of superintending. The purpose of superintending is to equip the Church in its disciple-making ministry. Those who superintend carry primary responsibility for ordering the life of the Church. It is their task to enable the gathered Church to worship and to evangelize faithfully."²¹ Superintending is a specialized ministry and not a separate order within the life of the United Methodist Church. Bishops and district superintendents belong to the Order of Elder and have been "ordained to be ministers of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order and thereby participate in the ministry of Christ, in sharing a royal priesthood that has apostolic roots."²²

The office of the district superintendent has not always existed within Methodism. "The combined term *district superintendent* appears initially in 1908 in The Methodist Episcopal Church."²³ "Influenced by John Wesley and Francis Asbury's distinctive styles of leadership, birthed within the contexts of their formation and ministry, the episcopacy in America took on a peculiar character of its own....While American episcopacy includes traditional roles of teacher and defender of Christian doctrine, its distinctive missional orientation is peculiar to the renewal movements of Methodism."²⁴ Such an understanding aligns with the reality that United Methodism is light on ecclesiology but heavy on missional language. "These roots of Methodism's peculiar episcopacy—the bishop as missionary in a popular movement, the bishop as head of a quasi-monastic order—offer two ways to account for the strange silence of today's *Discipline* on the ecclesiology and polity of episcopacy. United Methodism stands in a long heritage of simply not writing anything down about the theological foundations of episcopacy."²⁵ Nevertheless, the Book of Discipline tasks the bishop, and by extension, district superintendents, with the responsibility of ordering the life of the Church and fulfilling the United Methodist Church's mission of "making disciples for the transformation of the world."

While the term "district superintendent" did not appear until 1908, its role has long roots. "The current office is most closely related to its predecessor of presiding elder."²⁶ Here are the duties prescribed to these early presiding elders:

Of the Presiding Elders and their Duty.

Quest. 1. By whom are the Presiding Elders to be chosen?

Answer. By the bishop.

²⁰ The most recent B.O.D. due to postponing the 2020 General Conference because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

²¹ *Book of Discipline*, ¶401.

²² *Ibid.*, ¶402.

²³ Lacey C. Warner, *The Method Of Our Mission*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 93. *Italics in original text.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵ Russell E. Richey & Thomas Edward Frank, *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 91.

²⁶ Warner, 100.

Quest. 2. What are the duties of the presiding elder?

Answer 1. To travel through his appointed district.

2. In the absence of a bishop, to take charge of all the elders, deacons, traveling and local preachers, and exhorters, in his district.
3. To change, receive, or suspend preachers in his district during the intervals of the conferences, and in the absence of the bishop.
4. In the absence of a bishop, to preside in the conference of his district.
5. To be present, as far as practicable, at all the quarterly meetings; and to call together at each quarterly meeting, all the traveling and local preachers, exhorters, stewards, and leaders, of the circuit, to hear complaints, and to receive appeals.
6. To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the societies in his district.
7. To take care that every part of our Discipline be enforced in his district.
8. To attend the bishop when present in his district; and to give him when absent, all necessary information by letter, of the state of his district.

Quest. 3. By whom are the presiding elders to be stationed and changed?

Answer. By the bishop.

Quest. 4. How long may the bishop allow an elder to preside in the same district?

Answer. For any term not exceeding four years, successively.

Quest. 5. How shall the presiding elders be supported?

Answer. If there be a surplus of the public money, in one or more circuits in his district, he shall receive such surplus, provided he does not receive more than his annual salary. In case of a deficiency in his salary, after such surplus is paid him, or if there be no surplus, he shall share with the preachers of his district, in proportion with what they have respectively received, so that he receive no more than the amount of his salary upon the whole. ²⁷

²⁷ *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (New York: J. Emory & B. Waugh, 1829), Section V.

These specific duties were enumerated as early as 1792. They appear to make clear that the presiding elders, and today the district superintendents, "were, and are, the load-bearing points of the Methodist system."²⁸ Thus, the unique position of the district superintendent may have the single most significant impact on renewal within the United Methodist Church, resulting in making disciples for the transformation of the world.

While the criteria mentioned above surrounding the presiding elder appear straightforward, they have been subject to controversy. One major controversy centered around how one became a presiding elder, and the differing perspectives persist even today with district superintendents. The root of this controversy goes back to nearly the beginning of the Methodist movement in America and the first General Superintendent, Francis Asbury.

Methodism has always had a missional emphasis, and because the mission was paramount, growth within early Methodism was exponential. Initially, the organizational solution was "to hold multiple small regional annual conferences."²⁹ However, the number of regional annual conferences also began to multiply like rabbits and soon became unmanageable without adding another layer to the organization. "In response to this situation, Asbury devised an organization he called 'The Council,' and presented it to the conferences for their approval in 1789."³⁰ The proposed Council would comprise the bishop and presiding elders whom the bishop would choose.³¹ For any decision by the Council to be valid, conferences would have to ratify it. While Asbury's may have been well-intentioned, the plan had several glaring limitations: "1) it enhanced Asbury's power, since it gave him, along with other bishops, the authority to select the members of the Council; 2) the provision requiring unanimous assent to all matters brought before the Council before they could become binding in various conferences assured Asbury a veto on all proposed legislation; and 3) acts of The Council had the force of law only in the conferences that affirmed them."³²

Rev. Jesse Lee, a member of The Council, realized early on that there were severe flaws in the proposal and advocated for creating a General Conference in its place. Rev. James O'Kelly, also a member of The Council, expressed concerns and was less charitable in presuming Asbury's motives. "[O'Kelly] suspected Asbury's real motive in creating The Council was further to enhance his power."³³ In today's highly charged political atmosphere, accusing the Council of Bishops of attempting to enhance their power is commonplace. However, Asbury sought to remedy many of the faults in his plan. Rather than require unanimous consent of The Council members, a two-thirds majority and approval of the bishop was adopted. Another resolution sought to solidify

²⁸ James E. Kirby, *The Episcopacy In American Methodism*, (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 2000), 55.

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

³⁰ Ibid. 51-52.

³¹ Kirby points out to his readers that "this plan is the origin of the title 'presiding elder,' which is then taken up in the *Minutes*." p. 52.

³² Ibid. 52. This concept appears to have many similarities to the "One Church Plan" or "Regional Plan" favored by a majority within the current Council of Bishops. In 1789, Rev. Jesse Lee saw the potential danger The Council or a "One Church Plan" held toward dividing the connection when he wrote, "If then, one district should agree to any important point, and another district should reject it; the union between the two districts would be broken: and in the process of time our *United Societies* would be thrown into disorder and confusion."

³³ Ibid.

that the true power remained with the respective Annual Conferences and that the Council would merely serve in an advisory capacity. Furthermore, another adaptation to the original plan sought to lessen potential division and confusion by having resolutions ratified by a majority of Annual Conferences become binding upon all the Annual Conferences. Despite these changes, The Council only met twice, with no delineated proposals approved by the Annual Conferences at the second meeting.

At the 1812 General Conference, a delegate from the New York Conference, Laban Clark, asked a previously raised question. Ultimately, his motion suggesting the election of presiding elders by popular vote rather than appointed by the bishop failed by three. This effort would not be the last occasion a General Conference would discuss how one would become a presiding elder. "...the manner of choosing presiding elders was to divide and trouble the denomination until it was finally settled at the General Conference of 1828."³⁴

As mentioned, the district superintendent (and its forerunner, the presiding elder) is an extension of the Bishop's Office. It is also the "load-bearing point of the Methodist system," as previously stated. Thus, it stands to reason that a position with so much potential impact would be a lynchpin when seeking to limit a bishop's power. At the 1820 General Conference, a New England Conference delegate, Timothy Merrit, moved to elect presiding elders from their annual conferences. However, a compromise amendment came to the floor in a typical Methodist fashion. Ezekiel Cooper and John Emory proposed "calling for the bishop to nominate three persons for each vacancy and for the annual conference to choose the proper number from among those nominees."³⁵

There was much energy and support behind the Cooper-Emory amended motion. However, at the beginning of this General Conference, Joshua Soule had been elected to the episcopacy on the initial ballot. As discussion raged around changing the process for choosing presiding elders, Soule requested permission to leave the conference. That afternoon, he returned to his room and wrote the following about his recently elected position before his installation:

In consequence of an act of the General Conference, passed this day, in which I conceive the constitution of The Methodist Episcopal Church is violated, and that Episcopal government which has heretofore distinguished her greatly enervated, by a transfer of executive power from the episcopacy to the several Annual Conferences, it becomes my duty to notify you, from the imposition of whose hands only I can be qualified for the office of Superintendent, that under the existing state of things I *cannot, consistently with my convictions of propriety and obligation, enter the work of an itinerant General Superintendent.*

I was elected under the *constitution and government of the Methodist Episcopal Church UNIMPAIRED*. On no other consideration but that of their continuance would I have consented to be considered a candidate for a relation in which were incorporated such arduous labors and awful responsibilities.

³⁴ Ibid., 81.

³⁵ Ibid., 89.

I do not feel myself at liberty to wrest myself from your hands, as the act of the General Conference has placed me in them; but I *solemnly declare, and could appeal to the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of my intention, that I cannot act as Superintendent under the rules this day made and established by the General Conference.*³⁶

This letter was presented to the bishops and ultimately led to voting again on how to elect presiding elders. "Two ballots were required, since the first produced a tie vote of forty-three for and forty-three against; Bishop Roberts, who was again presiding, refused to break the tie. When the second ballot produced the same result, Roberts ruled the motion lost for lack of a majority."³⁷ Before the General Conference adjourned, a vote took place to suspend the nominating and electing of presiding elders until the next General Conference. It passed.

In the intervening years, the disunity amongst the bishops, some less-than-ethical decisions by the bishops, and the social and political turmoil of the country began taking their toll upon the Methodist Episcopal Church. By the 1828 General Conference, "The suggestion of electing presiding elders and the effort to seat laypersons in the General Conference had galvanized those who wanted to protect the old system. Joining with the other opponents, they laid the presiding-elder question to its final rest...."³⁸

In the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, a district superintendent's first of six specific responsibilities is to be "...the chief missional strategist of the district and be committed to living out the values of the Church...."³⁹ "Chief missional strategist" is still new, first appearing in the 2012 *Book of Discipline*. As often happens in organizations and individuals, the purpose or reason for existence becomes diluted as other priorities become vital. Ultimately, such a process leads to the main thing no longer remaining primary in an individual's life or an organization's existence. This language is the General Conference's attempt to correct the functional loss of missional effectiveness within the United Methodist Church. The "chief missional strategist" component of district superintendency—what it entails and can look like—will be the emphasis of chapter three, "Anticipation of Leading Pastors & Congregations."

It is important to note that the controversy mentioned above relating to how presiding elders (and now district superintendents) are chosen is more of a symptom of the problem than an actual problem. It belies a seed of mistrust that was not addressed and thus allowed to continue to grow. Many clergy believed that allowing a Bishop to choose the presiding elders centered too much power in the office. Similarly, Bishops were primarily concerned with where presiding elders placed their ultimate loyalty if a Bishop did not choose. Each of these positions has mistrust in their D.N.A. rather than a theological underpinning or missional reasons.

The purpose of Methodism was to spread scriptural holiness across the land. Wesley often said, "We have nothing to do but save souls." Within early Methodism, the

³⁶ Ibid., 90.

³⁷ Ibid., 93.

³⁸ Ibid., 107.

³⁹ 2016 B.O.D., ¶419.1

mission was paramount. Form followed function. The structure of a budding and growing denomination kept the mission moving.

An integral piece of early Methodism's missional structure was the quarterly meeting. "Quarterly meetings seem to have become prominent in Methodism by the 1760s."⁴⁰ These gatherings began as a way for the presiding elder to attend to the business side of societal life. "In fact, the office of presiding elder could be said to have been created for the very purpose of presiding at quarterly meetings."⁴¹ If such an assertion is accurate, then what transpired at the quarterly meetings is foundational to setting the priorities of the presiding elder. As mentioned above, form followed function, and the ultimate function of the Methodist movement was missional!

What the polity had once recognized as the whole (the business session *technically* was the quarterly meeting) had now become a part—the quarterly meeting conference. The original term, "quarterly meeting," now officially referred to the entire event: arrival, preaching services, family prayer, prayer meetings, love feast, sacrament, pastoral rites, fellowship, and departure, along with the conference.⁴²

This season of American Methodism practiced evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships in deep and sincere ways, thus bearing significant fruit. Prayer undergirded nearly every aspect of the presiding elders' lives and those within the various United Societies.

Methodists prayed that their worship would be occasions when God would act among them, convicting sinners, justifying mourners, sanctifying some believers, and enabling all the other "professors" to happily enjoy grace. They hoped and prayed that their public worship would be seasons of grace when poor sinners would come from hell's misery to heaven's peace.⁴³

During the quarterly meeting worship services, "Methodists experienced not only the power of heaven to convert and sanctify, but the very quality of heaven itself: communion with saints, angels, and especially, God."⁴⁴

In 1822, Peter Cartwright wrote about what transpired during a quarterly meeting over which he presided in Kentucky. Rev. Cartwright was concerned that pride kept several wealthy ladies in the community from coming forward after services. The women explained that it was not pride but the way "mourners were unceremoniously trodden on and abused." So that evening, toward the end of the service, he addressed those gathered about the change in how the invitation would be conducted. Cartwright wrote,

⁴⁰ Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship At Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 42.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43. *Italics in original text.*

⁴³ *Ibid*, 101.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 102.

I appointed and named out my men to keep order. Thus arranged, and our large altar being cleared, and the aisles kept open, I invited the mourners to come as humble penitents, and kneel at the altar, and pray for mercy; and we all were astonished at the number that distinguished themselves as seekers. I suppose there were not less than one hundred, and almost all of them professed comfort that night, and among the rest, many of those fine, wealthy ladies from town. It was supposed that this was one among the best camp meetings ever held in Logan County...The fruits of this camp-meeting I hope to see with pleasure in vast eternity....

During my presidency in this district up to the fall of 1824, there was a blessed revival in many parts of the district, and many joined the Methodist Episcopal Church....⁴⁵

As presiding elders and the United Societies participated in the perichoretic activity of the Trinity, God continually and regularly brought an abundant harvest. While many examples exist, unfortunately, space does not allow for such. Suffice it to say, "What happened when the quality of Methodist fellowship at quarterly meetings was clearly and vividly exhibited? Revival occurred! People in large numbers were drawn to the 'infectious quality' of the fellowship's corporate spirituality whose intensity could 'elicit religious experience.'"⁴⁶

In the earliest days of Methodism in America, the presiding elder was a missional strategist. The mission was paramount, and quarterly meetings were integral in fulfilling the mission to save souls and spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. However, the Methodist movement and the role of the presiding elder were both becoming victims of their success. Rev. Morris Crawford expresses some of the new realities as he addressed a Conference of Presiding Elders in New York City on December 8, 1884:

Do not understand me to say that the Quarterly Meeting has lost its value. On the contrary, it is indispensable. The presiding elder's visits, however, are not now, as formerly, chiefly to preach and conduct other religious services, but much more to "*oversee the spiritual and temporal business*" of the various charges of his district. This means vastly more than in former days.

When Bishop Asbury, in 1788, gave Freeborn Garrettson the Hudson River Valley for a district, with a dozen pious young men for preachers, among whom he divided the territory, this pioneer presiding elder traveled up one side of the river and down the other, meeting and encouraging all the preachers in turn, and by his ministrations, making every-where a profound impression. But certainly *supervision* was among the least of his duties, because there was very little to supervise. Now how that has changed.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Russell Richey, *The Methodist Experience In America: A Sourcebook*, Volume II, "Peter Cartwright Presides At Quarterly Meeting In Kentucky," (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 205.

⁴⁶ Ruth, 170.

⁴⁷ Richey, *The Methodist Experience*, "Morris Crawford Notes changing Duties Of District Superintendents," 420.

Ashamedly, this change in the role of "the load-bearing point of the Methodist system" has only moved further from the original connection to the Vine. The role of "district superintendent has become increasingly a managerial and promotional function."⁴⁸ Rather than listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and prioritizing the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ, "the D.S. regularly reminds clergy and laity that their local church has a responsibility to pay its apportioned share of the annual conference budget."⁴⁹

Hence, the decision by the 2012 General Conference to state the role of a missional strategist as having ultimate importance for the district superintendent was laudable. Thus, it is striking to hear several Bishops respond to how they understand the role and significance of the district superintendent as a missional strategist. When Dana Everhart interviewed Bishop Sue Haulpert-Johnson in November 2016, she responded to this question by stating:

I think it requires somebody to take the 20,000-foot view. And to look at where is the Holy Spirit present, where are the growth areas, and where should resources that are increasingly scarce be invested. It really is a matter of stewardship. So, the missional strategist makes sure that resources are going where the Spirit is active and vibrant and then has a strategic plan for moving toward merger or closure or innovation or reimagination of churches that are for whatever reasons—whether they've lost their evangelistic fervor, whether they are in areas that have dried up population-wise, whether they are in facilities that no longer accommodate the kind of ministry that they need to do. Those are the situations in which the creativity and intestinal fortitude of the Superintendent have to come. The vision always has to be that we are going to encourage, promote, and resource where the Holy Spirit is at work and where we see God (you know, Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God* said, "You will see where God is at work, and you join God."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Thomas Edward Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 249.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 248.

⁵⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEQcvu2Tus8&t=22s>

Chapter 2 "Scripture Is Our Guide"

John Wesley was asked, "What are the rules of a helper?" His resulting answer was twelve rules. They are summarized as follows:

Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time; neither spend more time at any place than is strictly necessary.

Be serious. Let your motto be, "Holiness to the Lord." Avoid all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking.

Converse sparingly and cautiously with women; particularly, with young women.

Take no step toward marriage without first consulting with your brethren.

Believe evil of no one; unless you see it done, take heed how you credit it.

Put the best construction on everything. You know the Judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner's side

Speak evil of no one; else your word especially would eat as doth a canker.

Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you come to the person concerned.

Tell everyone what you think wrong of him, and that plainly, as soon as may be; else it will fester in your heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.

Do not affect the gentlemen.... A preacher of the gospel is the servant of all.

Be ashamed of nothing but sin: Not of fetching wood (if time permit) or drawing water; not of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbour's.

Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And in general, do not mend our Rules but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake.

You have nothing to do but save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most...

Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the gospel.

As such, it is your part to employ your time in a manner which we direct; partly, in preaching and visiting from house to house; partly, in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those time and places we judge most to his glory.⁵¹

While all the rules contain significant value and wisdom, rule eleven is essential for this chapter. Wesley and the early Methodists' reason for existence is capsulated within this eleventh rule. "No rule carried more weight for Wesley's helpers than this one. Everything was aimed toward their primary purpose. Wesley pressed his team to be single-minded on the priority of saving souls."⁵² The forces of evil do not seek to

⁵¹ Mark L. Gorveatte, *Lead Like Wesley: Help for Today's Ministry Servants*, (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 176–177.

⁵² *Ibid*, 153.

convince Bishops, District superintendents, Pastors, or Laity that reaching others for God is unimportant. On the contrary, such forces elevate many other things such that without realizing it, the denomination's mission becomes excessively diluted. However, Lovett Weems Jr. reminds readers in a chapter entitled "What Makes Leadership Wesleyan" that "Wesley never forgot what was primary. Proclaiming the Good News revealed in Jesus Christ was the beginning, middle, and end of his entire life's work. He charged his preachers constantly, 'You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work.'"⁵³

Ultimately, this remains the "work" of the Church in the current day and age. As such, and as a United Methodist, it is essential to have a grasp of what John Wesley meant by "saving souls." From what is a soul being saved? How does a soul become saved, and by whom is a soul saved?

The New Testament word translated as saved concerning God is *sōzō* (σῶζω), and it means "to save, i.e. deliver or protect (lit. or fig.): –heal, preserve, save (self), do well, be (make) whole."⁵⁴ This definition begs the question, "In what way is a person not whole?" Another way of asking this question is, what did humanity lose in the Fall that needs to be restored? When John Wesley addressed the Fall of humanity, he did so "in terms of loss of participation in the life of God."⁵⁵ To this end, it is crucial to connect Jesus' statement in John 10:10b about coming so that disciples may have abundant life and his prayer in John 17:

that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.⁵⁶

In Wesley's sermon entitled "The New Birth," he begins by stressing the foundational importance of salvation. "If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two, –the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: The former relating to that great work which God does *for us*, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does *in us*, in renewing our fallen nature."⁵⁷ "Wesley established the theological context for his account of the new birth by providing the reason why we must be born again; the new birth reverses the three destructive consequences of the Fall: the loss of (1) the life of God, (2) the image of God, and (3) righteousness and holiness."⁵⁸

⁵³ Aaron Perry & Bryan Easley editors, *Leadership the Wesleyan Way: An Anthology for Forming Leaders in Wesleyan Thought and Practice*, (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2016), 28.

⁵⁴ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 70.

⁵⁵ Colyer, 93.

⁵⁶ John 17: 12-23, NRSV.

⁵⁷ *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 Volumes, 3rd ed, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 2:65. *Italics in original text.*

⁵⁸ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 93.

Even more cogently for this dissertation is the reality that for Wesley, "The gospel and our participation in it are thoroughly Trinitarian, and the doctrine of the Trinity arises out of soteriological soil since that doctrine is inextricably linked to the gospel and our encounter with it."⁵⁹

God is continually breathing, as it were, upon the soul; and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven: And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained; and the child of God grows up, till he comes to the 'full measure of the stature of Christ.'⁶⁰

The Apostle Paul describes maturing as the crucifixion of the flesh and those passions and desires that work counter to the Spirit and extinguishing at best or significantly subdued at worst. Regardless, in the same way that a person cannot serve both God and Mammon, people were not created to be led by fallen passions/desires and the Holy Spirit. As district superintendents engage in an evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationship, the Holy Spirit fills them and expels sin, thereby recognizing God's presence in one's life and ministry. As a missional strategist, the district superintendent lives a spirit-guided life that witnesses to what God has done. "The witness that confutes the world is not ours; it is that of one greater than ourselves who goes before us. Our task is simply to follow faithfully."⁶¹

The evangelical doxological participatory Trinitarian relationship is characterized by breathing in the LOVE of the FATHER through the GRACE of the SON, in the COMMUNION of the HOLY SPIRIT, and breathing out worship, praise, and service IN the Spirit, THROUGH the Son, TO the Father. The Apostle Paul reminds his readers in Acts 17: 28a, "*For 'In him we live and move and have our being.'*" The district superintendent (*and ultimately everyone*) is to live an abiding life in the Father. "...God is the content of what God is toward us in God's love and grace, what God has done and continues to do for us in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God really *is* in himself."⁶²

In mathematical language, one reads the equal sign as "is." For example, $2 + 2 = 4$ reads as two plus two is four. "Is" means that both sides of the equation are the same. Likewise, the proclamation that "God is love" truly means that the Father and love are the same. "Therefore, God could no more cease loving, and loving us, than God could cease being the triune God whose being is a ceaseless reciprocity of love. This is the ultimate ontological ground of why nothing can ever separate us from the love of God the Father in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus, God's being is not being that also *loves*, but rather being that *is* love."⁶³ When a person's being is in the person's action, the potential for revealing God through that person exists. "...the *being* of God and the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 92.

⁶⁰ *Works*, 6: 71.

⁶¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 62.

⁶² Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 151. *Italics in original text.*

⁶³ Ibid, 149. *Italics in original text.*

activity of God in loving are inseparable."⁶⁴ This connection is why when John writes about abiding in John 15, love becomes an integral aspect.

[T.F.] Torrance argues that knowledge of and belief in God as Father must be formulated within the evangelical interrelations of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is that the Father-Son and Son-Father relation in which we participate in the Holy Spirit is a relation of oneness in being (*homoousios*) or an onto-relation which enables us to know God in an accurate way according to God's nature.⁶⁵

Hence, as the district superintendent is breathing in the LOVE of the FATHER, through the GRACE of the SON, in the COMMUNION of the HOLY SPIRIT, and breathing out worship, praise, and service IN the Spirit, THROUGH the Son, TO the Father, the district superintendent is abiding in the Vine as Jesus describes in John 15. In restoring the *imago Dei*, the district superintendent's actions and being will become increasingly one, and the result will be joy and fruit that honors God. Conversely, when a district superintendent is not participating in such an economic doxological participatory Trinitarian relationship, one's relationship with God and others is damaged. In fact, "for humanity to live without a relation with God is to be less than human and too often fall into the monstrous inhumanity so recurrent in history."⁶⁶

For district superintendents to be faithful and fruitful as the Chief Missional Strategist, they will have to remain connected to the perichoretic activity of the Trinity and participate in such a way as to recognize what the Father is saying and doing, which leads to district superintendents discerning what to say and do.

While there is little doubt that people are real, relationships between people become transactional rather than real. Such an understanding allows for a disconnect between a district superintendent's being and actions. When this happens, the relationship between the district superintendent and pastor/laity is damaged, dehumanizing all involved. However, one discovers that relationships are increasingly real as one's being is in the actions, much like the abiding described by Jesus between himself and the Father. From a Trinitarian perspective, "the relations between the persons are as real (and constitutive of) the persons."⁶⁷

Just as the Father is love, likewise, the Son IS grace. In other words, grace is not something the district superintendent (or anyone else) receives apart from Jesus. Jesus' being is in the act of the grace given. "God himself is the content of his Word and grace in Jesus Christ, for the giver and the gift are identical."⁶⁸ Similarly, "Wesley affirmed the participatory character of all forms of grace, including justification itself: 'We have this grace not *from* Christ but in him."⁶⁹ When people receive more grace, they are receiving even more of Jesus the Christ.

⁶⁴ Ibid. *Italics in original text.*

⁶⁵ Ibid, 151-152.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 176.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 177.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 234.

⁶⁹ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 166. *Italics in original work.*

Additionally, communion with the Triune God is made possible because of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. As the district superintendent lives into and lives out healthy and whole relationships with laity, clergy, and colleagues, everyone involved is experiencing the Spirit in a tangible, life-giving way. Once again, the Spirit's being embodies the right relationships one experiences. The gift and the giver continue to be one. Right relationships with laity and clergy become a reality as the district superintendent remains in perichoretic activity, breathing in the LOVE of the FATHER, through the GRACE of the SON, in the COMMUNION of the HOLY SPIRIT, and empowering one to breathe out worship, praise, and ministry IN the Spirit, THROUGH the Son, TO the Father.

What did humanity lose as a result of the Fall? Wesley, in his sermon on Original Sin, weaves the following tapestry of scriptural references in answer to this question:

The Scripture avers, that "by one man's disobedience all men were constituted sinners;" that "in Adam all died," spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then "begat a son in his own likeness;"—nor was it possible he should beget him in any other; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"—that consequently we, as well as other men, were by nature "dead in trespasses and sins," "without hope, without God in the world," and therefore "children of wrath;" that every man may say, "I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me;" that "there is no difference," in that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," of that glorious image God wherein man was originally created.⁷⁰

God created humanity in the very image of God. However, due to humanity's sin, this image was lost, as was a communion with God that constitutes life itself. The relationship between humanity and God in the Garden was lost, leading to the loss of relationships between people. It is no small matter that following humanity's engagement in sin, a desire emerged to hide ourselves from God and one another, which is what the biblical writer illustrates through Adam and Eve needing clothes. Additionally, following the Fall, the biblical writer demonstrated males seeking to dominate females by having Adam name Eve, similarly to how he had previously been naming the animals (Genesis 3:20).

In "The End Of Christ's Coming," Wesley again stresses that God created people in God's image. "And God created man, not only in his natural, but likewise in his own *moral*, image."⁷¹ Thus, people were originally free moral agents with a genuine ability to choose between right and wrong.

And as a free agent, he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing, he was unspeakably happy; dwelling in God, and God in him; having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the eternal Spirit; and the continual

⁷⁰ *Works*, 6:55.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 275. *Emphasis in original text.*

testimony of his conscience, that all his ways were good and acceptable to God.⁷²

If God created Adam in such a state as Wesley contends, then how or why would such a person have willingly chosen evil? Wesley points out that Adam was not infallible in answer to this question. Thus, people "might mistake evil for good."⁷³ Wesley clearly states the chain of events that led to the human condition where people currently find themselves.

So unbelief begot pride: she thought herself wiser than God, capable of finding a better way to happiness than God had taught her. It begot self-will: She was determined to do her own will, not the will of Him that made her. It begot foolish desires; and completed all by outward sin: "She took of the fruit, and did eat."

She then "gave to her husband, and he did eat." And in that day, yea, that moment, he *died!* The life of God was extinguished in his soul. The glory departed from him. He lost the whole moral image of God,—righteousness and true holiness.⁷⁴

In this same sermon, Wesley juxtaposes what Jesus accomplished to counteract the forces of evil in the world.

At the same time the Son of God strikes at the root . . . pride; causing the sinner to humble himself before the Lord, to abhor himself, as it were, in dust and ashes. He strikes at the root of self-will, enabling the humbled sinner to say in all things, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." He destroys the love of the world; delivering them that believe in him from "every foolish and hurtful desire;" from the "desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life." He saves them from seeking or expecting to find happiness in any creature. As Satan turned the heart of man from Creator to the creature; so the Son of God turns his heart back again from creature to the Creator.⁷⁵

Furthermore, this understanding of events leads directly to Wesley's emphasis on what constitutes authentic religion.

Here then we see in the clearest, strongest light, what is real religion: A restoration of man by [Christ]; a restoration, not only to the favour but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but

⁷² Ibid, 271.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 272. *Emphasis in original text.*

⁷⁵ Ibid, 275.

the being filled with the fulness of God. It is plain, if we attend to the preceding considerations, that nothing short of this is Christian religion.⁷⁶

Wesley, however, is not content to stop at this point. Instead, he believes it necessary to stress that Christians must refrain from settling for a watered-down, cheap imitation of what constitutes authentic religion.

Beware of taking any thing else, or any thing less than this, for religion! Not any thing else: Do not imagine an outward form, a round of duties, both in public and private, is religion! Do not suppose that honesty, justice, and whatever is called morality, (though excellent in its place,) is religion! And least of all dream that orthodoxy, right opinion, (vulgarly called faith,) is religion. Of all religious dreams, this is the vainest; which takes hay and stubble for gold tried in the fire!

O do not take any thing less than this for the religion of Jesus Christ! Do not take part of it for the whole! What God hath joined together, put not asunder! Take no less for his religion, than the "faith that worketh by love;" all inward and outward holiness. Be not content with any religion which does not imply the destruction . . . of all sin.⁷⁷

Therefore, considering what Wesley preached in the two sermons above, it is now possible to quickly ascertain the answers to the questions raised in this chapter--"What did John Wesley mean by 'saving souls.' From what is a soul being saved? How does a soul become saved, and by whom is a soul saved?"

A soul is saved solely and purely by the will of God through the work of the Son and actively of the Spirit. Salvation is a gift of grace; a person cannot earn salvation. Additionally, the gift and the giver are the same—the grace that saves a person's soul is an incarnation of the Son, Jesus the Christ. To separate the intrinsic salvific character from grace leads to a grace that is no longer Trinitarian or Wesleyan. "Grace, for Wesley, is Christocentric, pneumatological, and Trinitarian....We have this grace not *from* Christ but in him....For Wesley, there is no other grace than one that is identical with the Triune God's economic activity in the gospel."⁷⁸

Salvation is a process and an instantaneous moment, as evidenced by the Greek word *sōzō* (σώζω). The imperfect tense denotes a process working itself out into the future due to something in the past. In other words, a more accurate translation of this word for salvation would be "I am saved...I am being saved...I will be fully saved someday." Therefore, salvation occurs as the Spirit of the risen Christ is operative within one's life because of the sacrificial work done by the Son such that the oneness with the Father lost in the Garden is fully restored in the future. For Wesley, this will not happen when people settle for pale substitutes but only as followers of Jesus the Christ participate in true religion.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 276.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 277.

⁷⁸ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 143.

As has often been said, "Christianity is more caught than taught," and "one cannot give what he/she has not first received." If Wesley's eleventh rule, "You have nothing to do but save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work," is paramount, then this is ultimately the work of a district superintendent. Such work is only possible as the district superintendent's soul is in the process of being saved. It is the position of this dissertation that for this to happen, a person must be engaged in true religion and participating in the way of life that embodies breathing in the LOVE of the FATHER through the GRACE of the SON in the COMMUNION of the HOLY SPIRIT and breathing out praise, worship, and service in the SPIRIT, through the SON, to the FATHER. Or as Wesley put it in his sermon on the "New Birth":

God is continually breathing, as it were, upon the soul; and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven: And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained; and the child of God grows up, till he comes to the "full measure of the stature of Christ."⁷⁹

Therefore, the district superintendent as Chief Missional Strategist must embody the reality in Acts 17: 28a—living, moving, and having our being in Christ. Such a way of living and functioning leads to the soteriological work of the Trinity in the Superintendent's heart, life, and beyond. The culmination of which will be an increasingly lived reality of Jesus' prayer in John 17, "that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."⁸⁰ This oneness with the Triune God that existed before the Fall is being restored via the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This relationship empowers the district superintendent to know and do God's will—i.e., be a part of our Triune God's mission to restore all people to Godself.

The "growing up" into the full measure and stature of Christ and being one with others and the Trinity occurs within the formed community. The ecclesiological dimension is equally crucial to the soteriological aspect of the district superintendent living into and living out being the Chief Missional Strategist and engaging in evangelical doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships.

John Wesley rooted his ecclesiology in Ephesians 4, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."⁸¹ Often, people cite and lean upon Matthew 18: 20, "Where two or three are gathered in my name I am in the midst," to define what constitutes the Church. Miroslav Volf affirms this concept when he writes, "According to the message of Jesus, the gathering of the people of God is grounded in the coming of the Kingdom of God in his person."⁸² Wesley appealed to Ephesians 4: 4-6 in his sermon "Of The Church." In this sermon,

⁷⁹ *Works*, 6: 71.

⁸⁰ John 17: 21, NLT.

⁸¹ Ephesians 4: 4-6, NRSV.

⁸² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 128.

Wesley clarifies that the number gathered determines the Church's presence.

Additionally, Wesley argues against those wishing to answer the question by invoking the nineteenth Article of the Church of England, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered."⁸³ Here, too, Volf acknowledges that many continue to hold that the Church is present when "externally perceivable and simultaneously necessary *conditions* or *consequences* of the ecclesially constitutive presence of the Spirit of Christ."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, while these aspects of the Church are essential, for Wesley, they are a part of the Church's *ben esse*. Wesley's concern with the above understanding concerning what constitutes the Church is, "According to this definition, those congregations in which the pure word of God (a strong expression) is not preached are no parts either of the Church of England, or the Church catholic: as neither are those in which the sacraments are not duly administered."⁸⁵ For Wesley, the answer to the question, "What is the Church?" is clear:

The catholic or universal Church is, all the persons in the universe whom God hath so called out of the world as to entitle them to the preceding character; as to be 'one body,' united by "one Spirit;" having "one faith, one hope, one baptism; on God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all."⁸⁶

Volf gives the following answer to the question, "What is the Church?":

The future of the Church in God's new creation is the mutual personal indwelling of the triune God and of his glorified people, as becomes clear from the description of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John. On the other hand, the entire city, which in the Apocalypse refers to the people rather than to the place in which the people live, is portrayed as the supradimensional holy of holies filled with the splendor of the presence of God and the Lamb. On the other hand, however, God and the Lamb are portrayed as the temple in which the holy of holies, the people, are found. "The saints will dwell in God and the Lamb just as God and the Lamb will dwell in them." In a canonical reading of the New Testament, one can understand this reciprocal personal indwelling of God, the Lamb, and the glorified people as the eschatological fulfillment of Jesus' high-priestly prayer, which portrays the unity of believers as communion within the communion of the triune God: "I ask...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (John 17:21).⁸⁷

In the Upper Room, Jesus prays for oneness amongst his disciples and between them and the Godhead. Such oneness is beyond humanity's ability. "So the unity is a

⁸³ Works, 6:396.

⁸⁴ Volf, 130.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 397.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 395-396.

⁸⁷ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 128.

divine gift, but it must be cultivated and cherished as Christians live together in harmonious relationships. Such unity is 'made fast with bonds of peace' (NEB) forged by Christ's reconciling work."⁸⁸ Martin continues:

In a series of creedlike formulations the meaning of unity of the Spirit is unpacked. Note the repeated (seven times) emphasis on the term "one", and there are three sets of pairs, forming a triad of couplets. We can display this diagrammatically:

one body (=the Church)—one Lord (the Church's head)

one Spirit (by which Christ is confessed)—one faith (I Cor. 12: 3)

one hope (accepted in baptism)—one baptism (I Cor. 12: 13)

After this Trinity of unities, the creedal statement is sealed with a reference to "one God"—a monotheism that Christians share with Israel (I Cor. 8: 6)—who is known in his self-revelation as the Father "over all" in creation, as Son "through all" (the preposition is one mediation, as in 2:18), and as Spirit who is "in all" the family of God.⁸⁹

Presuming that Martin is correct, and Paul has included an early rendition of a creed, then perhaps the confession and what Wesley would have been emphasizing is "what Christians share as their common heritage in the faith: one God, one Lord, and one baptism of the Spirit by which all were grafted into the body. We may call this a rudimentary trinitarian faith."⁹⁰ As such when Christians gather from across the theological spectrum, "they meet not to create unity but to confess it."⁹¹

The thesis of this dissertation is that the district superintendent in the United Methodist Church is most effective and faithful to one's calling as the district superintendent intentionally lives out the Chief Missional Strategist aspect of the position and maximizes the potential by engaging in evangelical doxological participatory economic Trinitarian relationships. From these verses in Ephesians, "Wesley pointed to the participatory, economic Trinitarian vision of Christian faith as that which constitutes the essence of the Church."⁹² As cited above, John Wesley's answer to "What is the Church?" is "all those persons who live by faith in Jesus Christ, who loved them and gave himself for them. The Church is constituted by its evangelical encounter with the activity of all three persons of the Trinity in the gospel, bound up with the vital religion that is their life together in union and communion with the Triune God and one another."⁹³

Colyer continues, "This encounter with the Triune God is participatory: the Spirit unites Christians to Christ as the body of Christ and through Christ with the Father so that they become the temple of this indwelling God.... This participatory evangelical encounter with the Triune God in the gospel is doxological, for when the Church comes

⁸⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *Interpretation: A Bible-Commentary for Teaching and Preaching—Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 48.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 49.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 209.

⁹³ Ibid, 208.

to know the love that God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Church cannot but worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together."⁹⁴ Lastly, when "Wesley developed his clear and explicit explanation of what is the essence of the church, he did not move in a functionalist direction of the church as a means of grace at all but instead provided a deeper understanding of the ontology of the church as communion with God and one another in vibrant Trinitarian terms."⁹⁵

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological foundation for the thesis that the district superintendent in the United Methodist Church is most faithful and fruitful to one's calling as one intentionally lives out the Chief Missional Strategist aspect of the position and is maximized as one engages in evangelical doxological ontological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. This chapter has shown that John Wesley's soteriology and ecclesiology parallel the reality and importance of evangelical doxological participatory economic Trinitarian relationships, and out of such relationships, the district superintendent is enabled to be effective and faithful in living out being the "the load-bearing points of the Methodist system."⁹⁶

Perhaps the piece overlooked in this chapter centers around the Chief Missional Strategist component. Nevertheless, as one more fully understands Wesley, he/she recognizes that the

Church is inherently missional and in this sense is a means of grace *because* its life is hidden with Christ in God, *because* it is a temple of this Trinitarian indwelling God who loves the world with the very love that God is. For Wesley, the mission of the Church flows from the *esse* of the Church as the body of Christ in the Spirit manifesting the love of God for the world.⁹⁷

Sadly, in the current reality of the United Methodist Church, the prevailing striving and purpose of the Church is to live out what is commonly called "The Three Simple Rules." This phrasing comes from a book by Bishop Ruben Job with the same title. Neither Job's book nor the current common practice of the three simple rules contain the robust trinitarian vision that Wesley and the early Methodists believed and practiced. For example, "do no harm" has a different meaning and application than "do no harm by avoiding evil." "Do no harm" is the shortened form of Wesley's "do no harm by avoiding evil" in *The Three Simple Rules*. It is of utmost importance to recognize that the way of superintending presented in the next chapter more closely aligns with John Wesley's theology than the current version promoted in United Methodism. "Wesley warned that true religion is not found in avoiding evil, doing good, and attending all the ordinances of God: 'this is only the outside of that religion,' which cannot 'satisfy . . . a soul that is athirst for God, the living God."⁹⁸

The remainder of the dissertation dealing with being a district superintendent in the United Methodist Church will seek to put flesh upon bones of what John Wesley

⁹⁴ Ibid, 208-209.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 211.

⁹⁶ Warner, 51. Italics is in original work.

⁹⁷ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 211.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 210.

expressed in the second sermon of his series on the Sermon on the Mount, "Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee; ...entering... 'within the veil,' and 'sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.'"⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3 "Anticipation the Role of District Superintendent"

It is paramount that the practices identified in this chapter for the district superintendent as a Missional Strategist rest wholly and entirely on a foundation of John Wesley's belief that the essence of the church is not functionalist "as a means of grace at all" but rather the ultimate reality of "the ontology of the church as communion with God and one another in vibrant Trinitarian terms."¹⁰⁰ Such a perspective does not suggest that practices are unimportant. As an eighth-grade class stated with wisdom well beyond their years in their motto: "What I am to be I am now becoming," a person's or group's practices form the individual and/or the group. Colyer stated multiple times during the three years of coursework in this Doctor of Ministries program, "Our practices form us, and there are no neutral practices." As people, as Christians, and as leaders, district superintendents are continually being formed by what they do and choose not to do, as well as what they say and choose not to say. Nevertheless, the reason undergirding why a person is engaging in a particular practice is as important, if not more critical, than merely engaging in specific practices. The role of Chief Missional Strategist is not a "plug-n-play" endeavor. A district superintendent will only be fruitful and faithful by remaining connected to the Vine and living out of evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Therefore, everything in this chapter is merely planting seeds in the soil of evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Otherwise, there is a risk and a danger of the following practices becoming techniques in a human-powered endeavor rather than the conduit of transformation that is the fruit of abiding in the love of the Father, through the grace of the Son, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The mission statement of the United Methodist Church is to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Thus, as a Missional Strategist, the district superintendent must understand what a disciple of Jesus Christ is. Even more so, district superintendents must grow continuously in their discipleship to allow the Triune God to work in and through them to bring others into participation with God and other believers as faithful disciples. As chapter two mentions, salvation is a process, and Christianity is more caught than taught. The district superintendent must set an example for the appointed and assigned leadership and invite them to participate in God's perichoretic activity. This is possible when the understanding of a disciple is clear.

To this end, Bishop Schnase lists the following practices in the Table of Contents of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*:

- 1: The Practice of Radical Hospitality
- 2: The Practice of Passionate Worship
- 3: The Practice of Intentional Faith Development
- 4: The Practice of Risk-Taking Mission and Service
- 5: The Practice of Extravagant Generosity¹⁰¹

The categories described by Bishop Schnase are 1) Evangelism, 2) Worship, 3) Fellowship, 4) Ministry, and 5) Stewardship, respectively.

¹⁰⁰ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 211.

¹⁰¹ Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 3.

Additionally, Rick Warren, in his bestseller, *The Purpose Driven Life*, lists the following five purposes of a disciple in the Table of Contents:

- Purpose # 1: You Were Planned for God's Pleasure
- Purpose # 2: You Were Formed for God's Family
- Purpose # 3: You Were Created to Become Like God
- Purpose # 4: You Were Shaped for Serving God
- Purpose # 5: You Were Made for a Mission¹⁰²

The categories described by Rev. Warren are 1) Worship, 2) Fellowship, 3) Stewardship, 4) Ministry, and 5) Evangelism respectively.

The United Methodist Church has those seeking to profess membership in a congregation respond affirmatively to the following vow, "Will you faithfully participate in the ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your services?"¹⁰³ In 2012, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church voted to expand this vow from four aspects to five by adding "witness" to the list. These vows parallel the following categories: 1) Worship, 2) Fellowship, 3) Stewardship, 4) Ministry, and 5) Evangelism.

Interestingly, each resource settled on five overarching categories that define what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Additionally, while using different words to describe or define each category, the definitions refer to the same categories represented in the respective lists.

In First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul puts forth the metaphor of an athlete and writes, "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified."¹⁰⁴ Therefore, as part of the groundwork around the ideal district superintendent, it is proposed that a disciple of Jesus the Christ is someone who is growing in one's relationship with our Triune God and other disciples by participating in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit in ways that yield results in line with what this dissertation is defining as five spiritual muscle groups. These spiritual muscle groups are as follows:

- 1) **Worship**: "Jesus replied, 'But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.'"¹⁰⁵
- 2) **Fellowship**: "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to the fellowship, and to sharing meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer."¹⁰⁶
- 3) **Ministry**: "Then [Jesus] said to the crowd, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me.'"¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 7-8.

¹⁰³ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 38.

¹⁰⁴ I Corinthians 9: 27, NLT.

¹⁰⁵ John 4: 23-24, NLT.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 2: 42, NLT.

¹⁰⁷ Luke 9: 23, NLT.

- 4) **Evangelism:** "So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.'"¹⁰⁸
- 5) **Stewardship:** "And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?"¹⁰⁹

As the disciples of Jesus the Christ (district superintendent, appointed or assigned leadership, or laity) participate with the Triune God in places where these particular aspects of discipleship can produce fruit, one experiences growth as a disciple by being transformed into the likeness of Jesus the Christ. This transformational embodiment allows the raising of Jesus in ways that the Triune God draws all people unto God's self, thereby continuing the transformational reality of the Gospel by extending God's grace and ushering in the fulfillment of the mission of the United Methodist Church.

It is essential to acknowledge that in much the same way that the relational dynamics between the district superintendent and the Bishop, Cabinet and Conference-Wide/Denominational-Wide responsibilities of the position are beyond the scope of this dissertation; likewise, there is more to ministry and Church-life that is beyond the scope as well. While vitally important, aspects of Church life (like flourishing in ministry, for one example) that are of high priority in many segments of ecclesiastical work are outside the scope of how this dissertation is seeking to address the role of missional strategist by participating in Trinitarian relationships.

Acknowledging that little work will be done with appointed or assigned leaders, nor with the laity, around flourishing in ministry, the district superintendent needs to incorporate what Colyer calls "Redeeming One's Routines." For Colyer, redeeming routines include the following specific domains: Spiritual, Basic Needs, Social, Vocation, and Leisure. Also significant is creating space for Mountaintop Time or what Heifetz and Linsky call "getting on the balcony." "Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray."¹¹⁰ However, of equal significance is the reminder that "the process must be interactive, not static. The challenge is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in real-time, and then returning to the action."¹¹¹ For this dissertation, the balcony or mountaintop time is an opportunity to participate with the Trinity in a concentrated way that seeks discernment and direction.

It is vital to say more about discernment before laying out how a district superintendent embodies being a Missional Strategist via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. The type of discernment found in this dissertation is Trinitarian and participatory, and thus will also be soteriological and ecclesial. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and it is only in and through their presence and agency that people can receive the good news of the Gospel efficaciously. While some practice discernment from primarily a humanism perspective, discernment in this dissertation is always participatory as one experiences

¹⁰⁸ Luke 14: 23, NLT.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 16: 11, NLT.

¹¹⁰ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002), 53.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

the Father's love through the Son's grace in the soteriological, ecclesiological communion of the Spirit. The noetic dimension of discernment in Spirit takes place as the Spirit unites persons to the mind of Christ and through Christ with the will of God the Father. The relationship of the district superintendent, as Chief Missional Strategist, to the appointed and assigned leadership and laity in the district is a soteriological and ecclesiological relationship with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The relationship is the evangelical movement from the Triune God to the district superintendent and the district's appointed and assigned leadership and laity, creating the participatory Trinitarian relationships with God and one another as sisters and brothers-in-Christ. As observed in Chapter One, such relationships existed historically in the early ministry contexts between presiding elders, pastors, and district laity.

The doxological dimension of discernment in the Spirit through the Son to the Father includes all aspects of human interaction and the response of the district superintendent, the appointed and assigned leadership, and the district laity to God's Trinitarian agency. The fellowship, stewardship, ministry, evangelism, worship, and all other dimensions of human participatory response that are a part of the relationship of the district superintendent as Chief Missional Strategist are soteriological, ecclesial, and missional. Anything else or anything less is not fully participatory or Trinitarian. Such endeavors become examples of trying to lead and empower ministry through human wisdom, ingenuity, authority, and might. The only way for a person or group to remain in the perichoretic activity of God is via God's Spirit, bringing wholeness to the relational reality between the Triune God, the district superintendent, the appointed and assigned leadership, and the district laity. Only within the power and presence of the Triune God in the Holy Spirit does the district superintendent live out the vocation of Chief Missional Strategist in participatory relationships with the appointed and assigned leadership and laity in the district. The soteriological and ecclesiological relational efficacy of discernment is fundamental and foundational to effective missional strategy, producing the fruit of fellowship, trust, openness, transparency, and all the other relational dynamics that are at the center of transformative relationships between the Triune God, the district superintendent, the appointed and assigned leadership, and laity in the district as well as everything else in mission and ministry.

"Wesley understood that team members are unlikely to grow when the leader is not growing."¹¹² In the same way that district superintendents must be growing as disciples to lead the pastors and preachers under their care and responsibility, likewise, those leading local congregations need to be growing as disciples by participating in the perichoretic activity of the Trinity for the people under their care to continue growing as disciples and participate in the fullness of God as well.

While the following statement is simple, it is essential to remember if one desires to maximize effectiveness and faithfulness. People are different. "Therefore, here is what you have to realize: You cannot deal with everyone in the same way. Different people, in different categories, require different strategies."¹¹³ With this in mind, the district superintendent will want to know those appointed and assigned in the district as unique individuals, not collectives or groups.

¹¹² Gorveatte, 83.

¹¹³ Dr. Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings: The Employees, Business, And Relations That All Of Us Have To Give Up In Order To Move Forward*, (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2010), 122.

The Consultation Season starts the appointment year for district superintendents. Conducting individual consultations in the first couple of months of each appointment year provides an opportunity for the appointed and assigned to get to know the district superintendent and to be known by the Superintendent. Due to the number of appointed and assigned persons under one's responsibility, the district superintendent will want to schedule the consultations strategically. Getting to know one another is one of many vital aspects of superintending that must happen within a similar period. Presuming the ability to meet with seven people daily (seven forty-five-minute sessions with an hour for lunch), the district superintendent must dedicate eight days to meet with up to fifty-six appointed and assigned persons. Providing two days per week over the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August will give enough flexibility to work around people's vacations and other commitments while also providing two additional weeks to meet with those who had an emergency that caused them to miss the initially planned time and still meet the goal of meeting with everyone by the end of August. Such intentionality implements a multiplication of complementary ends, allowing the district superintendent to schedule the mountaintop/balcony time mentioned above.

In preparation for the supervisory dimension of the new role, D.S. Renner designed a new form to guide the annual consultations each pastor has with the district superintendent.¹¹⁴ As chapter two mentions, salvation is a process, and Christianity is more caught than taught. The assessment seeks to assist those appointed and assigned in recognizing the growth in Christlikeness that has taken place over the previous year. As the appointed and assigned leaders grow as disciples, they set a visible example for their people.

As a missional strategist, the district superintendent must bring the unconscious to consciousness concerning the mission of the United Methodist Church. Additionally, it is vital to establish an agreed-upon, broad-based understanding of what constitutes a disciple from the beginning. For this dissertation, a disciple of Jesus the Christ is a fully devoted follower participating in the perichoretic activity of God. Such an image assists in denoting the participatory nature of Trinitarian relationships. The form allows each appointed and assigned person to clarify faithfulness and fruitfulness in each spiritual muscle grouping. This process enables the pastors and preachers to participate with the district superintendent in setting goals growing year-over-year, which is acknowledged and celebrated. The district superintendent seeks to hold the pastors and preachers accountable not for wrath but for conscience's sake.

Such an approach allows for flexibility and individuality while maintaining unity and continuity. Each subsequent year, people will share the growth and difficulties that have transpired as they sought to faithfully follow the Holy Spirit's leadership in the respective spiritual muscle groups. These yearly "check-ins" are a form of accountability. While accountability is frowned upon in many sectors of society, "the best leaders welcome accountability and require it of others."¹¹⁵ Wesley incorporated such practices into his organization to embody the Trinitarian reality.

The initial annual consultation will include the following questions: 1) What do you need most from your district superintendent? and 2) How do you most fully receive appreciation? The second question illuminates how the district superintendent can

¹¹⁴ Appendix A contains this form.

¹¹⁵ Gorveatte, 168.

express praise or appreciation to maximize how the recipient received it. Additionally, every consultation should include a conversation about how the current appointment or assignment does or does not continue to be an excellent missional match. An appointment or assignment change may benefit the congregation(s) and the appointed or assigned person in ways that ultimately lead to fulfilling the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Currently, in the United Methodist Church, there is significant mistrust. While previously mentioned that the district superintendent is the "most trusted" in the United Methodist Church, it is essential to remember that such a designation is comparative rather than qualitative. Unlike other positions in the United Methodist Church, the district superintendent may be the most trusted. However, this does not automatically mean a high level of trust is innately vested in the role of district superintendent. Those appointed, assigned, or laity worshipping in the district will fall on a trust continuum significantly dependent upon the previous interactions and relationship with district superintendents. Every district superintendent engages with people who have preconceived ideas (positive and negative) about the role of the district superintendent. Therefore, the district superintendent must realize that "the choice to trust consists of four distinct assessments about how someone is likely to act. These assessments are **care, sincerity, reliability, and competence**. Together, they define what we consider to be a person's trustworthiness."¹¹⁶ Chapter four will say more about these categories. However, a basic definition of each will be beneficial. "Care is the assessment that you have the other person's interest in mind as well as your own when you make decisions and take actions, and that your intentions toward them are positive."¹¹⁷ "Sincerity is the assessment that you are honest and act with integrity; that you say what you mean and mean what you say; you can be believed and taken seriously. It also means when you express an opinion it is valid, useful, and is backed up by sound thinking and evidence. Finally, it means that your actions will align with your words."¹¹⁸ "Reliability is the assessment that you fulfill the commitments you make, that you keep your promises."¹¹⁹ "Competence is the assessment that you have the ability to do what you are doing or propose to do."¹²⁰

It is vital to remember that while implementing the four assessments mentioned above is possible by purely human means, there is a qualitative difference when the district superintendent lives in evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Conversely, if district superintendents participate in the perichoretic activity of God but fail to follow through on commitments or evidence an unacceptable level of incompetence, then mistrust will likely result. The assessments on their own could be better; however, participating in Trinitarian relationships without expressing genuine care and sincerity also leads to trust deficits.

Celebrating with those under one's care and responsibility is essential. Therefore, knowing birthdays and anniversaries will be beneficial in fostering a connection that

¹¹⁶ Charles Feltman, *The Thin Book Of Trust: An Essential Primer For Building Trust At Work*, 2nd ed, (Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing, 2021), 11. *Emphasis in original text.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

goes beyond a traditional employee-employer relationship, expressing a deeper level of care for the entire family while embodying the celebratory nature of the Kingdom that Jesus demonstrates in the gospels. As mentioned above, people are different. Thus, knowing how a person is motivated and most naturally receives affirmation and encouragement will be invaluable information for the district superintendent. Some folks are visual; therefore, a note or email will mean more; others are auditory, and a phone call or face-to-face conversation will accomplish the desired intention more effectively. Relating to each person as a person and not from a one-size-fits-all perspective is a more accurate representation of how God relates to individuals. Additionally, greater trust and collegiality will result.

While many ways to communicate the four areas mentioned above constitute a person's trustworthiness, showing up and being present for worship and other community events will assist the district superintendent significantly to this end. Attending the worship services within the district will allow the district superintendent to 1) get a feel for the communities in the district, 2) know the location of each congregation within the respective communities, 3) experience the ethos of each worshipping congregation, and 4) hear the appointed/assigned person's ability to preach and style of sermon delivery. These areas of knowledge will significantly assist the district superintendent in making excellent appointments as the needs arise within the district. However, of even greater importance is letting the leaders know that the district superintendent will be attending worship services and then following through, which will aid the superintendent in maintaining a level of care, sincerity, reliability, and competence that will not undermine the faithful and fruitful distinction that is a part of living in Trinitarian relationships.

In addition to the district superintendent's relationship with the appointed and assigned leaders in the district, the district superintendent is the missional strategist for the entire district. Each district consists of charges that embody the Annual Conference's ministry at the local level. Each Charge meets annually to set the appointed/assigned person's compensation for the next year and approve officers for the following year. Overarchingly, Church Conferences are business meetings. However, the district superintendent can foster greater connection and community amongst the laity of the Embarras River District by scheduling multiple geographical Church Conferences. Church Conferences constitute the second season of a district superintendent's year.

The prevailing wisdom from the training for district superintendents at Lake Junaluska is that individual Charge Conferences should be conducted in the first year to enable the district superintendent to be in most churches and get to know the people "on their turf." Unfortunately, over two decades of pastoral experience has shown that few people participate in the Church Conference at their churches. Fifty-seven of the eighty-eight churches in the Embarras River District have a worship average of less than thirty people. If congregations had ten percent of their worshipping attendance participate in the Church Conference, then many nights, the district superintendent would travel over a hundred miles round trip to be with less than three people. The hours required to conduct fifty-five individual conferences with driving time is not the best use of time. If the district superintendent seeks to practice the multiplication of

complementary ends, then Cluster Church Conferences will yield a more significant benefit.

Worship is how the people of God most fully connect with the Triune God and one another. Fully devoted followers of Jesus the Christ breathe in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit and breathe out worship, praise, mission, and service in the Holy Spirit through the Son to the Father. Thus, a worship service format is preferable for Church Conferences. The group Church Conferences allow for enough people to be present for holy conferencing to become possible. Additionally, two Sunday afternoons will enable the group Church Conferences to implement the multiplication of complementary ends in the district superintendent's schedule. A group Church Conference occurs each Sunday at 2 p.m. and 4:45 p.m. The time will consist of singing, Scripture reading, prayer, sermon by the district superintendent, and the business of the Church Conference. The worship service, the required business, and the signing of necessary paperwork should occur within an hour. In addition to fulfilling the annual Church Conference requirement, these group Church Conferences will create greater community and connection between the laity as they worship and meet with others who have a similar passion to live out the mission of the United Methodist Church. Additionally, since the Church Conferences will occur in October, every appointed and assigned person in the district will receive a gift for Clergy Appreciation Month.

Most of the churches in the Embarras River District are small. Thus, they often live out of an understanding that their purpose is to survive. However, their attempts to save themselves ultimately lead to losing their lives. Jesus eloquently stated, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."¹²¹ Therefore, the district superintendent seeking to fulfill the Missional Strategist role must teach what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and cast a vision for what the shared lives of congregations, appointed and assigned leaders and the district superintendent will entail.

The district superintendent must remember that people and groups have different expectations. To watch over congregations and the assigned or appointed persons in love, the district superintendent must clearly articulate one's expectations. Additionally, a sermon should initiate a response and move a person or group beyond hearing the message only. The sermon for the initial year of Church Conferences should let each Administrative Council know that they will work with their assigned and appointed leadership to discern how God desires to define the five spiritual muscle groups in their respective contexts and embodied. In other words, if a congregation exists to produce disciples and people are becoming disciples and growing in their discipleship, what visible characteristics (or fruits) are present within the local congregation's context, demonstrating that such a transformation is happening within the lives of those connected to that local congregation? The district superintendent invites each church to pray and discern God's discipleship call and then share how they seek to foster and grow in the disciples within their respective contexts.

This discernment is significantly vital to what it means to be a Missional Strategist. If the mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, but

¹²¹ Matthew 16: 24-25, NLT.

no one knows what a disciple is or looks like, then how will the congregation and the pastor know if they are being faithful and fruitful to that which God is calling them? By having the Administrative Councils work on this piece with the assigned and appointed leadership, the congregation will have handles enabling them to work smarter, not harder, by being more strategic in the ministries offered. For example, suppose a congregation defines the Ministry Muscle as a spirit-gifted servant who meets specific human needs. In that case, they know they need to offer opportunities for their people to discover their spiritual gifts and then assist them in employing their gifts in God-glorifying ways within their communities.

Additionally, suppose a congregation discovers that God has provided them with many people with similar gifts or passions. In that case, that congregation is well down the line of discerning where God is leading them in the current season of their collective faith journey. God will not call congregations to places where God has not prepared and supplied what will be needed to accomplish God's purpose(s)!

Additionally, defining and clarifying the spiritual muscle groups in each context will assist the Pastor-Staff Parish in evaluating and strengthening the assigned and appointed person's leadership. It is also the desire of D.S. Renner that the consultation form in which the assigned and appointed persons share with the district superintendent concerning the ways each is personally growing as a disciple will also be shared with the Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committee so they can help hold their leader accountable in love. Ultimately, emphasizing and defining what it means to be a disciple will streamline the evaluative process for the church, assigned and appointed leadership, and district superintendent. Such a process will also function as an additional hedge against the diluting of the mission of the United Methodist Church and aid the district superintendent's discernment during the third season of the year, Appointment Season.

As previously mentioned, the Embarras River District consists of fifty-five Charges. A Charge can have one or more churches (often called "points"). Multi-point charges consist of at least two churches but may have more depending on the alignment. When the Charge consists of more than one point, the "correct" way to form the Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committee (P/SPRC) is to have a Charge P/SPRC made up of nine persons (at least one from each congregation of the Charge) plus the Lay Leaders from each congregation and the Lay Member(s) to Annual Conference for the Charge. The P/SPRC is the primary group with which the district superintendent will relate in the life of the Charge. The P/SPRC is the liaison between the congregation(s) and the district and between the appointed/assigned leadership and the congregation. Thus, most of the district superintendent's connection to a Charge or congregation will be with the leaders who make up the P/SPRC.

The Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committee aids the congregation in fulfilling its mission by stewarding the personnel resources of the Charge. The district superintendent works with this group in a concentrated way when the Bishop and Cabinet discern an appointed or assigned is required. In a similar way that a form is provided to the pastors and preachers to determine what the various spiritual muscle groups entail, the district superintendent will need to provide a form that will aid the Church Council in describing how the congregation envisions what faithfulness and fruitfulness to our Triune God's leading looks like in the five spiritual muscle groups as

the respective congregations seek to make disciples for the transformation of the world. This form (located in Appendix D) should be sent to the district superintendent and be a part of ongoing consultation times with the appointed/assigned leadership and consultation discussions with the P/SPRC.

The district superintendent will want to aid in regularly and consistently training the pastor-staff parish relations committees. In addition to the accountability for the assigned and appointed leadership that takes place with the district superintendent, additional accountability is an aspect of the responsibility of the P/SPRC. The district superintendent will help the P/SPRC understand this role and responsibility most fully and how to exercise this responsibility in the healthiest manner possible. P/SPRCs will find it profitable to follow Wesley's example of confrontation. "He believed it was better to call things the way he saw them than to pretend he didn't see them....Wesley insisted on telling people the plain truth. His secret was to do it with so much love that people understood that he wanted what was best for them."¹²² The district superintendent will provide a Pastor Assessment Form¹²³ with a slightly altered cover letter from the one that went to the appointed and assigned leaders.¹²⁴

D.S. Renner plans on making it a priority to have assigned and appointed leaders and spouses over to the District Parsonage during the year for dinner. These evenings include four to six guests for dinner and a time of fellowship with dessert. On each of these evenings, those invited will have an affinity with the intention of creating a space in which people become loyal friends who are spiritually connected to one another.

In addition to these invitations to the District Parsonage, retired clergy and spouses in the district will be invited to a brunch during Advent. Retirees are usually "add-ins" to various functions, with those actively serving. Retirees and spouses must have an opportunity to experience the Father's love through the Son's grace in the communion of the Holy Spirit through an event specifically designed for them. The appointed and assigned leaders will receive an invitation to gather for an Epiphany celebration due to the Advent-Christmas Season's many expectations and stresses. The district superintendent will donate to a charity to honor the retirees and those actively serving and send a Christmas card with a note.

A spiritual retreat for all appointed and assigned within the district will occur in the first year. The retreat will not be a learning event, but a true retreat called "A Day Apart." Ballard Nature Center will be the retreat location. The location will provide participants ample space and opportunity for personal time and reflection via the main building's walking trails and various displays. Additionally, video games, table games, puzzles, art supplies, and multiple spiritual/devotional books will be provided and available as the Holy Spirit leads each participant's time throughout the day. The only "structured" pieces will be when the group gathers to practice The Hours at 9 a.m., 11:45 a.m., and 3 p.m., and the provided lunch. The retreat hopes to offer each person the opportunity to have a "Snow Day" experience—a day that suddenly becomes available for rest, enjoyment, relationship building, and receiving life because one's "planned" schedule was non-existent.

¹²² Gorveatte, 90.

¹²³ Appendix C contains the Pastor Assessment Form.

¹²⁴ Appendix B contains the cover letter sent to the appointed and assigned leaders.

The other planned and primary way the district superintendent will connect with and lead laity in the Embarras River District during the first year is through the Pastor-Staff Parish Relation Committees in congregations where conflict occurs between the congregation and the assigned or appointed leadership or when the Bishop and Cabinet have discerned that a leadership change is needed. The district superintendent should not miss the critical opportunity afforded in such times to assist the laity in understanding their specific role of leadership, as well as to be the one plowing the fertile soil of congregational life in that location so that the gospel seeds that the next leader will plant can have more significant opportunity to be received, take root, grow, and produce fruit to the glory of God.

Functioning via Trinitarian relationships will have an increased success rate in this very endeavor. As the district superintendent, appointed/assigned leaders, P/SPRCs, and the rest of the congregation breathe in the Love of the Father through the Grace of the Son in the Communion of the Holy Spirit and breathe out worship, praise, mission, and ministry in the Spirit through the Son to the Father, ushering in our Triune God's Kingdom, and transforming the world to the glory of our Triune God.

In addition to the abovementioned plans, year two will build upon year one. However, the greater emphasis in year two will be connecting more fully and deeply with the local congregations via the Pastor-Staff Parish Relation Committees. Year three will continue building on the first two years, emphasizing congregations engaging in two to three district-wide ministry opportunities. Year four will broaden the ministry opportunities by including at least one domestic (in-country but out-of-state) mission service opportunity. Year five will expand the people in the Embarras District's hearts further by having an international mission service opportunity and domestic and district opportunities. Year six and beyond will continue to empower leadership to fulfill God's calling upon their lives and keep the faithfulness flowing. Years one and two will deepen relationships between the people in the district and the district superintendent as both clergy and laity connect deeply in the perichoretic activity of God. Years three and beyond continue to deepen the relationships by breathing in the Father's love through the Son's grace in the communion of the Holy Spirit while emphasizing the breathing out of worship, praise, mission, and ministry in the Holy Spirit through the Son to the Father.

Chapter 4 "Embodying the Role of District Superintendent"

Chapter one offered a historical sketch of the role of the district superintendent as a missional strategist. Chapter two presented biblical and theological underpinnings of the district superintendent living out the missional strategist role via evangelical ontological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Chapter three laid out an expectant description of the district superintendent living into and living out the role of missional strategist through Trinitarian relationships. Chapter four will present how the various aspects discussed came together in a real-world context.

Unfortunately, practices filled with God's life and presence become traditions even when the life they once embodied is missing. For example, the Bible is to be the living word of God; however, breath existed before the written word. Speech existed before becoming words on pages. Life was/is found not in dead letters on a page but in the breath that preceded the writing. A danger emerges when transitioning from breath to written word as people dissect words and sentences while missing the potential breathed life offered in those words and sentences.

The rich, abundant life that Jesus spoke of in John's Gospel manifests when people join in the perichoretic activity of God by breathing in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and breathing out worship, praise, mission, and ministry in the Holy Spirit through the Son to the Father. Such an abundant life has a soteriological emphasis that coincides with the missional aspect of the district superintendent's role as a missional strategist. Continuing what Wesley called a "religion of the world" is impossible if a district superintendent seeks to live in evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. "What is startling for some is that [Wesley] defined the religion of the world in terms rather familiar to Methodists: 'The religion of the world implies three things: first, the doing no harm...; secondly, the doing good...; thirdly, the using of the means of grace.'"¹²⁵ Such an emphasis, while beneficial for someone seeking a relationship with the Triune God, "falls so far short of the real essence of the Christian faith."¹²⁶ John Wesley said, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."¹²⁷

The "power of godliness" is the center of Christian faith, a center that Wesley understood in Trinitarian terms. When anyone confused the form of godliness (the General Rules) with the (participatory Trinitarian) power of godliness, the Rules of Methodism degenerated into a form of religion that falls woefully short of the vibrant Trinitarian Christian faith and life.¹²⁸

How this power of godliness is at work is at the core of the district superintendent as a missional strategist via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory

¹²⁵ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 161-162.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 162.

¹²⁷ *Works*, 13, 238.

¹²⁸ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 162.

Trinitarian relationships becomes a reality. "The Spirit regenerates by uniting us to Christ, who simultaneously lives his life through us in the power of the Spirit in obedience to and fellowship with the Father."¹²⁹ The intrinsic nature of grace is salvific, and as people receive more grace into their lives, they receive more of Jesus the Christ, which culminates in being transformed into the likeness of the One whose image humanity bears. This is the Gospel. This is true religion. This is salvation. This is the mission. This is what it means for the district superintendent to be the missional strategist. Quoting Albert Outler, Colyer reminds readers, "Wesley defined the church as an act, as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in Christian life."¹³⁰ Additionally, one must remember "that the church's mission flows from its participatory Trinitarian essence."¹³¹ Therefore, all that follows exists in the soil of participatory Trinitarian relationships; otherwise, the behaviors and activities are reduced to mere functions and become another example of Modernity's Wager.¹³²—or another form of godliness without the necessary power.

On July 1, 2019, I received a new appointment in the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference as the district superintendent of the Embarras River District. This ministry area included fifty-five charges consisting of eighty-eight churches and one extension ministry. Fifty-five individuals overseeing these churches and the extension ministry were under my direct supervision. The primary thrust of this chapter will describe the initial year of superintending.

In preparation for the role of district superintendent as a missional strategist via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships, maintaining health and balance required intentionality. The intentionality corresponds with Colyer's "Basic Needs" domain mentioned in chapter three and included going to bed by 10 p.m., being asleep before 10:30 p.m., and waking up around 5 a.m. to complete a workout. Workouts varied between runs, cycling, and swimming as I participated in sprint triathlons. I also ate appropriately and met regularly with my coach and spiritual director. These practices were integral to being physically, emotionally, and spiritually at my best.

As has been emphasized throughout this dissertation, disciples make disciples. A disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus the Christ, participating in the life of the Trinity and growing in five spiritual muscle groups. Thus, a fully devoted follower is:

- 1) An avid worshipper of God in public and private (Worship)
- 2) A loyal friend who is spiritually-connected to other believers (Fellowship)
- 3) A Spirit-gifted servant who meets specific human needs (Ministry)
- 4) A credible Christian witness in the eyes of nameable pre-Christians (Evangelism)
- 5) A generous giver of energy and resources to God's mission (Stewardship)

Most months, daily personal worship included *A Call To Prayer For Ministers & All God's Servants* by Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck. This resource provides the following pattern: an opening prayer, a reading of a psalm for the week, a reading of

¹²⁹ Ibid, 166.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 200.

¹³¹ Ibid, 201.

¹³² A term taken from the title of a book by Adam Seligman and used by Alan J. Roxburgh in *Practices For The Refounding Of God's People: The Missional Challenge of the West*. Modernity's wager is the belief and practice that life can be lived well without God.

daily scripture, a reading for reflection from various sources, a time for reflection, meditation, journaling, a time for prayer, reading or singing a hymn for the week; and a benediction. This practice provided a time each morning to center oneself in the Godhead and listen for the priorities and directions for the day.¹³³

As mentioned in chapter three, there are seasons for the superintending ministry. The first season centers around consultations with the appointed and assigned leaders in the district. These days were long and filled with a myriad of emotions. I scheduled two days per week over the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August. Each of these eight days consisted of up to seven forty-five-to-fifty-minute consultations. Each leader had been sent material by mid-June to be completed and returned to the district office at least a week before the consultation. Such a schedule affords the district superintendent enough time to read the material before the meeting so that the person knows the district superintendent cares about what is shared and that the paperwork is not "make work." Locations were selected throughout the district to lessen travel time for those coming to speak with the district superintendent. The appointed and assigned leaders appreciated the care shown by lessening their travel and felt valued that the district superintendent traveled to them.

Each consultation began with a prayer led by the district superintendent. Then the person was invited to share about family and celebrations—like birthdays and anniversaries. Consistently, each congregational leader attempted to redirect the conversation to church work rather than sharing personal information. I assured each person that time would be available to hear about the church, but that he/she is important and deserves to be known. Folks shared about hobbies and things they enjoyed doing. Most eventually relaxed and engaged in genuine conversation that provided space for them to share and to ask questions of me about my family as well. As people relaxed, the Holy Spirit's presence became increasingly palpable.

As the Triune God's presence filled the meeting space, it was imperative to introduce the idea that disciples make disciples, and for the pastor or preacher to have laity growing as disciples, they needed to be growing. This conversation transitioned smoothly to discussing the form they submitted before the consultation. People acknowledged that the form was unlike anything they had previously filled out for a D.S. The form contained a personal nature. After affirming their observations, I shared that a person's Christian walk is personal but not intended to be private. Casting the vision for how the spiritual muscle groups would be a part of each year's consultations and presented to the churches during Church Conferences led to inviting folks to hold the district superintendent accountable for growing as a disciple. Such interactions allowed the consultation to enter into the perichoretic activity of God and not remain a human endeavor that instrumentalized the role of the district superintendent into one who keeps the organization wheels of the district and annual conference turning.

The most surprising aspect of the consultations that first summer was how often the appointed people cried. One pastor cried and shared how he had been praying for years for someone to lead him and the district and be serious about connecting people

¹³³ Acknowledging once again that every person is different, two excellent resources to assist in discovering how our Triune God has uniquely designed you are: *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life: Understanding Who You Are Can Deepen Your Relationship with God* by Reginald Johnson and *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Sou's Path To God* by Gary Thomas.

to Jesus. Another pastor cried and said she did not understand why she shared so much with her district superintendent. Another pastor cried because of all the stress ministry placed upon the marriage and the kids. God's presence filled many consultation sessions as appointed and assigned leadership engaged in a participatory Trinitarian relationship rather than a transactional, how-are-you-useful way. These moments led to actual embodiments of the Church and a growth in grace that furthered each participant's transformation toward Christlikeness.

Only some consultation sessions were pleasant, however. There was one in which a part-time local pastor entered, obviously defensive. He was angry about multiple denominational issues and had not had positive experiences with previous superintendents. As he was talking, I sensed a Divine nudge to challenge him and the assumption he had just made. His response was increased belligerence. While he threatened to leave, he remained seated on the sofa in the office. Leaning forward in my chair, I shared with him my desire for the denomination in general, the district, and his ministry specifically. We talked for another ten to fifteen minutes, and I offered to pray for him. Following my prayer, he asked if he could pray for me, and I welcomed it. Relational wholeness is a byproduct of evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. In previous interactions with district superintendents, this pastor experienced transactional relationships. This encounter was different. I saw him. He experienced the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit. He responded by offering prayer for the person he initially understood to be an enemy.

The first-year consultations included two specific questions. 1) What do you need most from your district superintendent? and 2) How do you most fully receive appreciation? The overwhelming majority answered that they needed the district superintendent to have their backs and to be available. The third most common response was being unsure since this was the first time their district superintendent had asked many such questions. Some responses affirmed auditory, and hearing the words meant more, while others shared that visual and seeing the sentiment in writing would mean more. A few expressed that some act or gesture would have the most significant impact. A tone was set by asking these questions and an expectation that the relationship between them and the district superintendent would be different. The questions also affirmed that everyone is unique and embodies the imago Dei differently. Each person felt valued, heard, and important as they experienced their initial encounter with a district superintendent living into the Missional Strategist component via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory relationships.

Following consultation season, I created a master list of birthdays and anniversaries for the appointed and assigned leadership and their families. Personalized postcards on behalf of the district were purchased. During the final week of each month, those with birthdays and anniversaries received postcards with personal notes. The top right corner would show the date the postcard should be mailed during the following month so that the person could receive it as close to the birthday or anniversary. The stamp covered the date. Families expressed delight and surprise that the district superintendent not only remembered their celebratory event but took the time to hand-write something. Individualized and personalized communication embodies how the Father speaks to each person through the Son in the Spirit. Such efforts were low-

hanging fruit for the district superintendent to communicate God's love and grace while forming community. This simple act typically took thirty minutes or less each month. However, it resulted in deeper relationships and trust among those appointed and assigned in the district that far outpaced the effort the action required.

Beginning July 7, 2019, I attended at least two, and sometimes three, worship services weekly. I prioritized worshipping with each congregation at least every other year and hearing each appointed and assigned leader preach yearly. Additionally, every church building in the district was prayer walked within the first 100 days. Every congregation had the district superintendent worship in their respective buildings within the first two years, and every appointed and assigned leader preached with the district superintendent present by the third Sunday of July 2020. Often, the laity expressed surprise and appreciation that the district superintendent had chosen to worship in their church. Many also shared that this was the first time any district superintendent had worshipped in their building. It was also encouraging to hear the excitement, energy, and trust amongst the laity resulting from their hearing that the district superintendent had prayer-walked their sanctuary, buildings, and grounds. An additional personal benefit for the district superintendent assigned to a very rural district is that one will know the locations of the churches so that missional conversations and strategies can include direct knowledge of where opportunities and resources exist throughout the district.

If the first season for the district superintendent is consultations, then the second season is Church Conferences. My administrative assistant scheduled four Cluster Church Conferences for the Embarras River District, with approximately twenty or so churches at each. The required work of the Church Conference happened in the flow of a worship service. The attendance for the Church Conferences ranged from the mid-eighties to the mid-120s, providing most congregations with a worship experience that included a singing volume level significantly higher than they typically experience. The first year I preached a sermon casting the vision of what a disciple is and how congregations can participate in a mission greater than merely keeping their doors open. In the Parable of the Talents, two trusted with resources hear, "Well done, good and faithful servants." So, a question asked concerned what congregations participating in the life of the Trinity look like as they seek to be faithful with what the Master has entrusted to them.

At the end of the prepared sermon, a divine nudge raised a challenge for those present. Each congregation submitted paperwork for the Church Conference; one report was a Mission and Ministry report. The last question of this report asks what, if anything, the congregation needs from the district superintendent or Annual Conference to help the congregation accomplish its mission. The congregations represented had answered that question with "nothing." They submitted that they did not need additional training or help fulfilling their missions. However, all but a couple of the congregations had not reported the reception of a new member nor a baptism for over a decade. The divine nudge sought exposure of this gap. The following statement was made, "If your congregation is reaching new people for Jesus, then I understand why you would say you do not need additional assistance. However, most of us here are not fulfilling our mission of reaching new people for Jesus. So, why would your congregation submit that no additional assistance is needed to accomplish your mission?" The room became

quieter, but after the Church Conference, several expressed appreciations for raising the concern. No district superintendent had been willing to illuminate the disconnect between the congregations' responses to the report and their stated desire to reach new people in their communities. The divine nudge invited those present to enter into the perichoretic activity of God in a new way.

At the conclusion of the Church Conference, appointed and assigned leaders received a scripture rock that could fit into one's pocket. The district superintendent had prayed over it for Pastor Appreciation Month. It was a gentle reminder and an encouragement for the congregations to do something to encourage their appointed and assigned leaders.

The Church Conferences elicited enthusiasm similar to what transpired at the Quarterly Meetings described in chapter one. The response to the new format for Church Conferences was overwhelming. In addition to the increased attendance, genuine excitement amongst the leaders and laity existed because they saw they were part of a much larger group and connection. Additionally, congregations received recognition for how they responded to the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit that they had experienced and certificates for paying 100% of apportionments and Five Star Mission Churches. One pastor said that next year, he was bringing his entire family. Several laypersons said they would let their churches know what happened during the Church Conference and that they needed to be a part of it.

The appointed and assigned leaders appreciated receiving gifts and being recognized and affirmed publicly. Once again, none of these leaders had ever had a district superintendent express appreciation and gratitude for their ministries during Pastor Appreciation Month. One positive from these gestures and efforts was that they created a positive buzz amongst the appointed and assigned leaders and the district laity. However, the most vital aspect of the worship cluster Church Conferences and gifts was experiencing the Father's love through the Son's grace in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Rather than the Church Conference being a check-it-off event, participants were invited to an evangelical ontological doxological economic Trinitarian relationship with one another, their district superintendent, and the Triune God.

Following the Church Conference, the appointed and assigned leaders worked with their respective Administrative Councils to complete and submit how the congregation would put each spiritual muscle into words. Several pastors developed a sermon series to aid the congregation in aligning with their stated mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world. Other pastors chose to write multiple articles for their congregations' newsletters, expounding on the various aspects of what it looked like to be participating with our Triune God and growing as a disciple.

Throughout the Fall, my wife and I invited pastors and spouses to the district parsonage on Friday evenings. Typically, three couples ate a meal followed by dessert and coffee in the living room. The history of the Embarras River District had been one of non-participation in district-wide activities, and these evenings created more connection and community amongst the leadership and between the congregations. Inviting smaller groups to the district parsonage allowed people with similar interests or in similar stages of life to experience the communion of the Holy Spirit and grace of the Son in ways that

formed community. After these intimate dinner opportunities, several couples continued to connect and get together for mutual support and friendship.

On the first Saturday in December, thirteen retired clergy and spouses living within the district's bounds gathered at the district parsonage for a brunch. Previously, retirees and spouses participated whenever events transpired for those serving in active ministry. This occasion was planned solely for them. As the retirees and spouses shared about their respective ministries and how God continued to work through each in retirement, the love of the Father and the grace of the Son became evident. The communion of the Holy Spirit materialized before our eyes.

Just as a community's relationship with God is reciprocal, those gathered could ask the district superintendent anything they wished. Some knew one another, while others were delighted to make new acquaintances. This relationship-building time also allows the district superintendent to network and discover who may be available to assist congregations if/when the need arises. All who participated expressed deep appreciation because they had been seen and prioritized.

In a manner akin to Jesus' statement about the sabbath being for people and not people for the sabbath, far too often, District Christmas Parties become an obligation placed upon the appointed and assigned leaders rather than an event for fellowship and community building. The district parsonage dinners replaced the community-building, which occasionally happened at a Christmas party. Care was expressed during a high-stress season by not placing additional obligations upon the leaders and their families. Upon receiving Christmas cards mentioning a donation in their honor to Preachers' Aid, retired clergy expressed deep appreciation for the expression of God's love sent in their honor. The donation to Our Conference Our Kids elicited a similar response from the appointed and assigned leaders in the district. Both groups experienced the communion of the Holy Spirit and the love of the Father in ways that led them to offer the grace of the Son to others during that Christmas Season as they honored the district superintendent by meeting the needs of others.

In February 2020, the district-wide retreat opportunity for the appointed and licensed leaders within the district occurred at the Ballard Nature Center, located a few miles southwest of Effingham. The opportunity brought leaders together and aided them in centering themselves before the Lenten season. Those present enjoyed various recreational and refreshing activities, meeting the unique needs of all who participated. The day was designed with minimal structure so that participants would have maximum freedom to connect with God and follow however they were led. The only scheduled pieces included gathering as a group for The Hours—a time of scripture reading and prayer at 9 a.m., 11:45 a.m., and 3 p.m., and lunch.

The leaders participated in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit that day. Approximately twenty registered, and nineteen attended. Several commented at the end of the day how refreshed and renewed they were. Others shared their appreciation for a retreat that was indeed a retreat, not another seminar in which they would leave exhausted rather than renewed. Everyone said they would talk to those who had yet to participate to let them know this was an event they should prioritize the next time. This opportunity provided space to reconnect with God, colleagues, and their district superintendent. Participants left feeling loved,

valued, and appreciated. It created a deeper level of trust in a system rife with suspicion.

The third season of the year for the district superintendent is Appointment-Making. While most appointments happen in the Spring of the year with an expected July 1st start date, other appointments happen at various points and times throughout the year. These times of appointed or assigned leadership change are the most concentrated opportunities for the district superintendent to work with the lay leadership of a congregation.

In the early Fall of 2019, the Appointive Cabinet expressed how they were a team and had one another's backs. The bishop had said Embarras River District pastors were not eligible to fill the open church due to my being new. However, in discernment, it became apparent that God wanted a particular pastor from the Embarras River District for the appointment. I spoke with the bishop, who said it was my district, and he trusted me. I offered the pastor's name to the Table, and their discernment was to appoint the pastor, thus leaving an opening in the Embarras River District in September.

As I prepared for the initial meeting with the Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committee, I noticed something strange in the congregation's file. So, while meeting with the committee, I passed out sheets that contained this group's evaluations of the previous pastor. We read the sheet, and I asked if those gathered noticed anything. No one saw anything out of place. I then let them know that no one was holding the same year of the evaluation for the previous pastor, and yet every word on each report was identical. Heads dropped around the room. I let the folks in the room know that they have a district superintendent who reads the reports they submit. Then, a discussion occurred around their vital contribution to the team and ministry. Their assessments seek to help their pastor grow and to communicate to the district superintendent how the pastor is growing and improving and what the congregation's needs are. If they fail to fulfill their responsibility, it ultimately hinders God's ability to grow their pastor's ministry and the more significant work within the community. Their reports were no longer "cut-n-paste" submissions, and they sincerely appreciated the accountability and care.

Upon returning to the next Cabinet meeting, I shared the profile of the open church in the Embarras River District with the Table. The only criteria for those to be nominated were that the person had to have been at their current appointment for more than five years and be in a particular salary range. The Cabinet works as a team and shares nominations to fill open churches. Unfortunately, no names came forward. I felt betrayed. I followed God's leading by nominating a pastor who left an opening for one of the appointments in the district. Looking through the Conference Journal, it became apparent that no one in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference met the criteria.

This realization led to a time of prayer. God was the reason the opening existed. So, God would have to be the one to fill the opening. During prayer, the name of a former college roommate came to mind. While driving home, I called a former roommate who shared that he had been praying and telling God that he could not remain at the church he was serving and that something needed to happen. Moments after he prayed, he received my call. This pastor was an excellent match for the needs of the open appointment, and the community was close enough that his wife could keep her job and commute to her teaching position. This is an example of what happens as a district

superintendent is fulfilling the missional strategist role by breathing in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit and breathing out worship, praise, mission, and ministry. In this instance, the pastor has repeatedly shared that ministry is more enjoyable now than at any other time. The churches he serves are growing, and people are responding to the Gospel's good news.

While meeting with various Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committees following the current leader's announcement that the appointment or assignment was changing, the group would begin telling the district superintendent what they wanted in their next assigned or appointed leader. After a moment or two, I would like to say, "Thank you all for coming and for your excitement around our work. However, I will say something strongly, and then we can unpack it together. I do not care what you want in the next person, and I believe you also care about what God wants for this congregation/charge." After sharing this, folks around the table would be shocked to hear the first part but fully agree with the second. These encounters opened the opportunity to talk with those present about the importance of praying and seeking God's will, which was their preparation for this meeting.

A teaching moment presents itself at these points, and the district superintendent can lead the group in a simple prayer time. Following the prayer, the district superintendent can share, "As much as you care about your church and as much as you love the people in this community, I am absolutely sure that God cares for and loves them more." There was never disagreement about this assertion. Individuals would then share what they believed God was saying about what is needed next. I jotted notes looking for overlaps from the responses of the Pastor-Staff Parish Committee. The overlaps are where God's Spirit leads and will be an excellent place to start the group's further discernment of God's will and direction.

As the Pastor-Staff Parish shares, the district superintendent continues praying and asking for God's presence and guidance. Particular attention to hearing what question(s) God is asking in this setting for the good of the congregation and the next person the bishop will send. In multiple situations, the people kept discussing the need for more children and youth because "the children are the future of our church." My response was that the children are not the future of that church, and the next question was, "How many of your grown children have stayed in this community?" Few, if any, hands would go up. This led to sharing, "We live in rural Illinois. Most of our kids grow up and move away to find work. While the children may be the future of some churches, they will not likely be this congregation's future. If you put all your eggs in the "children are the future basket," you will likely find your basket empty. Transformed adults ages twenty-five to thirty-five are the future of your congregation. They have deep enough roots that they will have a higher likelihood of staying, and they are the ones who will bring their children."

In one situation, I sensed the Holy Spirit asking, "Do you want children because they are less threatening and less likely to change things?" The fascinating aspect of this exchange was that the laity gathered allowed the question to penetrate beyond their ears to their hearts. The group responded in the affirmative and then expressed that such a way of being the church needed to change.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, there was little broad-based opportunity to engage with the laity beyond Church Conferences and times with specific Pastor-Staff

Parish Relation Committees. Following the pandemic, the bulk of my time with congregations on a broad-based scale centered around disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church and laity questions.

However, the most exciting example of being a Missional Strategist via evangelic ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships resulted from a conversation with a retired pastor during consultations about his desire to no longer continue serving. The congregation was averaging around 150 in worship and served by this part-time retired pastor. Thus, their compensation was well below the minimum for a full-time person, and they needed a parsonage. Therefore, the distance from the church for the next pastor is limited. To complicate matters even more, this congregation had a thriving mission program in which a significant percentage of the church was involved in hands-on mission opportunities in the community and throughout the state. The potential for the church was significant, but the future leadership options were limited.

From various times of discernment, two pastors' names continued to rise as potentials to follow the soon-to-be re-retired pastor. While many people attempt discernment by offering up a prayer and then doing what they "feel" is best, the reality is that the Ancient Church has had valuable discernment practices throughout history. One such process is the subject of a book by Danny Morris and Charles Olsen entitled *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*.¹³⁴ While spending extended periods in prayer and working through this discernment process, I was awakened one night with the question, "Why choose?" In a moment of clarity, the prayer recommended to young Samuel left my lips, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening."

The answer to the simple prayer was to align three congregations and appoint two part-time pastors. One pastor would be three-quarter time, and the other would be half-time, thus allowing the church to take some half-steps toward being full-time without the entire economic cost crushing them. It also gave a pastor excellent leadership potential and an opportunity to grow, learn, and develop new skills for pastoral ministry and leading staff. The difficulty, however, was that neither pastor had ever led an organization this size or complex.

Unlike anything previously tried in the Annual Conference, the Bishop and Appointive Cabinet approved the new alignment. Then, the two pastors agreed to the possibility of team ministry and were on board to be mentored by the district superintendent. Lastly, the three congregations agreed to be a part of the experiment that would now have two part-time pastors leading a worshipping congregation of over two hundred in three locations.

Over the next year, the pastors and I met for prayer, scriptural study, and discernment. On multiple occasions, we anticipated an hour and a half, which turned into over three hours, and no one wanted to leave. Our Triune God's presence was manifest regularly in our midst. These pastors developed practices of listening more deeply and remaining perichoretically connected through constant prayer, which led to them experiencing greater participation in the life of the Trinity.

The pandemic hit the congregations hard and caused a significant amount of conflict. Each pastor shared that they had never experienced such a significant conflict or attack in their previous ministries. However, they also shared that they were

¹³⁴ Appendix E contains the process outlined, and Appendix F contains a pictorial form.

emerging stronger amid the conflict because of how much they had grown in their relationships with our Triune God, one another, and their district superintendent.

To address the unhealthy conflict during Administrative Council meetings, the pastors chose to institute a time of communion and prayer at the start of each meeting. Within a couple of months, the tone and tenor of the meetings began to change. People replaced hostility toward one another with demonstrations of love and support. At one point, the pastors shared with me that their laity who served on the Ad Council was sharing how their home lives were becoming more peaceful. Friends, neighbors, and co-workers initiated spiritual conversations and asked questions about the church and Jesus.

Some principles shared with the pastors over the months included what Rev. Dr. Russell May shared during seminary that were/are life-transforming. The first was that the power of the pastorate (now all ministries) is in the question. Questions are healthier and more effective than statements. The second is that while people say you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink—one can always make the horse drink by salting the oats. Spirit-led questions salt the oats. And the third was that everyone has at least two theologies—the one the person believes and the one the person lives. Part of what it means to lead in the evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships is asking questions that bring the unconscious gap between a person's two theologies to his or her consciousness.

While these are valuable lessons for pastors and laity, they are efficacious for the district superintendent who is living out the missional strategist component by asking questions that salt the oats in ways that culminate in laity and leaders wanting to drink, and asking questions that help bring people's theological believed and lived gaps to their respective consciousnesses, and assist them in entering into a Trinitarian respiration way of living that bears fruit while growing their spiritual muscles in the areas of worship, fellowship, ministry, evangelism, and stewardship. The next chapter will clarify the learnings gained from the responses to questionnaires sent out and returned from the laity and those appointed and assigned from the Embarras River District.

Chapter 5 "Evaluation and Concluding Thoughts"

The thesis of this dissertation is that the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the district superintendent increased as he/she lives into the role of Missional Strategist via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. Chapter one presented a sketch of the history of the position of district superintendent that illustrated how the role had changed over the years from fulfilling the mission to save souls and spread scriptural holiness throughout the land to one primarily concerned with supervision and administration.

In chapter two, the theological and scriptural underpinnings of the thesis were presented through John Wesley's soteriology and ecclesiology to illustrate the importance of evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships and how such relationships lead to the district superintendent's enablement to effectively and faithfully live out being "the load-bearing points of the Methodist system."¹³⁵ Chapter three laid out an expectant view of the district superintendent as the Chief Missional Strategist, which rests wholly and entirely on a foundation of John Wesley's belief that the essence of the church is not functionalist "as a means of grace at all" but rather the ultimate reality of "the ontology of the church as communion with God and one another in vibrant Trinitarian terms."¹³⁶ Chapter four sought to present how the various aspects presented in Chapter three came together in a real-world context and various positives and negatives from my limited vantage point.

Chapter five will present information gleaned from those appointed and assigned to the Embarras River District and the laity who served on various Pastor-Staff Parish Relations Committees with whom D.S. Renner had significant direct contact. Additionally, this chapter will offer evaluation and potential next steps to assist future district superintendents in living out the Chief Missional Strategist role faithfully and fruitfully through evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships.

Two questionnaires¹³⁷ were distributed throughout the district—one to those appointed/assigned and one to the laity who served on P/SPRCs. While the questionnaires did not utilize a rigorous methodology that would yield statistically significant data, the questionnaires did provide some critical insights into how the laity and those appointed and assigned in the district experienced and responded to the participatory Trinitarian relationships embodied by the district superintendent as Chief Missional Strategist presented in this dissertation.

An amazing ninety-two percent of respondents said they significantly saw and experienced the Triune God's presence upon district superintendent Renner. Almost half expressed that the experience of the Triune God's presence was less present with previous district superintendents. Living and relating via Trinitarian relationships led every respondent to affirm that his/her trust in the district superintendent was deepened. The trust level that developed between the district superintendent and leadership extended to greater trust within the congregations and between laity and leadership

¹³⁵ Warner, 51.

¹³⁶ Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 211.

¹³⁷ Appendix G contains the Appointed/Assigned questionnaire, and Appendix H contains the Laity questionnaire.

within the congregations. A small number, sixty-seven percent, expressed that trust in the Annual Conference deepened. Meanwhile, twenty-five percent were unsure, and one person was positive that trust in D.S. Renner did not extend to increased trust in the Annual Conference.

Concerning the trust factor, one person wrote of D.S. Renner, "His way of relating to me builds trust in the Annual Conference, especially if there are more people who conduct themselves in the caring and trustworthy manner as does he." Another wrote, "My answer is a 'qualified yes.' With the Annual Conference being such a large organization and having experienced certain trust-eroding actions firsthand, I cannot say that I 'completely' trust the Annual Conference. However, my interactions with Rev. Renner have directionally built my trust in the Annual Conference." When asked, "How has the depth of trust in various relationships [between you and the D.S., between you and church leadership] improved with how D.S. Renner related to you compared to previous District superintendents?" Once again, ninety-two percent said greatly improved, and one person said about the same. These responses are significant evidence that greater trust was developed as the district superintendent faithfully lived out his Chief Missional Strategist role via participatory Trinitarian relationships.

The following section sought to clarify multiple aspects of community life that may have affected the respondents' relationships between themselves and the district superintendent. Concerning the questionnaire's areas of openness and vulnerability, one person wrote, "D.S. Renner's relationship with me has improved my willingness to be open and vulnerable with my congregational leaders because I trust D.S. Renner to work with us and support us when needed." Another shared, "The congregational leaders have shared many struggles openly and honestly." Another shared, "My congregational leaders are more trusting of D.S. Renner, and I believe that has led to their being more open and vulnerable with him." Such evidence demonstrates that interjecting health in one part of the system leads to greater systemic health. When the district superintendent remains connected to the Vine by participating in evangelic ontological doxological economic relationships, the likelihood of others living similarly increases, leading to more excellent health throughout the congregational systems.

While necessary conversations were not always easy, the district superintendent must follow faithfully where the Triune God is leading. One respondent shared, "D.S. Renner went above and beyond to be open and transparent. Sharing and caring in a way that I had not experienced with prior D.S. He helped them to see that they were functioning unhealthily as leaders." Another expressed, "Very relatable and easy to speak with. The congregation felt comfortable sharing with him. Very approachable."

Regarding "trust & reliance" and "support & encouragement," eighty-three percent chose greatly improved due to their relationships with the current district superintendent compared to previous district superintendents. The remaining seventeen percent believed their trust and reliance levels had remained about the same. Some responses included: "My leaders always felt very comfortable conversing with D.S. Renner. They may not always like what they hear, but they always feel valued by D.S. Renner. He always had time to listen, and they trusted him." "Under D.S. Renner, the congregations, leadership, and I have grown to trust and rely on the Annual Conference more." "He is committed, so I support all that he leads in. Not always true of other D.S.es, and AC leaders." "D.S. Renner came and supported our leaders during a

controversial time. He embodied the love of Christ as he prayed and was present with them." In one situation, staff conflict was significant and engulfed the larger congregation. I was present for a hostile congregational meeting with the appointed leadership. By the end, the group gathered around to pray for a parishioner who succumbed to the heat in the sanctuary. I returned the following evening to listen and pray with several laity deeply hurt by what transpired the previous evening. The result was greater desire amongst the laity to participate with our Triune God such that God's Spirit was tangibly present with them.

The following questionnaire section relates to agape love and an increased connection with our Triune God, comparing D.S. Renner with previous district superintendents. Again, eighty-three percent expressed that these areas of congregational life had greatly improved by being in Trinitarian relationships as the district superintendent sought to be the chief missional strategist. Responses in this section included: "My relationship with D.S. Renner has increased both my experience of and desire to live in the agape love of our Triune God." "John Wesley described an increase of Agape love shed abroad in the hearts of those who increased their connection with the Triune God. I believe that D.S. Renner has facilitated an atmosphere for positive growth in the love between myself, the congregational leaders, and our local congregation and our Triune God." "Prior to meeting and developing a relationship with D.S. Renner I had never experienced the Triune God meaningfully. This experience was on a next-level holy relationship. I don't remember even having the conversation about a Triune God with previous D.S." "Rev. Renner's approach, his reliance on the Triune God, and the relationship that we have as a result of those things have helped me to definitely become more loving toward the congregations whom I serve and the communities in which they are located." However, perhaps one of the purest and life-affirming statements was also one of the simplest, as one respondent wrote, "I now have a greater capacity to see people like Jesus." This is significant evidence that greater fruitfulness and faithfulness are developed as the district superintendent lived out his Chief Missional Strategist role via participatory Trinitarian relationships.

The last section of the questionnaires provided respondents an opportunity to "share an example of how D.S. Renner has related and led that has aided in you and/or your congregation participating more fully in the evangelical, ontological, economic, doxological Trinitarian presence of God...." One person shared, "D.S. Renner's sermons at our Charge Conferences have challenged us in our relationship with God. His focus is on making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world." Another related, "He consistently reminds us that for all relationships to be as God desires, we first must be rooted in Him." Another wrote, "Rev. Renner's candidness and honesty with me have encouraged me to extend the same to the congregations whom I serve." One person expressed the following, "The openness, honesty, and resulting trust that Rev. Renner has displayed and built have led me to be even more convinced of my need to strive for the complete holiness that can only be attained through God's grace and mercy, and the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ. This has emboldened my messages to the congregations, encouraging them to seek that right relationship with God to which we are all called."

The responses showed increased experience in connection with the Triune God compared to previous district superintendents, and that this connection had rippling effects beyond one's relationship with the district superintendent. Additionally, the responses convey that human efforts and ingenuity were not an acceptable substitute for what springs out of a life lived in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, a couple of appointed leaders shared about the relational transformations that were taking place at the church and beyond. Their antidote supports the thesis that the district superintendent will be most fruitful and faithful as a Chief Missional Strategist when he/she participates in evangelical ontological doxological economic Trinitarian relationships. The appointed leaders conveyed that the administrative council meetings contained significant mistrust and contentiousness. Lay leadership wanted the district superintendent to come and assist in a way that would bring peace and harmony. Rather than directly interjecting the district superintendent, the pastors were encouraged to pray and seek our Triune God's will and direction. From their discernment, they decided to begin each administrative council meeting with communion. As this became a regular practice for the group, the amount of in-fighting and unrest lessened and no longer existed after a few months. The group began to share more openly with one another and spent time discerning together the ministry and direction God wanted to accomplish in and through that congregation. Even more exciting is that the appointed leadership shared that the laity who served on the administrative council shared that family relationships and work interactions had become healthier and more enjoyable.

The results of the questionnaires and antidotes from appointed leadership, as noted above, are all expressions of relational health, fruitfulness, and faithfulness resulting from a relationship that is alive and active with the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit and provide significant evidence for the effectiveness of a participatory Trinitarian vision of the district superintendent as the Chief Missional Strategist.

While hoping that such a way of living would produce numeric growth, that did not happen. Eight months into embodying the participatory Trinitarian pattern of a Chief Missional Strategist, as described in chapters three and four, the process was disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The shutting down of churches made numeric growth impossible. Nevertheless, most of the unrest and conflicts during the pandemic stemmed from congregations led by appointed and assigned persons who chose not to utilize the resources presented in Chapter Four. Churches that remained focused on making disciples experienced less outward conflict than those living for themselves, but all congregations experienced a statistical decline from pandemic shutdowns.

In addition to the massive disruption brought on by the pandemic, conflict, politics, and separation in the United Methodist Church disrupted the process of embodying a participatory Trinitarian vision of the district superintendent as the Chief Missional Strategist. The United Methodist Church came into being in 1968. In 1972, the General Conference added language to the Book of Discipline, stating that homosexual behavior is not compatible with Christian teaching. After stating the position of the United Methodist Church clearly, continuous conflict over human sexuality has existed. In 2019, the Council of Bishops called a Special General Conference to address only the United

Methodist's position on human sexuality. Rather than bringing resolution, the conflict increased as the General Conference reaffirmed its 1972 position.

By the end of 2019, various factions within the United Methodist Church came together and created a document known as the Protocol For Separation. Many believed this document would settle the denomination's impasse if approved and implemented by the 2020 General Conference. However, the 2020 General Conference never occurred due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Nevertheless, the 2019 Special General Conference did make provisions for pastors and congregations to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. However, the disaffiliation provision allowed Annual Conference Trustees to create varied processes, and many were complicated and costly.

The systemic anxiety created by the disaffiliation process caused further disruption. It pushed the Chief Missional Strategist component of superintending to a subordinate priority as town hall meetings were scheduled throughout the district to answer questions and meet with congregations as they sought to make decisions. During a town hall meeting, one participant asked what I believed was really going on. I responded that this entire thing is a distraction from fulfilling our mission of making disciples of Jesus the Christ. At another town hall meeting with a local congregation, I pointed out that I had been the district superintendent for almost four years and never asked to come to talk about making disciples for Jesus, but this was the third opportunity requested and provided to discuss the possibility of disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church. If such priorities stay the same, the denominational name on the door will not matter. They will continue to decline. In May 2023, only three congregations disaffiliated in the Embarras River District at the initial Special Disaffiliation Conference in Illinois Great Rivers.

The pandemic and disaffiliations derailed and hindered the possibility of embodying the Trinitarian participation with most laity as presented in chapter three. Due to other scheduled meetings, the PPRC pieces of training did not happen. The priorities raised in chapter three around significant missional engagement with the laity beyond the annual Church Conferences were impossible, as were the mission trips within the district, the United States, and outside the United States. COVID protocols and travel restrictions prohibited these aspects of evangelical ontological doxological economic Trinitarian participation. Redeeming routines allowing opportunities for reflection and experiencing mountaintop time required more emotional and psychological energy than the district superintendent, those appointed and assigned, and the laity had available. Surviving was a higher priority than thriving, significantly hindering the potential of experiencing a new way of living in relationship with our Triune God and one another.

In mid-May 2023, I began transitioning to a new appointment as the Executive Assistant to the Bishop. As described in chapter three, this change made it impossible to completely embody the participatory Trinitarian vision of the district superintendent as the Chief Missional Strategist. It is worth noting that the next district superintendent over what was the Embarras River District will have thirteen complete the requirements to disaffiliate at the special Annual Conference in December 2023.

In a group setting, a bishop recalled reading an internal study document presented to the Counsel of Bishops. It is critical to incorporate what was stressed by that Bishop concerning the study that determined that increasing the number of district superintendents should be a high priority as the Annual Conference seeks to fulfill their

mission of making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world. Unfortunately, due to financial limitations and disaffiliations, Annual Conferences are reducing the number of district superintendents and increasing the geographical areas each superintendent oversees. Consequently, the critical role of the Chief Missional Strategist is subjugated to the urgency of administrative and supervisory needs as district superintendents have increasing numbers of churches and appointed/assigned leaders under their care. Such has taken place in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference as a reorganization led to ten districts served by ten district superintendents becoming five districts served by five district superintendents.

While such changes have proliferated throughout the United Methodist Church in the United States in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and disaffiliations, the increased territories and the number of congregations and leaders for which a district superintendent is responsible make community building and connection increasingly difficult. The inability to know appointed and assigned leaders and congregations significantly restricts a district superintendent's ability to embody a participatory Trinitarian way of being the Chief Missional Strategist. It requires abundant personal interactions with those in leadership to cultivate trust and the other aspects included in the questionnaires.

As the questionnaire responses showed, the district superintendent living out the Chief Missional Strategist aspect via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships leads to greater trust and a more profound experience with our Triune God. Therefore, as districts expand geographically, efforts to secure assistants for district superintendents in administration will be vital. To embody a participatory Trinitarian way of superintending, the district superintendent should prioritize direct supervision of congregations and assigned/appointed leaders and allow assistants to represent the district on Annual Conference committees and at church closings. Many district superintendents are choosing to allocate their time to church closings and committee responsibilities and having assistants engage more closely with the leaders and laity in the district. Such decisions are a misallocation of resources, dramatically reducing the potential to fulfill the Chief Missional Strategist component of the position fruitfully.

As mentioned in chapter one, the purpose of Methodism was to spread scriptural holiness across the land. Chapter two mentioned the danger found in diluting an institution's purpose. Today, the denomination is far from its roots: "We have nothing to do but save souls and spread scriptural holiness throughout the land." Despite the language used by the United Methodist Church about making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the energy, time, and conversations center around other priorities. These other priorities currently serve as the rudder for this once-great denomination.

District superintendents seeking to fulfill their Chief Missional Strategist roles via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships lead to a Vine connection that prioritizes disciple-making and resisting the dilution of the United Methodist Church's mission. One example of diluting the mission is how some in the U.S. UMC exercise activism. As presented earlier in the dissertation, modernity's

wager¹³⁸ and reliance upon human ingenuity are antithetical to participatory Trinitarian relationships. Activism, as often embodied in the United Methodist Church, dehumanizes and alienates people. In contrast, participatory Trinitarian relationships embody peace in ways that multiply connections between people and lead to embrace.

Commonly, one hears, "No justice, no peace." However, scripturally, peace means relational wholeness. Therefore, until there is "peace," there is little hope of justice. "To agree on justice in conflict situations, you must want more than justice; you must want embrace. There can be *no justice without the will to embrace*. It is, however, equally true that there can be *no genuine and lasting embrace without justice*."¹³⁹ While justice is essential, only having justice moves away from participatory Trinitarian relationships and leads to very dark places. "If you want justice and nothing but justice, you will inevitably get injustice. If you want justice without injustice, you must want love."¹⁴⁰

Future district superintendents seeking to live out their Chief Missional Strategist roles via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships will be more fruitful and faithful as they love mercy and seek justice. However, "Justice will be done to each person when each person finds himself or herself reconciled with us in the embrace of the triune God.... For only in our mutual embrace within the embrace of the triune God can we find redemption and experience perfect justice."¹⁴¹

In addition to the shift from justice to embrace that flows from the evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian way of relating put forth throughout this dissertation, it will behoove district superintendents and the United Methodist Church to keep the salvific essence of grace at the forefront. As expressed in chapter two, when the salvific character separates from grace, it is no longer Trinitarian or Wesleyan. "Grace, for Wesley, is Christocentric, pneumatological, and Trinitarian.... We have this grace not *from* Christ but in him.... For Wesley, there is no other grace than one that is identical with the Triune God's economic activity in the gospel."¹⁴²

An additional shift, mentioned in chapter two, is integral around the current emphasis of the three simple rules. "Wesley warned that true religion is not found in avoiding evil, doing good, and attending all the ordinances of God: 'this is only the outside of that religion,' which cannot 'satisfy . . . a soul that is athirst for God, the living God.'"¹⁴³ As several of the respondents to the survey mentioned, their relationship with the district superintendent led them to desire and attain a deeper relationship with the Triune God. Embodying the gospel and participating in the perichoretic dance is far superior to emphasizing the three simple rules. Breathing in the love of the Father through the grace of the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and breathing out mission, ministry, praise, and worship leads to what Wesley understood as true religion:

¹³⁸ The belief that a person or group is able to be fruitful primarily through human effort with little to no divine activity.

¹³⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Revised and Updated, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 202.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁴² Colyer, *The Trinitarian Dimension*, 143.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

The religion that we long for, and of which the societies are only the outward *form*, is "The knowledge of God in Christ Jesus; 'the life that is hid with Christ in God'; the being 'joined unto the Lord in one Spirit'; the having 'fellowship with the Father and the Son,'" in short the soteriologically and ecclesiologically constitutive participatory Trinitarian *reality* of the gospel.¹⁴⁴

Lastly, it is imperative that future district superintendents model community and accountability within the Appointive Cabinet and the district if he or she genuinely desires to be a Missional Strategist via evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships. "Discipleship and discipline within connection are the very form that real Christian love takes in communion with the Triune God of grace who loved us too much to leave us in our sin and guilt, for discipline is love saying, 'We care too deeply about you not to uphold you and hold you accountable.'¹⁴⁵ Suppose the district superintendent truly desires to see disciples of Jesus Christ made and God's moving in and through those disciples to transform the world. In that case, he or she will realize that "failure to be a part of a loving and supportive small-group Christian fellowship that cares enough to hold one another accountable is failure to embody the love of God the Father manifested in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴⁶

The United Methodist Church, and by extension most district superintendents, lack a solid theology of accountability, which was part of the early Methodist movement and fulfilling the mission.

For the church to be the church, it needs connection *and* discipline. Without discipline, Christians always settle for a superficial form of community that does not care deeply enough to get involved in one another's lies at a level where holding each other accountable is an act of profound love. Without connection Christians end up with a conflicted community in which various factions, no longer living in connection, struggle to impose their agendas on one another via parliamentary, political, juridical, or other avenues of power.¹⁴⁷

Such is where the United Methodist Church currently finds itself. By unwittingly choosing to participate primarily via human ingenuity and initiative, district superintendents and others throughout the system embody the reality that "connection without discipline leads to superficial community, discipline without connection ends up in a divisive, conflicted, litigious community that resorts to coercive power to solve its problems."¹⁴⁸ The thrust of this dissertation is to present an alternative. As stated in the introduction and shown throughout this dissertation, district superintendents in the United Methodist Church are most effective and faithful to their calls as they intentionally live out the "Chief Missional Strategist" aspect of the position, maximizing

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 235.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 283.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

the potential by engaging in evangelical ontological doxological economic participatory Trinitarian relationships.

Appendix A

Pastor's Name: _____ Church/Charge: _____ Date: _____

This form is due one week in advance of your consultation date.

I believe that disciples of Jesus the Christ produce disciples. As we grow in our discipleship, and others grow in their discipleship, we discover that our Triune God is in the process of transforming our world! As your new DS, I want to take this opportunity to get to know you better. I especially want to hear how you are growing in your relationship with our Triune God! I'm excited to be on this journey with you and the Embarras River District. If you have questions about what is below, please do not hesitate to let Pat or me know. I am truly looking forward to our time together and seeing all that our Triune God has in store for us, the congregations we serve, and the world around us.

Rev. Charliam Renner,
Embarras River District superintendent

Part 1: Your continued growth as a disciple.

Worship: In what ways are you growing in this aspect of your own discipleship?
[Not leading worship...but you personally worshipping.]

Fellowship: In what ways are you growing in your relationships with your clergy colleagues?

Ministry: What ministry do you do that is not a part of your "job"? [This aspect of your discipleship is something you do as an expression of your love for God...not primarily because you are "the pastor".]

Evangelism: In what ways are you growing in this aspect of your own discipleship? How are you connecting, befriending, and developing relationships with the unChurched/de-Churched?

Stewardship: In what ways are you growing in this aspect of your own discipleship?

PART 2: Questions Related to Appointment-Making, to be shared with District superintendent only.

1. Describe how your spiritual gifts and skills continue/or no longer continue to align with the missional needs of your church and community.

2. If you were nominated and discerned for a new appointment, are there any personal or family-related circumstances at this time that limit your ability to move anywhere in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference? If so, your Superintendent may request that you complete and sign an "Advisory Consultation Form on Limited Itinerancy."

3. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Superintendent?

I request to be considered for reappointment to this charge.

I request to be considered for a change of appointment.

Please submit this assessment to the District Office (EmbarrasRiver@igrc.org) at least one week prior to your consultation. Thank you.

Appendix B

Dear colleagues in ministry,

As you are well aware, the mission statement of the United Methodist Church is to **"make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,"** and the Book of Discipline specifically states that *"Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs."* (§¶ 120, *The Book Of Discipline Of The United Methodist Church: 2016*)

We are tasked to make disciples, but what does a "disciple" look like? To what end are we aiming?

Bishop Schnase's Five Practices Of Fruitful Living

- Radical Hospitality (*Fellowship*)
- Passionate Worship (*Worship*)
- Intentional Faith Development (*Discipleship*)
- Mission and Service (*Ministry*)
- Extravagant Generosity (*Stewardship*)

Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life

- You were planned for God's pleasure (*Worship*)
- You were formed for God's family (*Fellowship*)
- You were created to become like God (*Discipleship*)
- You were shaped for serving God (*Ministry*)
- You were made for mission (*Evangelism*)

Our membership vows into the local congregation are: *As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers (Fellowship), your presence (Worship), your gifts (Stewardship), your service (Ministry), your witness (Evangelism).*

For over twenty years, I have utilized the following at each appointment I have led: *We exist to produce fully devoted followers of Jesus the Christ. A fully devoted follower is:*

- 1) *An avid worshipper of God in public and private (Worship)*
- 2) *A loyal-friend who is spiritually-connected with other believers (Fellowship)*
- 3) *A spirit-gifted servant who meets specific human needs (Ministry)*
- 4) *A credible Christian witness in the eyes of nameable pre-Christians (Evangelism)*
- 5) *A generous giver of energy and resources to God's mission here & around the world (Stewardship)*

So, since God has called you into leadership in the United Methodist Church, and our mission statement is to "make disciples for the transformation of the world"; and since leaders cannot lead others where they are not also going...our self-evaluations, P/SPRC assessments of the pastor, and the P/SPRC assessments of the local church are going to be aligned around what a disciple of Jesus is. **A disciple of Jesus is someone who is growing in his/her relationship with God and others by regularly exercising five "spiritual muscle" groups:**

-Worship *"Jesus replied, 'The Scriptures say, you must worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" (Lk 4:8, NLT)*

-Fellowship *"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer." (Acts 2:42, NLT)*

-Ministry *"Then [Jesus] said to the crowd, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.'" (Lk 9:23, NLT)*

-Evangelism *"So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.'" (Lk 14:23, NLT)*

-Stewardship *"And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?" (Lk 16:11, NLT)*

Our Christian walk (discipleship) is a journey. There should be movement and growth in a person's life. As these five "spiritual muscles" **[Worship, Fellowship, Ministry, Evangelism, & Stewardship]** are exercised, space is created for the Holy Spirit to do the work of DISCIPLESHIP in one's life. As disciples are being formed and grown, the congregation continues to change and be transformed into the Body of Christ. As the Body of Christ is present and functioning in individuals' lives, households, and congregations...towns/communities discover transformation is taking place. As communities are transformed the world experiences transformation and is being made new!

So, if we truly desire to be about what our Triune God is seeking to do to transform this world, then it is paramount that our churches participate with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in inviting and assisting people in becoming and growing as disciples. And this will happen most productively as the clergy leaders are growing in their discipleship—their relationships with God and others.

I look forward to our time of consultation and further conversation. I look forward to seeing and hearing how our Triune God is and will be working in and through you and your ministry! Additionally, you are always welcome to ask me how I am growing and exercising these "spiritual muscles" in my life. We are on this journey together!

Grace & Peace,

Charliam Renner,
Embarras River District superintendent

Appendix C

Pastor's Name: _____ Church/Charge: _____ Date: _____

This assessment is due in the district office no later than November 15, 2019

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. A disciple is a fully-devoted follower of Jesus who regularly exercises five 'spiritual muscles': Worship, Fellowship, Ministry, Evangelism, and Stewardship. One aspect of a pastor's responsibility is to lead by example. [*"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11: 1)*] Earlier this year, your pastor completed a self-assessment with respect to how he/she is developing each of these "spiritual muscles." Your pastor will share with your team how he/she is and is planning to do that after your team has completed this assessment.

Directions for the Chairperson: Please copy and distribute (or email) this clergy assessment form to each member of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee **at least one week** in advance of your assessment meeting and ask each to respond individually to the questions. When gathered, with the pastor(s) present and participating, discuss your various responses and come to agreement on a response for each question. **Ask the pastor(s) how they have defined each 'spiritual muscle' and include that information when contacting your team.** Please do not be confined by the space provided; feel free to attach additional sheets if necessary.

Part 1: Spiritual Muscle Development

Worship:

How has your pastor (personally) been growing in this area? What spiritual disciplines does he/she practice? When is his/her sabbath?

Fellowship:

How is your pastor growing in his/her relationships with clergy colleagues—other United Methodist and community clergy?

Ministry:

What ministry or ministries is your pastor doing as a fellow disciple and not because he/she is your pastor?

Evangelism:

**How is your pastor developing relationships with the unChurched/de-Churched?
Stewardship:**

How is your pastor strengthening this 'spiritual muscle' in his/her life?

PART 2: Questions Related to Appointment-Making and the Work of S/PPRC

1. List the gifts and graces of your pastor that you affirm as essential and most helpful to your congregation's efforts to make disciples for the transformation of the world.
2. In the space below, list areas where the pastor could use encouragement and continuing education to strengthen his/her leadership in the congregation's disciple-making ministry.
3. How has your Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee worked to assist your pastor in fulfilling his/her personal growth as a disciple?

4. Does your Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee request a consultation with the District superintendent?

Yes _____

No _____

5. How many times did your Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee meet in the past twelve months? _____

6. Other comments:

Please list name of the S/PPRC members who participated in the assessment.

Date: _____

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Please send to the District Office by **November 15, 2019**.

Remember to keep a copy for your use as you meet during the year. Thank you!

Appendix D

Pastor's Name: _____ Church/Charge: _____ Date: _____

Important: This completed assessment is due in the district office no later than November 15, 2019.

Name of Church/Charge:

Name(s) of Pastor(s):

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. A fully-devoted follower of Jesus is a person who regularly exercises five "spiritual muscle": Worship, Fellowship, Ministry, Evangelism, and Stewardship. *"Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs."* (§ 120, *The Book Of Discipline Of The United Methodist Church: 2016*) So, the district is only able to fulfill its purpose as local congregations live out theirs.

Directions for the Chairperson: Please copy and distribute (or email) this church assessment form to your Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and clergy **at least one week** in advance of your assessment meeting and ask each to respond individually to the questions. When gathered, with the pastor(s) present and participating, discuss your various responses and come to an agreement on a response for each question. Please do not be confined by the space provided; feel free to attach additional sheets if necessary.

Please have your Ad Council describe each "spiritual muscle" for your ministry setting & context. They are free to utilize one of the examples from the cover letter or describe each "spiritual muscle" in their own words.

Part 1: Congregational Spiritual Muscle Development

Worship:

How has your congregation provided opportunities for folks to exercise this "spiritual muscle?" How successful have these endeavors been? What new opportunities will you provide in the future and/or how will you strengthen what you are currently doing?

Fellowship:

How has your congregation provided opportunities for folks to exercise this "spiritual muscle?" How successful have these endeavors been? What new opportunities will you provide in the future and/or how will you strengthen what you are currently doing?

Ministry:

How has your congregation provided opportunities for folks to exercise this 'spiritual muscle'? How successful have these endeavors been? What new opportunities will you provide in the future and/or how will you strengthen what you are currently doing?

Evangelism:

How has your congregation provided opportunities for folks to exercise this "spiritual muscle?" How successful have these endeavors been? What new opportunities will you provide in the future and/or how will you strengthen what you are currently doing?

Stewardship:

How has your congregation provided opportunities for folks to exercise this "spiritual muscle?" How successful have these endeavors been? What new opportunities will you provide in the future and/or how will you strengthen what you are currently doing?

Other comments?

Pastor	Date	P/SPRC Chairperson	Date
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Please send this completed and signed form to the district office by **Nov. 15, 2019**.
Keep a copy for your use during the year. Thank you.

Appendix E

Discerning God's Will Together Process

"The process of discernment invites us into the heart and life of the triune God. Decision making can no longer be defined as doing what we think is best; it should be a search for the mind and will of God within a community of people with whom God has chosen to dwell."¹⁴⁹

Framing: identifies the focus for discernment of God's will. The matters to be included are arranged into a unified whole. The focus of the exploration is briefly described.

Grounding: in a guiding principle jump-starts the process of discernment. The guiding principle is informed by the values, beliefs, and purpose of the discerning community. Boundaries are set.

Shedding: lays aside ego, preconceived notions, false assumptions, biases, and predetermined conclusions so that persons involved in discernment can openly consider the matter.

Rooting: in the tradition connects religious and biblical stories, themes, and images with the situation at hand. The tradition may confront, confirm, nudge, or even transform the direction of the discernment process.

Listening: enables hearing the promptings of the Spirit of God, the voices of all in the discerning community, and the cries of others who may be affected by our discernment.

Exploring: frees our playful imaginations to identify possible options and paths that lie within the guiding principle.

Improving: works in consultation and prayer to improve each option under consideration until it becomes the best that we can imagine it to be within the yearning of God.

Weighing: sorts and tests the options or paths in response to the leading of God's Spirit.

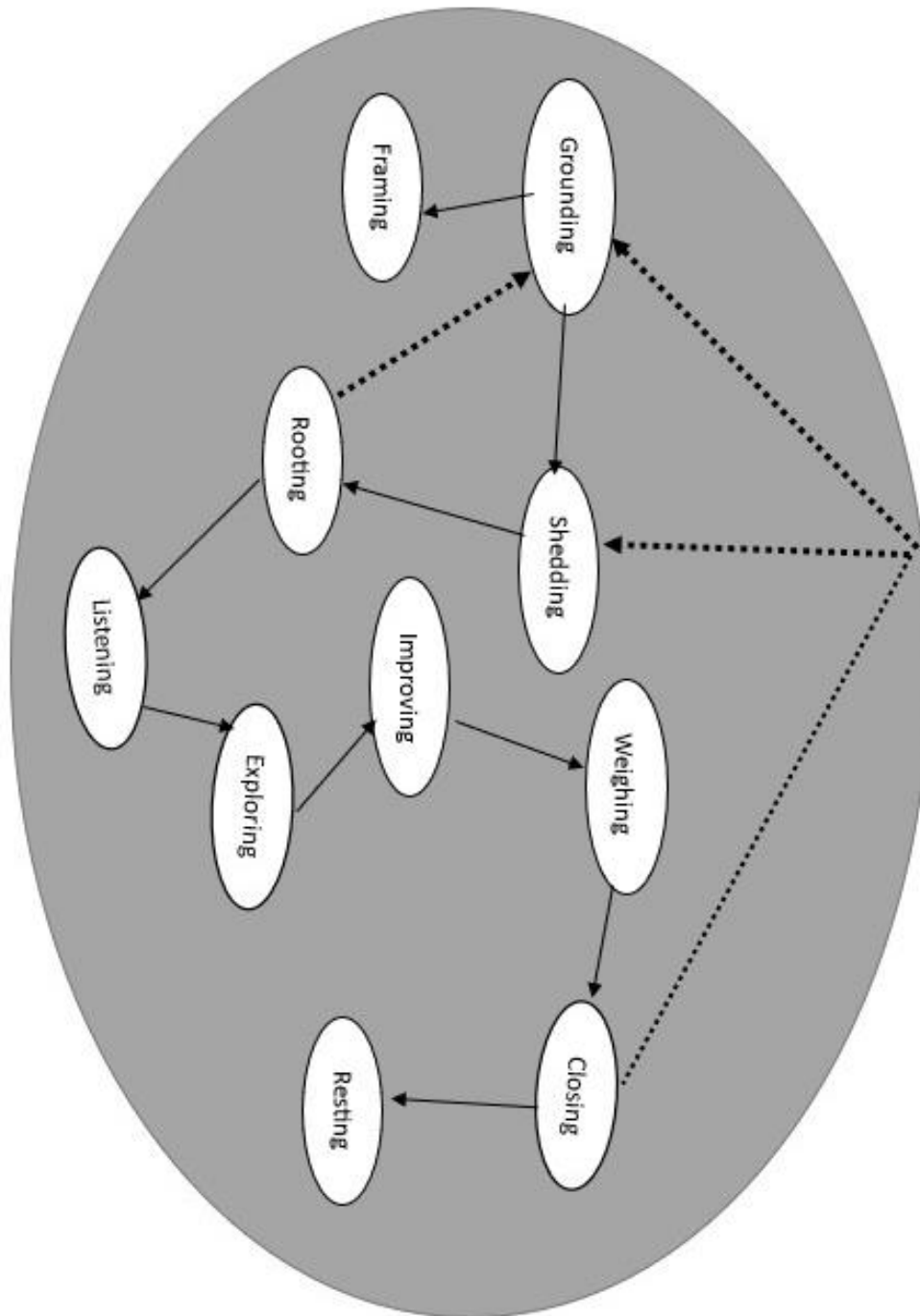
Closing: brings the exploration to a conclusion, moving toward the selection of an option which is given weight by the Spirit of God and the process in which the community is engaged.

Resting: tests the decision by allowing it to rest near the heart to determine whether it brings primarily feelings of consolation (a sense of peace and movement toward God) or desolation (distress and movement away from God).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Danny E. Morris & Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1997), 63-64.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

Appendix F

Stepping Stones for Discernment Process—Visual¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 67

Appendix G

Appointed/Assigned Survey

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in an anonymous survey that will aid D.S. Renner in evaluating the benefit(s) and limitation(s) of the district superintendent embodying the role of Missional Strategist through evangelical, doxological, economic, participatory Trinitarian relationships. This survey is anticipated to take approximately minutes depending on how much you choose to share. If you choose not to participate, thank you for your consideration. If you choose to participate, thank you for taking the time to complete this anonymous survey and assist D.S. Renner in completing his dissertation.

[The scale below is from 1 being Not At All and 10 being Fully & Completely]

1. Have you experienced our Triune God's presence upon D.S. Renner?

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10

2. Have you experienced our Triune God's presence in the midst of your relationship with D.S. Renner?

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10

3. Has the Triune God's presence with previous district superintendents been more present, less present, or about the same as in your relationship with D.S. Renner?

More Present
 About The Same
 Less Present

4. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating with you deepen your relationship with and trust of him?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

5. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen your relationship with and trust of your local church leadership?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

6. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen the relationships and trust with the congregation?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

7. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen your relationship with and trust in the Annual Conference?

Yes No

If yes, please share an example:

8. How was the depth of and trust in the various relationships mentioned in questions 4-7 improved greatly with how D.S. Renner related to you as compared with previous district superintendents?

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

9. The following set of questions asks you to briefly describe if and how the listed aspects of community were affected by your relationship with D.S. Renner:

- a) Openness and vulnerability:

With the district superintendent

With my congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of openness and vulnerability were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

- b) Trust and reliance upon:

With the district superintendent

With my congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of trust and reliance upon were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

c) Support and Encouragement of:
With the district superintendent

With my congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of support and encouragement of were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

d) Agape Love springing from my increased connection with our Triune God:

With the district superintendent

With my congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of Agape Love springing from my increased connection with our Triune God were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

10. If you are willing, please share an example of how D.S. Renner has related and led that has aided you and or your congregation to participating more fully in the evangelical, ontological, economic, doxological Trinitarian presence of God with respect to:

Increased right relationship with God

Increased right relationships within the congregation

11. With respect to the example(s) you shared in question 10, was the potential of them happening more likely, about the same, or less likely with D.S. Renner as compared to previous district superintendents?

More Likely About The Same Less Likely

12. Feel free to share additional information/insights about how you have experienced D.S. Renner in comparison to previous district superintendents and how higher levels of trust could have been fostered.

Appendix H

Laity Survey

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in an anonymous survey that will aid D.S. Renner in evaluating the benefit(s) and limitation(s) of the district superintendent embodying the role of Missional Strategist through evangelical, doxological, economic, participatory Trinitarian relationships. This survey is anticipated to take approximately minutes depending on how much you choose to share. If you choose not to participate, thank you for your consideration. If you choose to participate, thank you for taking the time to complete this anonymous survey and assist D.S. Renner in completing his dissertation.

[The scale below is from 1 being Not At All and 10 being Fully & Completely]

1. Have you experienced our Triune God's presence upon D.S. Renner?

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10

2. Have you experienced our Triune God's presence in the midst of your relationship with D.S. Renner?

1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10

3. Has the Triune God's presence with previous District superintendents been more present, less present, or about the same than in your relationship with D.S. Renner?

More Present
 About The Same
 Less Present

4. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating with you deepen your relationship with and trust of him?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

5. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen your relationship with and trust of your pastor and other church leadership?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

6. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen the relationships and trust with the congregation?

Yes
 No

If yes, please share an example:

7. Did D.S. Renner's way of relating to you deepen your relationship with and trust in the Annual Conference?

Yes No

If yes, please share an example:

8. How was the depth of and trust in the various relationships mentioned in questions 4-7 improved greatly with how D.S. Renner related to you as compared with previous district superintendents?

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

9. The following set of questions asks you to briefly describe if and how the listed aspects of community were affected by your relationship with D.S. Renner:

- a) Openness and vulnerability:

With the district superintendent

With my pastor and congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of openness and vulnerability were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

- b) Trust and reliance upon:

With the district superintendent

With my pastor and congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of trust and reliance upon were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

c) Support and Encouragement of:
With the district superintendent

With my pastor and congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of support and encouragement of were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

d) Agape Love springing from my increased connection with our Triune God:

With the district superintendent

With my pastor and congregational leaders

With my congregation as a whole

With the Annual Conference

The above areas of Agape Love springing from my increased connection with our Triune God were greatly improved, about the same, greatly hindered by my relationship with D.S. Renner as compared with previous district superintendents:

Greatly Improved About The Same Greatly Hindered

10. If you are willing, please share an example of how D.S. Renner has related and led that has aided you and or your congregation to participating more fully in the evangelical, ontological, economic, doxological Trinitarian presence of God with respect to:

Increased right relationship with God

Increased right relationship within the congregation

11. With respect to the example(s) you shared in question 10, was the potential of them happening more likely, about the same, or less likely with D.S. Renner as compared to previous district superintendents?

More Likely About The Same Less Likely

12. Feel free to share additional information/insights about how you have experienced D.S. Renner in comparison to previous district superintendents and how higher levels of trust could have been fostered.

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