A Missiology

for the ELCA Congregation

in the United States Suburban Context

by

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Introduction

A new television show appeared on ABC this season. It's called *Suburgatory*.

Here is the show description:

> Single father George Altman is doing his best to raise his sixteen-year-old daughter Tessa in the big city. When he discovers a box of condoms in her bedroom, though, he decides the time has come to move her to a more wholesome and nurturing environment: the suburbs.
>
> But behind the beautiful homes and perfect lawns lurk the Franken-moms, spray tans, nose jobs, and Red Bull-guzzling teens who have nothing in common with Tessa. It's a whole new world, one that makes George wonder if they haven't jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire.
>
> With the help of suburbanites like old college friend Noah, flirty Alpha mom Dallas and awkward classmate Lisa, George and Tessa slowly learn to navigate the pitfalls of suburban life. With time, they might even find that it isn't so bad. Once you get past the plastic smell.[1]

This satirical description reveals two conflicting stereotypes that many people hold regarding this space we call *the suburbs*. On the one hand there is the idea that the suburbs are a wholesome and nurturing environment where a single father can find shelter from the hazards of urban life for his teenage daughter. On the other hand there is the notion that the suburbs are filled will Franken-moms, spray tans, and plastic people with empty lives.

What is suburbia? Why do such conflicting stereotypes exist? More importantly, what is God's vision for the church in suburbia? This paper will explore these questions

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[1] From the ABC network website. http://beta.abc.go.com/shows/suburgatory/about-the-show (accessed May 8, 2012).

[2] Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Cambridge,

and specifically ask how an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

congregation can embody God's mission in the context of United States Suburbia.

Welcome to the Suburbs

What is a Suburb?

Strictly speaking, a suburb is the populated region that surrounds a central city. It

is not urban and it is not rural, it is sub-urban. It is also called the urban sprawl. This is a

fitting description since the railroads, streets, highways, industrial complexes, civic

centers, and residential units that spider out from the central city resemble a splotch of

ink dropped from the ceiling onto the floor. The population density typically decreases as

the distance from the city and the median household income increases.

Not all suburbs are the same, however. There is not a simple division between

urban life and suburban life. Myron Orfield identifies six distinct types of suburban

communities: *at-risk segregated*, *at-risk older*, *at-risk low density*, *bedroom-developing*,

affluent job centers, and *very affluent job centers*.[2] These six types represent one of the

greatest challenges of suburbia: the socio-economic stratification of the suburban

population.

> Social separation leaves middle-class children in overcrowded, underfunded
> schools, but its more powerful harms accrue to the poor people of color left
> behind in communities of concentrated poverty in many American cities and
> some older suburbs. Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty destroy the lives of
> the people trapped in them and create a growing social and fiscal cancer in the
> midst of previously healthy communities. In cities and older suburbs, as
> joblessness, racial segregation, and single-parent families come to dominate
> neighborhoods, residents are cut off from middle-class society and the private
> economy. Individuals, particularly children, are deprived of successful local role

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[2] Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution Press; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1997), 31-48.

models and connections to opportunities outside their neighborhood. A distinct society emerges with expectations and patterns of behavior at odds with middle-class norms, and the 'exodus of middle and working-class families from ghetto neighborhoods removes an important social buffer.'[3]

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into each of the six types of suburban communities. It will become apparent in the conclusion that one aspect of the missional imagination for the suburban church is to recognize this diversity and begin to move toward a metropolitan awareness and involvement at the local church level.

This paper will focus on the bedroom-developing (B/D) suburb. The B/D suburb is comprised primarily of residential neighborhoods that are separated by great distances from shopping centers, schools, and civic centers. We will focus on the B/D suburb for a number of reasons. First, it is this type of suburb that conjures up the stereotypes caricatured in suburgatory and is most associated with the suburban lifestyle of the United States. Second, this is the place where the largest relative percentage of people live.[4] Third, it is an in-between space. The B/D communities are primarily populated by middle and upper-middle class people. They are not the extremely wealthy of the affluent regions, nor are they the extremely poor of the at-risk communities. Bridge-building is an important component of the missional imagination and the most logical people to build bridges are those who are naturally in the middle. We will see how the B/D suburban church is uniquely positioned to become a connective tissue to the metropolitan church.

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[3] Ibid., 53-54.

[4] Ibid., 42.

The Philosophical History of the B/D Suburbs

The B/D suburban culture of today is the result of modernity that dominated United States culture in the nineteenth century. Six modern, American ideals helped to shape our current situation: *progressivism*, *mechanistic utilitarianism*, *manifest destiny*, *individualism, commodification, and consumerism*.[5] Not all of these are unique to the United States, but all have definitely contributed to the social imagination of the B/D suburbanite. We currently find ourselves in a late/post modern situation where the inertia of their effects still creates a dominant current, but their foundation has crumbled and the younger generation is struggling to find its footing in the world that modernity has created.

Progressivism was the belief that human history was moving forward in a positive direction. The use of reason and technological innovation was part of the evolutionary process that would eventually overcome social evils and deliver humanity into a utopic state of being. This created a type of eschatological, future oriented imagination that fueled the American dream. This progressive dream literally exploded in the modern world's face with the detonation of the nuclear weapons in Japan at the end of World War II. The decades since that moment have shown the unraveling of progressivism. However, the inertia of that vision stills pushes the B/D suburbanite to move forward even today.

Mechanistic utilitarianism was the idea that the universe was best described as a machine that functioned predictably under the laws of physics. Natural resources, both physical elements and human labor, were considered interchangeable parts that propelled

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[5] This is by no means an exhaustive list. These selected ideals will help frame our suburban conversation.

the larger machine. The invention of the steam engine and the gasoline engine propelled us into an ever-increasing need for speed and an insatiable appetite for fossil fuel. The handcrafted work of the artisan was replaced by the mass produced efficiency of the assembly-line. Raw materials were burned up and toxic exhaust was belched out. Human beings were placed into the machine and burned up like fuel as well. The early twentieth century found itself swimming in polluted water and breathing toxic air.

Manifest destiny was the belief that European culture was God's culture and that the discovery of the "New World" was God's gift of land and opportunity to spread this culture. This vision was tied closely to progressivism. The newly formed United States of America believed it was called by God to press into the Western frontiers to convert and/or subdue the heathen and domesticate the wilderness. The Euro-American colonists' mission into the western frontiers led to the deforestation of most of the countryside, the annihilation of Native American culture, and the parceling of land into individual plots of personal property where the lone man could be the king of his own castle.

Individualism was the belief that each person is an autonomous unit, independent of all other people. Individualism had twin faces in the modern era. One face was born from Cartesian rationalism and was propelled by the idea that the individual was an objective observer of the universe. The observer needed only to probe and dissect the objects of nature, apply reason to any question, and all the problems of the world would be solved. The second face was born from Kant's critique of pure reason that led to subjectivism. Kant rejected the idea that the individual was able to ascertain truth as an objective observer and moved the focus to the subjective nature of truth. This move led to radical subjectivism and the popular idea that the individual is the author of truth. Both

objectivism and subjectivism are the twin faces of radical individualism. This modern

notion allowed the individual to easily uproot from family and friends, move across the

country, drive out native inhabitants, mark off personal property, fight for personal rights

and the freedoms of liberty, and do whatever it takes to gain personal success.

Commodification was first exposed and discussed by Karl Marx. He critiqued

Western capitalism for dislocating the common laborer from a sense of place and

reducing her to the labor she produces. This labor then becomes a commodity to be

bought and sold on the free market. There is little difference, in Marx's mind, between

this and slavery. The B/D suburbanite sees herself and the other as items on the market

that can be utilized for one's own needs. Gibson Winter says that the social organization

of suburbanites is one of *impersonality* and *interdependence*. The people we encounter as

we travel from place to place are no longer persons, they are object that can provide a

service. We need the other, but life functions better if that other is a detached non-person.

He says, "who they are becomes secondary to what they can do."[6]

Consumerism is the natural outgrowth of the commodification of self. The free

enterprise market system of capitalism is built upon the need to produce and consume

products. "William Cavanaugh analyzes the problem of consumption in *Being Consumed.*

He quotes a spokesman for General Motors. The goal is 'the organized creation of

dissatisfaction.' For Cavanaugh, 'it is not simply buying but shopping that is at the heart

of consumerism.'"[7] Andy Root claims that a current social imagination for today's youth

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[6] Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis*, 1st ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 22-33.

[7] Cavanaugh is quoted by Roger Helland on his blog *Missional Spirituality*. http://missionalspirituality.com/2012/01/formed-for-gods-mission-6/ (accessed May 17, 2012).

is that we are what we consume. "For the first time in history, many teens are receiving the bulk of the information they use to make decisions about their life from entities who want to sell them something, rather than receiving it from home, from school or from church."[8]

The late twentieth century began to see reactions against these modern ideals. However, the free enterprise, capitalistic socio-economic system of the United States still rewards the individuals who follow this system. It is the dream of a self-made individual who, when she works hard enough, can climb out of the lower classes and move out to the suburbs where she can have her own little piece of Heaven, buy the right products, and have a sense of self that satisfies her, because she deserves it.

The Physical History of the B/D Suburbs

Physical space and geographical location has a strong influence on the human sense of self and relation to the world. It shapes who we are. When we find ourselves in a space that is raw wilderness we tend to see ourselves as a small part of a larger whole. We tend to respect the forces of nature, and seek to survive within the larger natural system. When our space is filled with technology—agricultural dominance of land, large permanent architectural structures, vast networks of public utilities, automated machinery, motorized automobility—we are tempted to believe that we have dominance and control over the physical universe. We are privy to a position of entitlement. The modern ideals have led us to use technology to dominate the physical space we encounter and bring them under our control to serve our purposes.

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[8] Andy Root, *We Are What We Consume – Part 1*. Fuller Youth Institute website. http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/2011/02/we-are-what-we-consume/ (accessed May 17, 2012).

This use of technology and this view of physical space is observable in the history of the urban centers in the United States. The progressive movement flows outward from the Central city to the outlying frontiers of undeveloped land. Let us briefly trace the history of this development.[9]

The Pre-Industrial Suburb

Suburbs have existed since the beginning of recorded civilization. Social geography had two basic locations throughout most of human history: the city and the country. Cities in the pre-modern world were often encircled by a wall that clearly marked the boundary between the city and the countryside. New England colonial cities did not have walls, but they were still structured with the clear city/country boundary. Everything was built around pedestrian traffic. People either walked or used horse and buggy to travel. This limited the distance people were able and willing to travel. This limitation, combined with the fact that most manufacturing was produced by local artisan guilds, made it a necessity for people to stay clustered close together in order for social, commercial, and political interaction.

Two contrasting images of extra-urban dwellings existed in this period.[10] First, there were the suburbs. This was the underdeveloped, underserviced area lying just beyond and surrounding the city limits. This area was considered the fringe place were the questionable elements of society lurked about. Second, there was the country estate. The wealthy citizens would often establish country manors just a few miles outside of the

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[9] Much of the following history comes from Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[10] This does not include the rural lifestyle. Here I am referring only to the population that is centered on the city. Farmers and rural dwellers fall into a different category, separate from this discussion.

city for recreational use. This image of wealth and its ability to allow one to move away from the city is an important psychological factor that would play into the later suburban exodus.

The Industrial Revolution changed the face of civilization and contributed to the expansion and evolution of the United States suburb. There are two key types of technology that have contributed to this development. The first is the development of *transportation technology*. It not only allowed us to move places with more ease, it also reshaped how we thought about time and space. The second is the development of *communication technology*. This technology reshaped human interaction and how we think about the self. We will see how transportation and communication technologies have contributed to the current suburban dislocation of self.

How Transportation Technology Reshaped Social Geography

The steam engine changed the nature of transportation and broke open two new types of suburban experiences. First, it allowed people to travel away from the cities in a way that they had previously never known. Thousands of miles of railroad tracks spread across the United States by the mid-nineteenth century and connected cities to each other. This allowed people to move outside of the central city and still be able to travel back into the city in a relatively short amount of time. Small towns soon popped up along the railways. These towns were the first bedroom communities and were populated by primarily white-collar workers who commuted by train into the city for work each day and back home each evening. These first mainline suburbs catered to the aforementioned ideal of the country gentile lifestyle. Country clubs sprang up around these mainline suburbs where the affluent population enjoyed weekend recreational activities. The

recreational, suburban lifestyle drew the wealthy population out of the central city and into the suburbs, creating a donut hole of poverty within the city limits.

The second type of suburban experience was formed less by the steam engine itself and more through the invention of the rail upon which it moved. Steam engines were too cumbersome to move within the city itself, but the rail became an important component of intra-urban transportation. Horse-drawn streetcars ran along rails embedded in paved streets. These carts replaced cumbersome carriages that ran through the muddy streets. The rail-riding streetcar was smoother, larger, and able to carry more passengers at one time than carriages had been able to do. Soon the horse-drawn streetcar was replaced by the cable car and then by the electric streetcar or trolley.

The trolley system expanded the boundaries of the city itself and allowed the middle-class, common worker to move further away from the central city and still ride the trolley into work each day. Neighborhoods full of affordable housing sprang up on the edges of the city and along the Trolley lines. The Trolley also created a new habit of recreational travel and lifestyle. People would ride the trolley across town to have dinner, to see a show, or to visit the newly-invented amusement park.

The automobile is the transportation technology that has done more to create the current suburban experience than any other. The earliest automobiles were little more than recreational toys for the wealthy. They became associated with the values of speed, fun, personal freedom, and individual mobility.[11] Two factors combined to make the automobile a culture-shaping phenomenon. The first was Henry Ford's mass-produced assembly line process that allowed a large amount of cars to be produced at a price that

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[11] Craig Van Gelder, "Effects of Auto-Mobility on Church Life and Culture," *Word & World* 28, no. 3 (2008): 241.

the average citizen could afford. Second, the increased popularity of automobiles led the government to invest road construction as a public service. When roads, highways, and freeways began to stretch out across the countryside the era of autonomous travel changed the landscape.

The automobile between came to be deeply embedded in the growing consumer culture and the twin values it feeds upon: choice and identity.[12] An individual's ability to purchase a car and the type of car that one purchased became directly linked to ones standing and identity in society. In the post-World War II United States economy multiple factors came together to foster the explosion of what came to be known as the automobile suburb: affordable automobiles, expanding roadways that enabled people to move to the countryside, affordable housing, the return of the soldiers, and the need to house their young families at the beginning of the baby-boom generation. "This new type of bedroom community separated people's homes from their places of work, and a whole set of new institutional forms was generated to serve these suburban communities, including shopping centers, suburban (one-story) schools, and suburban congregations."[13]

The increased ability for the individual to drive long distances opened the opportunity for housing developers to build vast tracts of affordable homes a great distance from the city and other developed areas. This "made it increasingly difficult for institutions to know where to locate, whether it be shopping centers, schools, or churches. The overall tendency was toward a regionalization in the placement of institutions that served multiple neighborhoods and suburbs in order to accommodate larger economies of

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 242.

scale. These new forms included regional malls for shopping, multiscreen cinema-plexes for moviegoers, massive campuses for junior and senior high schools, and megachurch campuses for churchgoers."[14]

The automobile continues to shape our suburban identity and sense of place today. Many strides have been made to be more fuel efficient and environmentally conscious with emissions, but the fact remains that the B/D suburb is populated by people who are completely dependent upon motorized auto-mobility for survival. It would be nearly impossible to function in the daily routines of the suburbs without an automobile. There is minimal public transportation. Shopping centers, schools, and entertainment venues are generally several miles away from clusters of single family dwellings.

The B/D suburbanite has a fractured sense of place. They aren't any one place, they are constantly moving from place to place. "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the typical worker in America's metropolitan areas spends 24.4 minutes getting to work each day. This reflects a range from an average 16.5 minute commute in Wichita, Kansas to a 38.4 minute commute in New York City."[15] The typical suburban daily routine is a series of movements to work or school, to practices, to meetings, to rehearsals, to shopping, to entertainment. The home is a place for retreat and sleep. The suburbanite is not anywhere, she is everywhere.

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[14] Ibid., 245.

[15] Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books/InterVarsity Press, 2006), 55.

How Communication Technology Has Shaped Social Location

Communication technology has followed a similar historical trajectory and has contributed to the current suburban context of the dislocated self. The telegraph connected distant cities with the ability to send simple messages. The telephone allowed people to have conversations in real time across thousands of miles. Radio and television enabled broadcasting companies to disperse messages to millions of people simultaneously. Computers allowed information to be digitally manipulated at staggering speeds. Satellite technology allowed for simultaneous global communication. The internet has moved information dispersement from being a one-way monologue—controlled by the networks—to a global dialogue in which all people with access to online computers have freedom of speech. The advances over the last five years in wireless technology, smart phones, texting, social networking, and multi-touch tablets is so staggering that social scientists and psychologists cannot keep up with the implications it is having on our sense of self and social location.

The ability to physically move away from social connections—empowered by transportation technology—created a problem of social isolation. Communication technology has attempted to bridge the gap. People can now be more connected to each other than any other time in history. We can tweet, post, or blog about anything we want, anytime we want, and anyone we want can tune in to and respond to what we are saying. This technology allows information to be readily distributed, but does it really counteract the effects of physical dislocation and isolation? Sherry Turkle argues that it actually exacerbates the problem of disconnection. She says that smart phones and texting devices "are so psychologically powerful that they don't only change what we do, they

change who we are…we're getting used to a new way of being alone together. People want to be with each other, but also elsewhere—connected to all the different places they want to be. People want to customize their lives. They want to go in and out of all the places they are because the thing that matters most to them is control over where they put their attention."[16]

A Critique

There is a fundamental flaw in the modern project as we have described it. The flaw is that it is based on linear movement in a forward, upward direction. It believes that everything is moving from one place to another. There is movement from lesser to higher, from poorer to richer, from here to there, from less to more. When there are vast tracts of land and seemingly unlimited natural resources, this vision makes sense. This raises some important questions. *What happens when you arrive*? *How can you know when you arrive*? If one's identity is wrapped up in the process of forward movement, then the achievement of goals is a fleeting reward.

Some suburbanites, many among the younger generation, are starting to wake up to this reality. Their parents and grandparents worked hard to get to the B/D suburbs, but now that they are here, what's next? They had to rip themselves away from everything they knew and plant themselves in housing developments next to strangers who disappear behind automatic garage doors in order to accomplish their dreams. *What do they do now*? All they have ever done is feed their own dreams. This is the first generation that does not believe that there are unlimited resources or that building a newer housing

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[16] Sherry Turkle, *Connected…but Alone?* (TED Talk Video). http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together.html (accessed May 16, 2012).

development further away from the central city is the next step up the ladder of success. The American dream is dying and the suburban youth is lost in a disconnected world.

Let us summarize this current portrait of the B/D suburb. The suburban self is dislocated. It is dislocated from a sense of place, from formational human relations, and from self. Suburbanites are busy people who spend most of their time traveling from place to place for daily routines and to meet daily needs. Most suburbanites are dislocated from their family of origin and live in their present location because of work related decisions. They are identified by what they consume. They are socially dislocated and are developing a propensity to express themselves in a disembodied alternate self through social networking. Welcome to suburbia.

The Suburban ELCA Church

The Big Picture

The ELCA is a young organization that encompasses the entire United States. It was formed in 1988 and numbers nearly 5,000,000 people in membership. It is important to note that the ELCA statement of purpose has a very missional imagination.[17] Article 4.01 states, "The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world."[18] Article 4.02 states that to "participate in God's mission, the church shall...carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with

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[17] This is found in chapter Four of the ELCA, "Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," (2011).

[18] Ibid., 21.

the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all…working for peace

and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and

committing itself to their needs…to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise

of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for

their calling in the world."[19]

While the ELCA seeks to be missional, Van Gelder and Zscheile do not think it

has quite moved fully into that imagination. They label the ELCA as a church that is

discovering the missional church conversation. The *discovering* churches have made

great strides toward the missional imagination in that they have begun to turn the

church's focus toward engagement in the local context and have helped foster the idea

that all believers must be understood as being missionaries, not just the professional

clergy or missionary. However, Van Gelder and Zscheile note the following limiting

factors to the *discovering* church's ability to live fully into the missional imagination.

> [the *discovering* churches] continue to frame agency primarily in human terms as either obedience to the Great Commission or the responsibility of the church to carry out its mission, thereby diminishing an understanding of God's agency. (2) The central role that Christology plays for most of them tends to: (a) Downplay the role of the Spirit, (b) Reinforce hierarchical patterns of authority and decision making, and (c) Focus attention on our responsibility to emulate the example of Jesus—a perspective not wrong in and of itself, but insufficient for disclosing the fullness of God's intent in sending God's Son. (3) Focus on mission/missions tends to promote a functional understanding of ecclesiology, which diminishes an appreciation for the nature of the church as the creation of the Spirit. (4) Any discussion of the reign of God is either very limited or absent in defining God's redemptive work in relation to the church and world, which makes the church the primary locus of God's redemptive activity.[20]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 74-75.

The ELCA struggles to realize it missional aspirations. The critique above provides a helpful framework to identify areas of growth and transformation that need to be addressed. The ELCA strives to be a diverse multiethnic group, but the reality is that the vast majority of its membership is white middle class people in either a rural or suburban context. The B/D suburbs are sprinkled with ELCA congregations. This is especially true in the Midwest region, with a high concentration in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area.

The B/D suburban ELCA congregation finds itself pulled in a variety of cultural and theological directions. The combination of these divergent forces creates a tendency within the ELCA to be internally focused rather than externally or missionally focused. One of these forces is the fact that the ELCA has a long history of being an ethnic immigrant church and many of the older members still identify Lutheranism with Scandinavian cultural heritage. Another force is that the ELCA is an amalgamation of three distinct Lutheran churches that were each previously formed from nearly 60 separate synods. These synods bring with them a wide array of theological perspectives. Lutheranism is not a theological monolith and with the combination of diverse ideologies on matters like church polity, ecumenical relations, church/culture relations, etc. there is the temptation to become fixated on internal matters of agreement and compromise rather than be missionally minded or attentive to local context. Finally, another force that pulls on the ELCA is the disparity between its stated missional aspiration and the lived experience of its local congregations.

Ethnic Identity and Social Enclaves

The ELCA was the merger of three Lutheran churches: the American Lutheran Church (ALC), The Association of American Lutheran Churches (AELC), and the Lutheran Church in America.

The Lutheran church is an immigrant church. Lutherans from Germany, Sweden, Finland, and Norway immigrated to the United States during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. 58 synods were formed between 1840 and 1875. These synods varied in theological perspectives, culture, and language. The first generations of Lutherans still looked to the homeland for pastors and liturgical aids. The younger generations began to speak more English and the demand to engage with the new host culture became stronger. The church struggled with how to interact with the modern American ideals listed above. Several factors in the early twentieth century—language, economics, and war—brought the various synods into cooperation for the purpose of a unified effort to support their soldiers and the homeland that was being ravaged by war. This movement to unification continued through mid-century until it reached the formation of the ELCA in 1988.

The Lutheran church has an interesting relationship with the suburban story. In some ways it is part of it. In other ways it is parallel to it. The first Lutheran immigrants followed the typical path of other European immigrants. They flocked together in ghettos. However, the suburbs were first populated by primarily white, middle and upper middle class people, so Lutherans, being from northern Europe, eventually blended in well with the established white, protestant population. Therefore, when the middle-class began moving out of the city, the Lutherans were among them.

Most white urban churches of all denominations shared a similar experience from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Lutherans were no exception. Their congregations began moving away from the city, where the church building had been central to the ethnic and geographic identity, and followed the outward/upward migration to the automobile suburbs. Many of these churches became commuter congregations. The white population would drive in from the suburbs on Sunday morning to attend worship while the church building sat in the middle of a neighborhood with which it had no connection. Many churches made the choice to follow their congregations into the suburbs. In this new context, however, there was no longer a concentration of Lutherans in one particular area and the suburban church was forced to become the program church that served the Lutherans in a region for the exchange and consumption of religious services. Winter describes this as the captivity of the suburban church. He states:

> The problem of the churches in the metropolis is intimately bound up with this conflict between the major principles of social organization in metropolitan life; in fact, the mission of the Church in the metropolis can only be understood in the light of this polarization of the principles of metropolitan organization. Since churches have traditionally anchored their communal life in residential areas, they inevitably become victims of the pathology that assails neighborhood life, whether it be small-town gossip or metropolitan discrimination. The revival of religious interest and the peculiar pattern of religious development in the metropolis are interwoven with the special problems attendant upon the struggle to stabilize local communities, these problems create the peculiar dilemma confronting Protestantism in the metropolis. How can an inclusive message be mediated through an exclusive group, when the principle of exclusiveness is social-class identity rather than a gift of faith which is open to all?[21]

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[21] Winter, 32-33.

Theological Boxes

Three theological issues challenge the ELCA congregation and hinder its ability

to move more fully into the missional imagination. They are: *ecclesial identity*, the

sacraments, and *polity*.

The first is that of *ecclesial identity*. Lutheranism was born under Christendom in

Europe. The church was the center of society in that world. Everyone born within the

political realm, of which the local church was the center, was considered Christian and a

member of the parish. Lutheranism was also born at the dawn of the Enlightenment and

the beginning of the Western colonization of the world. Missions, in this era, was

separate from the church and carried out by specialized individuals who were sent

oversees to proclaim the gospel to heathen nations in order to bring them into the church.

The ecclesial identity of the *parish church* is what immigrated to the United

States. This worked in the first and second generations of immigrants since they tended to

live near each other and established the church in the center of their dwellings. The parish

mentality dominated the United States during one hundred fifty years of its existence,

thus creating a churched culture. If people wanted to commune with God, they went to

church.

The second issue is that of the *sacrament*. Lutheran sacramental theology lays a

strong emphasis on the belief that the real presence of the risen Jesus is over, under, and

above the elements of bread and wine. It also closely associates the presence of the Holy

Spirit with the Word as it is proclaimed and with the water of baptism.

This theology is beautiful and can have some important missional implications.

Those will be explored later. Currently, we must discuss two notable hazards inherent

within it. First, there is a tendency to have a God-in-the-box theology. God is contained within the sacraments and the liturgy. If a human wishes to commune with God she must enter the church and participate in the liturgical structures in order to do so. While the missional church is gathered around the risen Jesus, it is dangerous to limit the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit to the confines of the kerygma and the water of baptism. The second hazard has to do with the administration of Word and Sacrament and leads into the third theological issue.

The third issue is that of *polity*. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession defines the church as "the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is *rightly taught* and the Sacraments are *rightly administered* (italics mine)."[22] It goes on in Articles XIV and XV to speak of *good order* regarding ecclesiastical usages and restricts the administration of the sacraments to those who have been called by the church. The ambiguity of the term *good order*, combined with the historical tradition of hierarchical power structures within certain episcopal-structured branches of the Lutheran tradition, has created a bureaucratic power structure within the national-synodical structure of the ELCA. This power structure can prove contrary to the dynamic spirit at work in the missional church.

A Snapshot Summary

We have, thus far, traced the contours of the ELCA congregation in the B/D suburb in the late/post modern era. It is a congregation that consists of older, ethnically oriented (Scandinavian) members mixed with younger, transient, middle-class families who have a vague cultural memory of religious commodities such as Sunday School and

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[22] Philip Melancthon, "The Augsburg Confession," in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*, ed. F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921) (accessed November 3, 2011).

confirmation. It is connected to a hierarchical power structure of which it is the lowest of three rungs.[23] It is situated in a brick-and-mortar building that was first established to house the religious commodities needed for the Lutheran constituents within the sprawling suburban region. The members travel a number of miles, past other, closer church buildings, from multiple residential communities to gather in the building for liturgical practices that are in keeping with the traditional Lutheran patterns of the proper administration of Word and Sacrament. In the suburban culture of increasing dislocation, the commodification of self, consumerism, and the hectic lifestyle of auto-mobility, social-networking, and self-indulgent consumer based entertainment, the local congregation is just one small commodity on a vast smorgasbord of viable options for the American consumer of religious goods and/or recreational, self-gratifying activities.

Toward a Suburban Missional Ecclesiology

How does the B/D suburban ELCA congregation move more fully into a missional imagination? First, before we answer that specific question, it will be helpful to frame a broader missional theology and ecclesiology from which to draw specifics.

A Theological Framework

God has a mission. It begins with creation. The Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has created and is creating all things out of the loving relationality that is the divine essence. The relationship between the persons of the Trinity creates space for the physical universe to be created out of nothing (ex nihilo) and to be sustained

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[23] The ELCA claims that it is not a top-down bureaucracy, but is, rather, an interdependent partnership of three expressions of the church—the churchwide organization, the synod, and the local congregation. The reality is that, in the American culture which is dominated by neo-weberian bureaucratic structures, it is difficult to function in any way other than a top-down command and control system.

ontologically in otherness to God. Zizioulas calls this *relational ontology*. All being exists in its relatedness to that which is other. Love is the bond that holds the relationality. God is love and love is that which seeks the existence of the other and upholds it. In this relationality there is particularity in unity. There are individual parts of the whole, but separated from the whole, the individual parts cease to exist.[24]

God created and creates humanity in love. The Spirit of God is actively creating the world and the human being is created in the image of God. "God makes space within God's own Trinitarian life for creation, and creation participates relationally in that life."[25] Genesis 1:27 says "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female* he created them. (italics mine)" The image of God is male and female. It is the relationality between the otherness of gender that constitutes humanity. Humans exist in the pluriform relationality of God/human, human/human, and human/creation. The love of God leads to freedom. Within freedom, however, there is the potential to disrupt love and invert the focus of love away from the sustaining relationality and direct it inward toward self. This inversion disrupts the field of God's love and transforms difference between particularities into division between parts. This division fosters fear, hatred, and ultimately violence toward the other. It is destructive and leads to death. This is Hell.

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[24] Jean Zizioulas and Paul McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

[25] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 112.

Human history is the continual story of creation, uncreation, and recreation.[26] God the Father creates by calling things into existence by and for love—*creation*. Humanity disrupts the flow and brings about chaos and destruction manifested in the principalities and powers of society that war against the love of God—*un-creation*. God the Son incarnates in human history and reconciles all things to the Father through the power of God the Spirit as she permeates all things as the power and sustainer of life and the bond of love and peace—*re-creation*.

This redemptive story happens at both the *micro* level and at the *macro* level. The *macro* level is revealed in scripture. It is in this story that we see the economic Trinity moving in and through the flow human history.[27] In the beginning God created all things by and for love. Fellowship was disrupted and God pursued reconciliation of all things. The first incarnation was in the election of Israel for the purpose of blessing all nations.[28] The promise of a Messiah lay embedded in this election. Jesus of Nazareth was the specific incarnation of the Son and the fulfillment of the Messianic hope of Israel.[29] Jesus' life demonstrated perfect relationality with the Father as the example of intended human existence. Jesus' death on the cross mended the division between God and humanity by Jesus taking on complete otherness in the forsakenness of division. The

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[26] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011).

[27] Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

[28] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications 1989), 80-102.

[29] Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission*, 1st ed., Foundations of the Christian Mission (New York,: McGraw-Hill, 1962).

resurrection was the Father's "yes" to the Son's victory over death.[30] "Incarnation is God's ultimate missional participation in human life. The Word was made flesh in Jesus, and the church as the body of Christ must continue to be enfleshed in every human culture and moment in mission."[31] The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and reconciled him with the Father in order to overcome death—the effect of division—and reconcile all things to God. Jesus is exalted as the king and ruler above all human principalities and powers and the reign of God over all creation lies in the eschatological hope of God's futurity.

The *macro* story unfolds in three massive movements from the beginning of time to its fulfillment. However, this same redemptive story also happens at the *micro* level in relationships across time and space. When the broken and hurting are healed and restored through the loving touch of another, the story is present—the *uncreated* is *recreated*. When estranged lovers are reconciled, the story is present. When broken relationships—whether they are families, friends, or nations—are brought back from the edge of war and violence to find peace, the story is present.

<div align="center">A Biblical Image</div>

Jesus' conversation with his disciples in the upper room, found in John 13-17, contains rich imagery of mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) that is a necessary motif for the missional imagination described above.

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[30] Jenson, 194-206.

[31] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 114.

It begins with Praxis

Jesus begins by washing the disciples' feet. This act of service demonstrated to the disciples, through action, the message Jesus wished to present in the rest of the discourse. He showed them that the heart of leadership in God's kingdom is that the leader is servant of the other. The focus is not self, but other; not preserving position, but putting others first. The missional church is called to wash the feet of the other through action first, not words. The incarnational presence of Jesus among the other is an other-oriented presence of attentiveness and servitude. It is a compelling reminder to note that Judas Iscariot was still present at the table when Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Jesus washed his betrayers feet, because that is what God's love does.

It is About Indwelling

The Greek father, John of Damascus, first used the term perichoresis to describe the Trinity. The word denotes the interweaving patterns of particulars to form a whole. Jesus uses the word *meno*—to *remain* or to *dwell*—as a central theme in the upper room discourse: He goes to prepare a place in his Father's house were there are many *dwelling places*; The Father *dwells* in the Son and the Son *dwells* in the Father; The Father and the Son send the Spirit to *dwell* in the disciples; Jesus invites the disciples to *dwell* in him so that he may *dwell* in them.

Let us look closer at a few specific images in this passage where we see this dwelling—or *indwelling*—as it demonstrates the nature of relational ontology. (1) 14:1-7. In the Father's house there are many *dwelling* places. Where is the Father's house other than creation itself? Notice where Jesus says he will take the disciples when he returns. He will not take them away to a place called the Father's house. Rather, he said "I will

take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." Where is Jesus? He is in full relationality with the Father. The disciples know the way to this place because they have been living in relationality with Jesus for three years. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life." In other words, Jesus' way of mutual indwelling with the Father *is* the way, it *is* the truth, and it *is* the life. There is no other way of being. Jesus demonstrates the validity of this claim by pointing to the works he has performed. What are his works? He dwelled with the marginalized. He touched the leper and the unclean. In so doing he reversed the powers of destruction and brought healing and reconciliation. This may seem simple to us, but for Jesus to cross the expansive gulf that divided the clean from the unclean in the social imaginary of the Jewish world was nothing short of the miraculous power of God to completely lose oneself in relationality to the other. Jesus promised that if the disciples lived in this way—*praxis*—they, too, would bridge this divide and bring healing and restoration.

(2) The language of the Father, Son, and Spirit sharing a mutual indwelling is peppered throughout this entire discourse. Here we see the meaning of the term *immanent* Trinity. A tiny word lies nestled in the middle of the word immanent: *mane*. This is the Latinized Greek *meno*—to dwell. The im*mane*nt Trinity is the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity.[32]

(3) 15:1-17. The three persons of the Trinity, in their relationality, create and sustain life. The Father is the vine grower. The Son is the Vine. The Spirit is the life energy that flows like sap through the vine and the branch to produce fruit. Apart from a mutual indwelling with the vine the branch ceases to be and is discarded into the fire.

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[32] I am indebted to Dr. Gary Simpson for explaining that to me.

(3) 15:18-16:24. The indwelling Spirit does not reside within the individual person to draw the individual toward God.[33] The Spirit works through, with, and around the group of disciples in order to help the disciples have interaction with the world that hates them and seeks to destroy them. Notice how the Spirit treats these enemies. She does not destroy them, or return hatred. The Spirit faces the world and exposes to the world (*elengthon*) sin, righteousness, and judgment. She does not convict them of sin, but exposes the fact that sin is the loss of relationality, that righteousness is the restoration of relationality, and that the one who stands condemned is the dominant power(s) that perpetuate destructive divisions that impede God's relationality. The Spirit continues to work in and through the disciples to exposes deeper truths. The Spirit can do this because all that is the Son's and all that is the Father's fully indwells the Spirit as the Spirit fully indwells the disciples as the disciples indwell the world.

(4) 17:1-26. Eternal life is defined as indwelling.[34] This passage is replete with indwelling. Here we see a glimpse of the immanent Trinity when Jesus says, "glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." We also see that the church dwells in the world.[35] Jesus prayed that the Father would not take the church out of the world, but that he would protect the church from the evil one. The church is sent into the world to dwell with the other, to demonstrate the mutual indwelling and unity of God and the church, so that the world will also know the love of God. It is in the church's indwelling with the world that the love of God is known.

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[33] This has been the typical Western understanding of the indwelling of the Spirit in my experience.

[34] John 17:3

[35] I am extrapolating the church here in that Jesus cites all the disciples that would follow him on account of his original disciples' witness.

It is About Being Formed into Fruit

The product of indwelling is fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is manifested in many ways: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, self-control.[36] Here, then, is the nature of the missional church. The missional church is the body of believers, called by God for service to the world, gathered by and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to experience the indwelling that produces the fruit of love for all to taste. The gathered body is indwelt by the Trinity as it centers on the risen Jesus in the eucharist, identifies in the resurrection life in a conscious presence of daily baptism, and enfleshes the presence of the risen Jesus in the world. The body indwells one another through the bond of peace in the power of the Holy Spirit. The body indwells the world through the power of the Holy Spirit in the places where the Spirit is already at work bringing and sustaining life.[37] As the body of Christ encounters the other and indwells it, here fruit is produced. The division is crossed and the potential for healing and reconciliation exists. Behold, the Kingdom of God is at hand!

<div align="center">A Succinct Missional Ecclesiology</div>

This is God's mission—*missio dei*. The Triune God seeks to create and recreate all things in the loving relationality that is its existence. God chose Israel to be the embodiment of this mission and Messianic promise. Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. Today, the church is in partnership with the mission of God in the world. This is what it means to be the missional church. The church is the relational body of people

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[36] I am operating with the assumption that the fruit of Galatians 5:22 is singular—love—and pluriform. Love takes the shape of the recipient as the giver seeks to meet the needs of the lover. See Simpson's article on the Fruit of the Spirit.

[37] Van Gelder discusses well the role of the Spirit in the missional church. Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

called by the Holy Spirit to gather around the risen Jesus—manifested in the eucharistic and baptismal identities of sacramental life—to be empowered to go and grow in the indwelling love of God with all nations, starting with the local context of the congregation and connecting to the larger network of the world.

<div align="center">Bringing it to the Burbs</div>

What does this look like in the B/D ELCA suburban congregation? The missional ecclesiology stated above implies a need for contextual sensitivity. No two congregations are in exactly the same place, so there can never be a prescriptive map for how to help a congregation move into a more fully missional imagination. Each local congregation is a complex network of relationships that connect inter-congregationally, regionally, and globally. The following suggestions are painted in broad strokes drawing from the generalities stated in the above sections on the B/D suburb and the ELCA suburban congregation.

Don't panic

Breathe. It is not about implementing new programs. It is not about measuring success. Rest in the reality that the Spirit of God is moving and bringing about life and restoration, always. Our job is not to work harder to get the job done. Our job is to learn how to dwell in the indwelling God and discern what God is doing and what God is moving us to do in the local space in which we find ourselves.

Embrace your assets.

The ELCA has many positive, missional intuitions and aspirations. A good starting place is to spend time, as a congregation, dwelling in the first four chapters of the

ELCA Constitution. When more people realize the intended vision of the churchwide

organization it might be easier to begin the process of change.

Another strong aspect of the ELCA is its rich sacramental identity. Lutherans

understand that it is God's activity in the world that is the source of grace and life. It is in

the eucharist that we meet the risen Jesus—that the "happy exchange" takes place—and it

is in the death-and-resurrection life of our baptismal identity that we can walk in humility

and grace as we indwell the world. We have a strong sense of being gathered by the

Spirit. The next step is to help the congregation understand that we are also sent by the

Spirit and drawn to the creative Spirit that is at work in the other outside of the comfort of

our Scandinavian enclave.[38]

Yet another asset of the ELCA is its expansive local, regional, and national

network. This asset can also be a liability, so caution is needed. However, if the

leadership of the Churchwide and Synodical judicatories maintains a spirit of service and

support to the local congregation, there is great strength in this expansive connectivity

that can be helpful in rallying resources and support networks for hurting or developing

congregations.

Cultivate an indwelling culture

The church is not a commodity that services the religious consumer. It is a

community of particulars who find their identity in the participatory indwelling of God-

church-world. This is an extremely difficult concept for the commodified, consumerist,

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[38] *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* offers many helpful suggestions along these lines. One of which is to expand the idea of *Word* and *Sacrament* to also include *Community*. The body of Christ, as it is sent into the world is the sacramental presence of Christ in the world. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005).

individualistic, suburbanite to understand, let alone embody. The first step to indwelling

is to simply learn to *slow down*. We need to *simplify*.[39] The missional congregation is

called to dwell[40] in several spaces: the *Word* and *Spirit*, *each other*, the *region*, and the

world.

Indwelling the Word[41]

Scripture must remain central to the life of the missional congregation. Scripture

offers us a point of reference from which to discern the movement of the Spirit in our

own context. The congregation that internalizes God's redemptive story in Israel, Jesus,

and the early church and connects itself to it as the ongoing living out of the story will

find it to be a dynamic catalyst for mission. Alan Roxburgh suggests that the

congregation commit to spiritual practices, such as the practice of the Offices, as a way to

cultivate a culture of indwelling the Word in the Spirit collectively.[42]

It is important to note the communal nature of the practices that are typically

known as the *spiritual disciplines*. It is through communal praxis that a community is

formed in the Word and the Spirit. Personal, individual Bible study and prayer is good

and important, but, in the B/D suburban context it can often foster the radical

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[39] These two concepts—to *slow down* and to *simplify*—could become an entire paper in themselves. This is a prerequisite decompression process that must happen before the indwelling process will have fertile soil in which to grow.

[40] It is important to reemphasize the assumption behind the word *dwell*. This is the mutual indwelling. It is a reciprocal relationship, not a sent-to-sendee, top/down, benefactor-to-recipient, monodirectional relationship. It is the perichoretic indwelling that is comprised of listening to, giving and receiving as needed, and dwelling in communion with the other.

[41] Patrick Kiefert outlines a helpful process he calls Dwelling in the Word. Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

[42] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 1st ed., Leadership Network (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

individualism that is creating the division that hinders missional movement. The

missional community must begin with communal praxis and then find the particularity of

spiritual development flowing out of that.[43]

Indwelling Each Other

It is vitally important that the local congregation be a place of safety for

vulnerability, mutual care, and accountability. Congregations can often err on the side of

being so internally focused that they exclude the other, or they can err on the side of

being so externally focused in a missional mindset that they lose cohesion as a

community. It is helpful to envision the local congregation as a living, single-cell

organism. The organism is fluid and adaptive, but held together by a semi-permeable

membrane. The membrane offers cohesion for self-identity, but also allows elements to

both enter and exit the core. The missional church need not lose a sense of identity. In

fact, a strong sense of fellowship and identity, that is missionally minded, is just the kind

of presence that the local context needs.

Indwelling the Region

The greatest danger for the ELCA B/D suburban congregation is to see its mission

as reaching the typical B/D suburbanites through flashy programs, "relevant" music, and

a building that resembles the local YMCA or movie theatre. This attractional approach to

congregational life seeks to reach the commodified, consumerist, socially dislocated

suburbanite with the very medium that is perpetuating the commodification and

consumption. This reduces the church to another commodity to be consumed. The

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[43] An excellent example of communal praxis is found in Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011).

missional church must cultivate an alternative culture "in which people begin to understand and challenge the ways their lives are controlled by values in the larger culture."[44]

Here we must return to Orfield's taxonomy of six types of suburbs for help. If the B/D suburban congregation is going to break free of the negative aspects of the larger culture it must reconnect to a broader understanding of social geography. Much of the motivation behind the formation of the B/D suburb was to escape the poverty and racial diversity of the at-risk suburbs and the central city. This segregation is antithetical to the mission of God. The B/D suburban church cannot limit its indwelling to other suburbanites who are similar to the congregation. The B/D suburban congregation must indwell the metropolitan region as its social location. Albert Hsu quotes Walter Brueggemann's perspective on the gospel.

> When life is not precarious, when survival is not at stake, the gospel is not one of deliverance but rather of 'proper management and joyous celebration.' The poor and oppressed need to hear God's word of salvation and rescue. The rich and well-off need to hear God's word of stewardship. It has often been said that God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. Brueggemann would say that a biblical theology of shalom is a gospel of deliverance for the oppressed and stewardship for the blessed."[45]

We can read Bruegemann's *shalom* as synonymous with our concept of *indwelling*. The typical B/D suburbanite is economically stable and is replete with recreational toys and creature comforts. The gospel calls for the B/D congregation to engage the tough social issues in the metropolitan region. When the B/D congregation fully engages these issues within an indwelling framework, as opposed to a benefactor

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[44] Roxburgh, 161.

[45] Hsu, 190.

mentality, then the congregation will begin to see spiritual transformation in these *works*, like Jesus predicted in John 14.

Here is where the benefits of the ELCA can become truly effective. The ELCA is already networked through the synodical structure. Local congregations that are physically situated in at-risk areas can form primary and natural relationships with congregations located in B/D suburbs. These network connections can form nodes, or network hubs, for indwelling to take place. As authentic relationships are developed through all the regions of the metropolis, resources can flow as the Spirit leads them.

Indwelling the World

We live in a globally minded and interdependent world. The local B/D congregation must also locate itself as a particular part of the relationality of all nations and the environment. Here, again, is an advantage that the ELCA has. Not only is the ELCA a national network, it is also connected to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and has the ability to mobilize resources at the global level as needed. Also, the ELCA has ecumenical initiatives in place that are seeking the indwelling of other denominations. This is a missional move at the global level.

Conclusion

The ELCA B/D suburban congregation can move more fully into a missional imagination. It won't be quick and it won't be easy. There are no maps to show the way. The congregational leader is called to cultivate an indwelling community that is able to discern what the Spirit is doing and how it should proceed to get there. Alan Roxburgh says that the missional congregation is called to make the maps as it goes. "The role of

leadership is to cultivate the core identity of the system, its DNA, to support the practices and habits that infuse the system's life and identity throughout."[46]

The suburbs may be full of spray-tans, nose jobs, SUVs, and smell like plastic. The commodified, consumer-driven, socially dislocated suburbanite may be moving too fast to even know things are flying apart around and under them. Yet, the suburbanite is a beautiful creation of God located in a place, just like every other person on earth. The *missio dei* is in the suburbs and the B/D ELCA congregation is a welcomed participant.

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[46] Roxburgh, 180.

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