

A Blessing to the World: A Recommendation for Increased Community Engagement for  
Religious Groups in the United States

Thesis

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Religious communities must step up and take responsibility for community engagement and development. Communities should combine personal motivations with religious ones, such as mercy, love, and the innate need for belonging, to help their communities grow. In doing this, church leaders support community action with religious call, and empower members to do more for their communities. I present a replicable way for church leaders to do this, using a case study of ReWire: San Francisco, a church revitalization organization. This case study includes practices, goals, and processes that will enable church leaders and members to impact their communities.

### **Introduction**

The religious call to community engagement is not followed or acted upon at a large scale by religious people in the United States. Western Christianity provides lip service towards solidarity with the poor, the challenging of unfair systems, and freeing the oppressed. Churches emphasize personal betterment for members, and end up perpetuating these unequal systems. Societal inequality is growing, and the church is unwittingly adding to it. For Christians, the Biblical call towards the righteous treatment of the downtrodden is a call that cannot be ignored. The desire of church leaders to help members grow must expand to include non-members as well. These non-members are the society that the western church finds itself in. In addition to recognizing this social inequality, Christians and their churches must take action. This fulfills the call to be a light to the world, and happens by challenging unfair systems, spreading love, demanding justice where there is injustice, and equality where there is inequality.

Religious communities must step up and take responsibility for community engagement and development. Communities should combine personal motivations with religious ones, such as mercy, love, and the innate need for belonging, to help their communities grow. In doing this,

church leaders support community action with religious call, and empower members to do more for their communities. I present a replicable way for church leaders to do this, using a case study of ReWire: San Francisco, a church revitalization organization. This case study includes practices, goals, and processes that will enable church leaders and members to impact their communities. My process on how to do so occurs in four steps. First, teaching the importance of community engagement in Christian theology. Second, tapping in to the motivations people have to help their communities grow. Third, by facilitating opportunities for members to put their motivations into action. And fourth, by reinforcing this ideal over time, ensuring that community engagement as a group becomes a normal process for religious groups.

Much of this thesis revolves around the idea of pursuing “community engagement”. In the context of this thesis, the term "community engagement" refers to any effort to strengthen community ties, reduce legal and social inequalities, and/or pursue social justice. Clawson describes justice as an act of love and relationship, working towards right relationships between humans, with God, and with the world, saying “To act justly, then, is to represent God’s love to each other and thereby honor the image of God in the other person as well” (20). She then provides a working definition, stating “Justice can thus be defined simply as the practical outworking of loving God and others” (Clawson 21).

References both to community engagement and to social justice in this work derive from Clawson’s theory of right, loving relationships, mirrored after God’s love. I leave the specifics of how to engage in community engagement vague, because each community is unique in its needs, and each Christian has a unique role to play. While evangelizing is important for most religions, making a connected, equal, joyous, and just society is important to all. Thus, community

engagement in this thesis does not refer to evangelizing or proselytizing. Rather, it is about creating a just and righteous society, with moral values that most religions hold dear.

Christianity is not the only religion that states the importance of community engagement as a religious rule. Community engagement is valued in practically all faith systems, evident in even a cursory review of religions such as Islam and Buddhism. I use Christianity as a primary example due to its prevalence in the United States, but the theories presented generally apply to other faiths as well.

### **Theological Arguments for Community Engagement**

Ideals of equality and a just society are addressed throughout the pages of the Bible. Not unique to any specific Testament or book, the ideals of community engagement and the pursuit of equality are core to the message of the Bible. The author of the book of Isaiah states:

Is not this the fast that I choose: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (English Standard Version, Is. 58:6-7).

This passage details the importance of pursuing justice and challenging inequality at a core level. Not only do personal actions such as housing the homeless and feeding the hungry clearly exist, but there is a social element stated. Freeing the oppressed and breaking the yokes that have led to oppression are social actions in nature, not individual.

In this passage, the value of social work to addressing community pains is taken further. Those without clothes, “the naked”, are marginalized members of society. But the passage explains that they are the same flesh as the clothed, which are most likely the people of high

economic means. Far from individually focused, this shows not only a personal aspect of justice, but also a communal one. Here, the passage rejects social inequalities and class based ideas, replacing them with equality. The following verse shows the result of the pursuit of equitable and just relationships: “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard” (Is. 58:6-7). This promise of a new dawn, of healing, of a righteousness reputation for the church, and of the Lord’s glory coming down is a powerful statement.

My aim is not to embark on a Biblical exegesis here, but it is important to know that this passage came to the Jews when they found themselves in a dire spot. Surrounded by a wayward world, one that followed non-Biblical theologies and moralities, they were struggling to hear God’s word. My proposed solution is not to change personal beliefs, pray harder, or try to force Christian morals on others. Rather, it is to serve the poor, house the homeless, and to recognize the humanity of others, instead of hiding from them. It is not through individual salvation that God’s favor will return. Rather, God promises His favor will return as He sees people working in their community and exemplifying God’s love to those around them, without condition or bias. In other words, we welcome God’s love and provision in the form through community engagement, solidarity with the poor, and the breaking of barriers.

The validity of practicing Christian love and values to in one's community is not a contentious topic in churches. Instead, it is a topic that is often passed over, and considered less important than individual actions. This leaves individual Christians to act on their own, further avoiding community action. The religious call on a social level is one that is simply forgotten in the typical church in the United States. Churches agree that poverty and unrighteous systems are

oppositional with Jesus' teachings, but they do so in a passive fashion. This moral understanding is not connected to dedicated action in localized settings.

Many churches and their members believe that their community looks to them as a moral compass. In these cases, the contribution of a moral line is considered to be the most valuable contribution the church can give to its community. Due in part to this, Christians often assume that their financial giving is a satisfactory way to challenge poverty and inequality. Churches may pride themselves on providing food kitchens, rent subsidization, and other immediate services, but they also tend to ignore the systems that lead to this need. Acting to change these systems is not looked at as oppositional to the content of Biblical ideology, but it is also not a priority. Perhaps this forgetfulness is due to the culture of the United States, even outside of the church community.

The well-known cultural dimensions research, put forth by Hofstede et al., places the United States decidedly on the side of the individualistic, rather than collective, index (95). In fact, the United States ranks first in individualism in any country studied by Hofstede et al. (95). These dimensions are expressions of how citizens think, react, and operate, and form in response to how people react to real life things, such as religion, politics, and society. As such, the focus on individual faith, and the accompanying failure to pursue community engagement, is somewhat understandable. It may seem that the United States is simply too individualistic to pursue this ideal of community engagement.

Yet, Jesus' work to enact God's kingdom on earth does not stop because of a cultural disposition. Vorster theorizes that the ideals of the Kingdom of God, and of the reign of Christ, apply to the present. This lays a foundational need for churches and Christians to engage in civil action to further this reality (2). He suggests the church is the present sign of the kingdom, and

says it should be actively transforming the world and advancing the morality of the kingdom of God “in all spheres of society” (Vorster 3-4). Rather than being isolationist and elitist, Vorster suggests that many moral values of reign of Christ are present in more than Christianity (5). He thus suggests that these morals benefit all of society, regardless of religion (5). Vorster’s work suggests that it is imperative for Christian believers to pursue reconciliation, human dignity, peace, and the common good of society (7). This ideal suggests that Christians need to engage in moving society towards these values, using the social power the church has to do so.

The need to recognize this reality and to expand God’s kingdom through community does not make American individualism any less real. Individualism is here to stay, and it changes the way that Americans look at the world. This ranges from their cultural interpretation of how life works, to their views on Christianity. Due to this, the importance of charity, unity with the disenfranchised, and rejecting worldly gains are thought of as personal decisions only. Christians recognize the importance of building God’s kingdom, but their theories on how to do so are, in general, anything but community based.

Because of this, the Biblical idea of personal salvation and individual relationship with God is improperly weighted. This gives it priority over social issues, which then reduces actual community change. The idea that church members should address societal issues such as homelessness, sex trafficking, and racism is rarely connected to loving one's neighbor and caring for the oppressed. Instead, people see issues such as these on an individual level. Christians work to ensure that they personally do not engage in these actions, and assume that their refusal to act negatively is the same as acting positively. This a dangerous viewpoint. It not only fails to help immediate victims, but it also allows the systems that perpetuate these problems to grow, become engrained in society, and become normal. Indeed, inaction often occurs specifically due to how



normal an evil has become, and people see any attempts to reduce it as fruitless. In this way, inaction leads to normalization, which sparks a hopelessness that leads to even greater lethargy and inaction. Christians can in this way claim innocence, when in fact their lack of action has perpetuated and normalized sin.

This idea that the community shares blame in sin, even though not every individual engages in that sin, is difficult to see when people see religion as an individual concept. Why should Christians address the society they live in if their faith isn't connected to it? In opposition to this, Biblical examples and discussion of systemic issues occur throughout the pages. For example, the story of Achan in Joshua 7 speaks of a man who went against God's word and took spoils of war, and was put to death to keep his actions from impacting the whole society (Josh. 7). Achan's actions had an effect on his society because of his connection to it. With his belief system being influential to his surrounding community, his actions thus were a threat to the moral standing of the society that was the people of Israel. This passage shows that personal actions impact their surrounding society; people do not make decisions in a vacuum. It also shows that the morality of a society arises from the morals of its people. Groody states, "In contrast to a society that prizes individualism and self-sufficiency, and where the winner takes all, the Christian vision of reality brings out that all beings have their origin in sharing. We come to realize that what is done to one is done to all: when any are losing, all are effected; when any are deprived, all suffer; and when any are empowered, all benefit" (ch 3, par 3). This is easy to say in a vacuum, but it is difficult for a person or community to actually recognize their moral failures. Individual examination can result in deep reflection, but it also produces blind spots.

Recognizing problematic areas of one's culture is very difficult without an outsider's perspective. Even if they are recognized, it can be very difficult to outline a way forward. It is far

easier to point out another's faults than it is to see one's own, and this blindness is no different for cultures and denominations. Thus, addressing societal ills is a challenging topic for faith leaders, especially when pursuing change through a self-reflecting approach. This approach often misses the most glaring issues entirely. Nevertheless, this difficulty does not make community engagement any less necessary.

Richard Stearns, President of World Vision United States, speaks to this tension between personal salvation and community action. He suggests that the current focus on personal salvation effectively ignores a Biblical requirement to pursue relationship with the surrounding community (Stearns 18). This includes pursuing universal equality, properly treating the poor, and pursuing reconciliation (Stearns 18). Stearns pulls from multiple Biblical texts, such as Luke 4:14-21, Psalm 82:3-4, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, and Isaiah 61:1-3, to show that Christian love matters in the current physical world, and entails pursuing justice, caring for the poor, and standing in solidarity with the oppressed (Stearns 21, 116, 124, 176). He argues that pursuing a just society is necessary for Christians, and suggests that it is not done in most churches (Stearns 18). He then theorizes that each person and church has "time, treasure and talents" to use to pursue a better society (Stearns 258-259). Rather than rejecting individuality, church leaders and the church body can use it to motivate each other to act. Church leaders have the unique opportunity to show the Biblical importance of holistic, community health. The first step towards doing this is showing that pursuing a just and equal society is not an optional aspect of Christian faith: it is a mandate.

Edwards positions Christianity as a religion that is naturally associated with social justice (13). He explains that social justice exists in scripture, and that God expects Christians to engage in it (11). He states, "It is not assumed that Christianity is alone in this calling nor that Christians

are excelling in practicing social justice. The argument, rather, is that they should be doing a better job than they are, given the theological roots of the Christian faith” (15). The words “social justice” may leave a sour taste in many Christian’s mouths, but this is mostly due to a confusion of semantics. In the context of this paper, social justice is synonymous with community engagement. Here, social justice focuses on building relationships with one’s community, and fighting against unfair systems. With this in mind, Edwards words put social justice and community engagement in the same realm as mercy and love. Thus, they are action based expressions of these theological anchors. As Dr. Cornell West stated, Justice is what love looks like in public” (West).

No single person fully embodies Biblical righteousness, or build a perfect society. The temporal and imperfect nature of humanity ensures that no person or culture can ever, on their own, recognize a perfect world. People don’t have the capacity or moral fortitude to do this. Our interpretations of scripture or laws influence our interpretation of the world. This puts us in a starting position that influences our conclusion. To this end, Volf suggests that cultural viewpoints fail to perfectly reflect Christ’s universal law (48). In fact, he proposes that salvation provides Christians an understanding of their flawed nature (51). He states, “the distance from our own culture which is born of the Spirit of the new creation should loosen the grip of our culture on us and enable us to live with its fluidity and affirm its hybridity. Other cultures are not a threat to the pristine purity of our cultural identity, but a potential source of its enrichment” (Volf 51). This does not ensure or suggest that Christians leave their culture. Rather, it suggests that salvation gives Christians the opportunity to step into a new world, built upon God’s perfect justice (49).

Even though community engagement is important for Christians, it may raise eyebrows for people that believe it detracts from time spent evangelizing. To ease any worries, Vorster says community engagement is a “purpose driven approach”, and pulls in non-Christians to the church (6). He suggests that this open and inclusive approach towards social change does two things for Christianity. First, it creates positive thoughts on Christianity to non-Christians (Vorster 6). This ensures Christianity appeals and spreads to non-Christians, expanding the kingdom of God (Vorster 7). Second, if Christianity shapes social growth, then Christian morality spreads to others (7). Thus, Vorster's purpose driven approach is very helpful for those worried about engagement. Community engagement allows Christianity to have a say in social morality, and also helps with evangelizing.

Traditional evangelization, or spreading Christianity to people that do not know of it or know extremely little about it, is very rare in the United States. The average American has heard about heaven and hell, knows of the sinner’s prayer, interacts with outspoken Christians, and knows the Christian belief that Jesus died for our sins. Americans already know the base ideas that traditional evangelism presents. Additionally, non-Christians know the fruits of Christianity; they have seen the different (or in many cases, very similar) lives that their Christian neighbors, friends, families, and celebrities have lived. And yet, they have not believed.

This raises two separate options. First, that non-Christians see the joys of Christianity but are unwilling to change their current way of life. Or second, that the individual actions of Christians have not done enough to show Christ's love, in a real and tangible way. Perhaps Christianity does not spread to the many who have seen and not changed because Christians have not lived out Christ's call to the world. When Christians aren’t involved in their community, and aren't pursuing expanding the kingdom of God, they perpetuate the idea that the only difference

between Christians and non-Christians is where they go when they die. It should not be a shock that people are not stirred by traditional evangelism when they see very little proof that faith in Jesus Christ actually changes the behaviors and worldview of Christians. If the only difference between a Christian and a secular community is a title, then what transformative power is there to believe in?

Christians have a profound opportunity for outreach, by outreach. Community engagement illuminates the aspects of Christianity that are different than life as normal in the United States. Sheridan and Hendricks explain that a growing movement in western Christianity is trying to recover this missional identity. Community engagement is a primary part of this emerging church (Sheridan and Hendricks 312). This missional aspect occurs by working towards a stronger, more united, and inclusive society (Vorster 3). The theology of the emergent church movement reduces the narrow focus on individual faith. This movement prioritizes spreading Christ's love by engaging with the community. By doing this, the Biblical ideals of God's kingdom engrain in the world. To this end, Volf suggests that Christians live "with one foot planted in their own culture and the other in God's future" (53), where "they have a vantage point from which to perceive and judge the self and others not simply on their own terms but in the light of God's new world – a world in which a great multitude 'from every nation, from all tribe and peoples and languages' is gathered 'before the throne and before the Lamb'" (53, Revelation 7:9, 5:9). This idea of increased social involvement and spreading of God's Kingdom is waiting on the local church to champion it. This cannot happen until the traditional, individual model of evangelism is abandoned.

This new form of Christianity is growing on the outskirts of the faith. These people reject the traditional model that fails to engage in community engagement (Sheridan and Hendricks

314). An example of this emergent church movement comes from Stivers, who details detailing two ways that Christians can deal with the prevalence of homelessness (53). Stivers discusses two standard forms of action that Christians take to address homelessness in the United States. These two options are either working to fix the homeless individual, or working to provide base level housing (Stivers 53). Stivers rejects both options and instead proposes systematic change (67). This includes advocating for increased social protections, disrupting and altering the systems that create homelessness (67). In fact, Stivers theorizes that first two responses empower a system of victimization and perpetual homelessness (69). These responses fail to embody Christian ideals of social justice. Stivers' work supports the theory that the American church must be more active in pursuing social justice. Otherwise, the American church becomes implicit through inaction.

This emergent church movement hopes to act in ways that Jesus did. Specifically, interacting with the surrounding community, and challenging the laws, cultural beliefs, and religious customs that aren't just. Kolimon theorizes that much of Jesus' ministry included empowering the weak and powerless in an unbalanced society (Kolimon 42). Thus, he suggests that the modern church must work to empower the powerless just as Jesus did (Kolimon 38). To Kolimon, Jesus' ministry focused on providing an empowerment that was three dimensioned: personal, social-cultural, and political - (Kolimon 38). While Jesus' ministry looked towards this form of empowerment, the modern church misses the mark. Kolimon theorizes that the church has become a tool for creating a power imbalance (55). In response, the church must instead model Jesus, and needs to empower the powerless throughout the world (Kolimon 55). In sum, Christianity and community engagement are congruent ideas. Community engagement is a firm and necessary aspect of Christian faith. Even so, In the United States, it is largely

relegated to the side, in favor of a focus on individual faith. A helplessness at the magnitude of issues also leads to inaction. Christians must note that God's word in Isaiah 58:6-7 came to a people in a similar predicament. His call to the Israelites was as powerful then as it is for Christians today. If Christians adopt an active faith, engaging the community and challenging inequality, "then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard" (Is. 58:6-7).

### **People Want to Engage**

Crafting a program that is a blessing to the surrounding community is a noble task to tackle. Community engagement is an important aspect of Christian life, and positively benefits members of the church. But, before acting, understanding the core reasoning for community engagement is essential. Sinek explains that the action of a program, in his words titled the "what" of leadership, is often the core focus of leaders (38). This action-first mentality then forms and shapes the purpose, which Sinek calls a "why" (38). Though this is the standard, Sinek suggests flipping the two (84). Starting with "why" focuses and narrows the ensuing "what", and leads to better results. It also builds a transparency and authenticity that results in higher levels of trust (Sinek 84). It is, thus, important to recognize the "why" of community engagement for the church. I find this "why" in this verse: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34). Pursuing this love through community engagement benefits the church, its members, and the surrounding community.

This goal of loving others is embodied in the simple but difficult act of seeing people as people, worthy of love and filled with value. The Arbinger Institute explains that, at times,

leaders can get caught in a box of self-deception, inflating their goals and worth, while losing sight of the value of others (ch 13, par 1). The Arbinger Institute states, “Over time, as we betray ourselves, we come to see ourselves in various self-justifying ways. We don’t see people, straightforwardly, as people. Rather, we see them *in terms of* the self-justifying images we’ve created” [emphasis in original text] (ch 13, par 1). For people that desire to act, ensuring that the core focus is on the people being served, rather than the action itself, promises greater results.

Prioritizing loving others as the core purpose of community engagement ensures effectiveness for any action towards engagement. Love is a core Christian principle; prioritizing it by seeing all people as children of God provides zeal and purpose to community engagement. This purpose translates to authentic excitement, and helps people jump into action. Acting in love is an example of a simple truth that is core to this study on community engagement: people want to engage in real, positive change.

Helping others, improving their lives, and being a blessing to future generations appeals to all people. Be it a schooling system, a citizen-centered government, the act of voting, or running a business that provides a service, the common denominator remains the same: helping others. A common term used to judge individual worth in America is one’s “contribution to society”. This term is an attempt to create a quantitative measure for a qualitative effort. The prevalence and importance of this term alone shows that people tend to value their society. More importantly, it’s continued prevalence shows that there is more to do to improve the human experience in the world. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 62 million adults volunteered through an organization in 2015 in some shape or fashion (Volunteer). This is not the number of people that desire an improved society; this is the number of people that put action to their desires. People recognize the importance of community growth, and work



to ensure that it happens. Volunteerism is an example of people valuing their society so much, that they are willing to give their own money or time to help.

Deci and Ryan suggest that this is due to basic human motivation, arising out of intrinsic needs and desires (227). The authors theorize that human motivations arise out of innate needs for “autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness”, (Deci and Ryan 230), and that being part of a larger social structure helps to achieve these goals (Deci and Ryan 262). As such, people want to contribute to society, either for their own motivations, or to fulfill the expectations of others. Religious identity adds to this desire, and places additional expectations for people. For Christians, the Holy Spirit is an additional motivation, as the Spirit works in Christians to be more like Christ in day-to-day actions. Thus, Christians have their intrinsic motivations shaped and formed to be more like Christ by the Holy Spirit.

For Christians, the importance of community engagement arises out of personal desire and biblical goal to be like Christ. This includes treating the poor as He did, challenging unfair systems as He did, and making active steps to show love in daily life. Thurman explains that this connection with the disenfranchised was a major part of Jesus’ ministry, and that following Christ includes learning how to survive during oppression (18). Bringing salvation and life to the poor was an important part of Christ’s message (Thurman 24). Thus, Christians have both personal and religious motivations to push them towards engagement. The Holy Spirit provides additional impetus that pushes them towards action, as their motivations are compounded by the work of the Holy Spirit in each Christian.

However, as we have seen from Kolimon, this high pressure to pursue reconciliation and equal systems has not led to an equally high level of engagement (55). To this end, motivation and commitment theory provide ways to increase engagement. They apply easily to the church,

and if used, help Christians meet the high pressure. Church leaders should capitalize on this knowledge, and create systems that motivate Christians to go out into the community and act out the love of Christ.

The study of motivation and commitment is, then, an opportunity for church leaders to increase engagement and work to ensure that it continues. This results in stronger communities, and tighter knit church bodies. This section thus reviews the relationship between individual motivation, long-term commitment, and continued action, and shows how they can be used to help a community grow. I argue that people have an innate desire to connect with those around them. People find significance in helping others, and working towards a goal creates a feeling of personal value. This sense of value translates to long-term engagement, strengthening group ties while maximizing results. The first step in this process for church leaders and members is to understand exactly what motivates people to volunteer. Church leaders must understand, why do people want to help? And, how can they conscript these hopeful volunteers?

### *Understanding Motivations*

To understand personal motivations, is important to understand the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. According to Deci and Ryan, intrinsic motivators are behaviors that are “freely engaged out of interest without the necessity of separable consequences, and, to be maintained, they require satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and competence” (233). That is, intrinsic motivations are personal desires that do not come from other people. Satisfying these motivations is important for every person in affirming their own self-worth. Extrinsic motivations, on the other hand, are social rules, regulations, and beliefs that a person attempts to transform into personally held, innate values (Deci and Ryan 235-36). The importance of this

distinction is to show that motivations are desires that are either innate, or come from an outside source.

Similar in many ways are intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, which are goals, not desires. Deci and Ryan explain that intrinsic aspirations are things such as “affiliation, personal growth, and community contribution, which are closely associated with basic need satisfaction” (244). Conversely, extrinsic aspirations are things such as “attaining wealth, fame, and image, which are more related to obtaining contingent approval or external signs of worth, and thus are, on average, expected to be less likely to yield direct need satisfaction and may even distract from it” (244). The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations is of extreme importance for any church leader or member that is attempting to get others to act in their community.

Take, for example, a church-wide initiative to provide mentors for a youth center, with the bonus of increasing the strength of the church body, and helping members to have their own needs satisfied. Appealing specifically to the intrinsic aspirations of members will fulfill both the goal to provide mentors for the youth center, as well as the aspirations of the individuals participating. This is because by actively being involved, members will be able to fulfill their own aspirations, while also being helpful to their community through mentoring youth. On the other hand, appealing only to the extrinsic aspirations of members, by incentivizing acceptance, status, or value, will not fulfill the needs of the group members. In fact, appealing to extrinsic motivators only may distract people from fulfilling their needs. People may act as mentors at the start, but when their needs are not being fulfilled and are being avoided, they will most likely stop volunteering, or at least limit their time and effort. This lessens church body unity, and means that the youth center has fewer mentors. These mentors are also less enthusiastic, which in turn means the church misses on a prime opportunity to show Christ’s love. As such, appeals to

the intrinsic aspirations of people garners much more success than appeals to their extrinsic aspirations.

### *Intrinsic and Extrinsic*

Literature on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations can be difficult in a rewards-based society. This is especially true when trying to decide how effort to put into either form of motivation. Liao and Ji studied personal goals and values, focusing on college students in Taiwan. Specifically, they looked at youth that were pursuing their major due to internal motivations, and youth pursuing their degree due to external motivators. External motivators in this case were parental pressure and a desire for status (Liao and Ji 157). The authors found that students who chose a major based on their own personal values, as opposed to those who followed extrinsic motivators, showed higher levels of commitment to their education (157). Specifically, the intrinsically motivated students worked harder when studying, gained more confidence in their abilities, and stayed committed longer (Liao and Ji 165). As a caveat, Taiwan is much different than America; according to Hofstede et al.'s results, it is far closer to collectivism than it is individualism, landing on the bottom third of nations on the Individualism index (97). Thus, the results of this study cannot be extrapolated to America without a recognition of the cultural differences. Even so, the results are striking, and show that long-term commitment, even to one's own education, is stronger if it is pursued for personal reasons rather than societal ones. Bénabou and Tirole agree with this assessment, and argue that while external motivators can provide a limited, short-term spike of commitment, in the long-term this commitment fades (490). Results such as these seem to argue against the use of extrinsic motivators, if the goal is to achieve long-term commitment.

The research of Robnett and Leaper looks at the effect of personal motivation and group expectations on career choices for high school students, and offers a different view of intrinsic

and extrinsic motivation (652). Robnett and Leaper explain that one's personal values and confidence can lead to goal achievement (653), which suggests that intrinsic motivation can lead to success. However, Robnett and Leaper's research also shows that group norms have the largest effect on a person if the group shares similar motivations (654). These results suggest a complementary approach between intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations. Essentially, a person's desire to align with a group can be helpful, rather than detrimental, if they have similar goals. Indeed, when properly used, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have a compounded result on motivation. For churches, this is important, because religious rules are extrinsic motivators. With Robnett and Leaper's theory in mind, religious rules can help a group unite if they all believe in following them. This makes churches powerful entities in shaping and guiding members.

Most research on extrinsic and intrinsic motivators rejects this complementary view and pits the motivations against each other, searching for the more potent of the two. In a head to head matchup, intrinsic motivators "win". This is because intrinsic motivators are internally created needs and goals; as such, achieving them results in a net positive, and strengthens commitment to continue. Extrinsic motivators do not have the same level of internal achievement, and thus commitment is not as strong. However, rather than seeing them as an either/or, seeing the value of both means that churches can better motivate members to engage. An example is in the work force, where an opportunity for a promotion is an extrinsic motivator, but satisfaction for a job well done is intrinsic. Thus, using both together can increase levels of commitment, so long as they are complementary. So, aspiring church leaders or members that want to build a community group don't have to choose between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. They can focus on intrinsic motivators, and use extrinsic one's as well if they need.

I have personally been involved in church programs that have yearly volunteer celebrations, providing meals and coffee shop gift cards while focusing on the positive results of the volunteering. While these efforts are well-intentioned, they have been, in my experience, the extent to which leadership has focused on recognizing satisfying volunteer motivations. When people don't feel that they are seen and valued, they won't continue to volunteer. In this way, volunteer programs won't appeal to as many people in the church. Overlooking of motivation likely happens because church leaders have limited schedules. Thus, they weigh the vibrancy of commitment levels against the time commitment, and choose against it. This is understandable reaction. However, it is possible that choosing the immediate, but somewhat stunted, results is not as effective of an option as taking the time to create a more intensive, member focused group.

Immediate goals, such as meals prepared for a soup kitchen or number of participants in a levy rebuilding effort (a common issue in my flood-prone hometown), are good and provide short-term incentive. However, in addition to immediate goals, leaders and members can create more complex end-goals that achieve the project at hand and simultaneously appeal to the needs of members. Rather than focusing on reaching “x” number of people helped, leaders should focus on the needs of their members, rallying around community, the innate need for belonging, and personal growth. By focusing on the motivations of members, leaders can create community action groups that get more work done. Additionally, these groups will appeal more to members, and will leave them more committed, and better satisfied. An explicit focus on satisfying group needs has great, long-term effects for group cohesion, and means the group will likely grow. Of course, this additional effort is only valuable if it does, in fact, lead to stronger groups and better

application. This effort needs to result in more effectively acting out Christ's love to the outside community.

### *Member-Centered Engagement*

To find out if this effort is truly worth the time, it is important to understand to why exactly people choose to volunteer. I have noted above that understanding why people volunteer paves the way towards ensuring people's motivations are betterment. This leads to increased effort and commitment. As such, motivations are a wonderful asset for leaders to tap into, in the hopes of expanding commitment. Additionally, if leaders can increase these motivations, as well as help members form new ones, then engagement will increase dramatically. This is when a focus on member needs starts to pay off dramatically.

Thus, understanding why people choose to volunteer is the first step towards maximizing engagement in the long run. Clary and Snider suggest that there are six different functions that volunteering serves for people; Values (self-held beliefs), Understanding (desire to learn), Enhancement (feeling better about one's self), Career (skills, gained experience), Social (relationships), and Protective (to reduce feelings such as guilt) (157). These six functions include both intrinsic motivators (Values) and extrinsic motivators (Career), as well as combinations of the two (Social, Enhancement). This leads to a difficult complication. With so many different functions, what are leaders supposed to focus in on?

The best way to find out why people are choosing to engage in an activity is the simplest one: ask them! Church groups that work towards community engagement likely will prioritize theological beliefs (Values), a desire to know how to act out one's faith (Understanding), and a desire for community (Social). Of course, the remaining functions may also be motivators,

depending on the person and situation. Recognizing and fulfilling them is the first step towards expanding them and increasing commitment.

Recognizing that people usually volunteer for more than their own motivations is important in knowing how to help build them up. Once people see that they are valued, they will continue to engage, seeking more validity. This means increased commitment and engagement. Clary and Snider echo this theory, stating “if volunteers’ satisfaction with their volunteer service is associated with receiving functionally relevant benefits, then it follows that their actual intentions to continue serving as volunteers will also be linked to the matching between experiences and motivations” (158). Of course, the opposite is true as well; members that volunteer but fail to find satisfaction will be less likely to return (Clary and Snider 158). As such, there is value in understanding and meeting motivations, simply to ensure sustained commitment. Ignoring people's motivations has a negative effect. Thus, meeting them is vital for ensuring members don't leave.

In the same way that meeting motivations results in higher commitment, it also follows that motivations being met leads to an increased motivation. In this way, intrinsic motivations become partially malleable, as being an active participant helps member needs be met. For example, if a person that studies chess to increase their critical thinking skills is successful, they will create newer and stronger motivations that have a relationship to chess. They may aim to increase their critical thinking skills at a much higher level, but additional functions of chess, such as desires to increase sportsmanship or motivation to raise one’s competitive rating, will arise as complementary motivations. Similarly, people may originally volunteer to learn, but as they succeed, they become passionate. Thus, meeting initial motivations can increase them. This gives church leaders a level of say in forming people's motivations.



However, a caveat looms over this ideal of creating and meeting motivations. Emerging and growing motivations aren't maintained if they come off as forced or controlled, according to Deci and Ryan (241). So, if leaders recruit members to take part in a program that polls the community on issues in need, they should not motivate them by saying volunteering is what good Christians do. Over time, this pressure will stop motivating people. Newly formed motivations are best sustained when they are freely made, or lightly monitored. So, rather than saying that their faith depends on if they help or not, leaders can suggest that community engagement pleases the Lord. This is not a pressured, do or die suggestion. Rather, it is an appeal to a person's intrinsic desire to see their community improve and to serve the Lord they follow. In this way, people can take their motivations and "assimilate them into their integrated sense of self, and thus fully accept them as their own" (Deci and Ryan 236). By making engagement a good thing, but not forcing people to do it, commitment stays high.

Personal choice cannot be controlled by a group. Bauer, who researched self-flourishing and growth, explains that for people to move towards fulfilling a motivation or desire, they must want to; it is not a passive activity (205). People who choose to engage in an activity or form of volunteering likely desire to actively grow. Thus, allowing this form of experimentation and active effort is vital for building individual motivations and desires (Bauer 191). This does not mean having no structure or process within the group activity. It instead means that leaders allow volunteers to have an active role in what they do, rather than giving only commands and directives for them to follow. Randomly assigning activities does not let intrinsic motivations grow anywhere near as much as asking members what they see, and empowering them to act. This lets leaders build capacity for members, and ensures they help their community as much as possible.

The process of allowing experimentation and active engagement sets the stage for relationships to grow and strengthens in-group communities. This is vital, as when people have strong relationships in a community, they are less likely to fade or pull back on their involvement. In fact, Sinclair researched nurses working in groups and their levels of commitment, including level of effort, and found that nurses who had high community ties with their coworkers ended up working harder, acting with higher resilience (781). This highlights an important piece of information for any leader attempting to increase member ties with their organization (or church); high community ties lead to high organizational ties, and low community ties lead to lower organizational ties. For church leaders of any type, placing proper focus on community ties will result in more members staying engaged with the mission of the church. For volunteers, the importance of friendship and group commonality will be influential in igniting a desire to continue; coupling strong relationship ties with met motivations will make deeper commitment an easy decision for volunteers.

Nouwen states, “Compassion, as a downward movement toward solidarity instead of an upward movement toward popularity, does not require heroic gestures or a sensational turnaround. In fact, the compassionate life is mostly hidden in the ordinariness of everyday living” (62). The process of community engagement does not need to be one where every person goes against their natural inclinations and works to bless their community. This desire is already in people, and is waiting to be harnessed through the process listed above. I included this literature review to show that a focus on the motivations of members to volunteer will increase the end results; churches that want to be as effective in their community engagement as they can will be able to do so if they focus on building up their members and ensuring that motivations are met. This makes groups stronger, more inviting, and more appealing to others, expanding efforts

rather than stagnating them. Stagnation is a great enemy of churches and church missions; if the mission is beneficial, positive, and of value, leaders should maximize its reach. Thus, by using motivation theory, church leaders can create systems that focus on member motivations, ensuring that need satisfaction occurs, and members view the church and volunteering opportunity as important aspects of their life. In this sense, community engagement becomes beneficial for church numbers, for member vitality, and for the surrounding community.

### **Putting Together Motivations and Requirements**

The church has specific requirements on how we are to operate; although easy to forget in a self-driven culture, the Christian mission is not and has never been solely about the individual. This is visible in the greatest commandment, wherein Jesus says “shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:36-40). The unifier between these two commandments is love. Just as Jesus lived in a self-sacrificial love, Christians must recognize that our call is not to try to purify ourselves in a vacuum; it is to love others in reality. Christians are called to love, and this love is best represented not in word, but in action; showing Christ’s love to the community, and learning to be like Christ through action, drawing no pre-conception about Christian vs. non-Christian. The parable of the Samaritan not only shows the importance of loving even against one’s own self-interest, but it shows how powerful love is when it stretches across cultural and community lines; in a split society, between secular and faith-based, there is no line that is more accessible for Christians.

The ideals of community engagement are not at odds with the ideals of the church, and any trepidation regarding their implementation is likely due to the perceived magnitude of the

mission. The prevalence of poverty, the extensive nature of societal inequalities, and the lack of immediate results is often staggering, and at times paralyzing. However, fear of the ability to totally succeed should not stop churches or church leaders; Jesus, as well as many of the apostles, healed and acted out in love, even against the seeming insurmountable amount of issues in the world. As we know, these issues of sickness and failure persist to this day. Though difficult, this form of love did not cease due to self-defeating resignation. As such, the church must model commitment to the cause of community engagement, just as it works to increase commitment from members. Leaders gain this level of commitment from members by focusing on what has gone right, rather than dwelling on what still needs to be done.

Recognizing small successes provides the strength for volunteers to continue, and increases commitment and effort. In fact, according to Lee et. al., commitment tends to increase when goals become more difficult, so long as there is a way to achieve success through greater effort (125). For groups in the church, this can be achieved through setting sub-goals as a continuing process to an overarching goal. For example, the overarching goal of eliminating hunger in a large city is practically unachievable. However, a church community group could set the goal of providing food for ten people, then twenty, then thirty, and so on, slowly building the goal and adding difficulty to keep members engaged and committed. The results of a process such as this, though simple, are that while hunger itself is not solved, the group reaches many more people than if they had set out only to achieve the overarching goal of ending hunger. Coupling this process of sub-goals with a focus on intrinsic motivations increases group cohesion, maximizes individual commitment, and results in a much greater level of community engagement than is currently happening.

Thus, churches should do as much as they can to be a community voice. I would be remiss to not give attention to the areas in which the church has excels. To this effect, Leigh states:

All major religions acknowledge the benefits of giving in terms of justice, humanity and kindness, as well as self-fulfilment. Studies show that religious people are, generally speaking, more engaged than non-religious people. For most religions, community work is a feature of their congregations, either in helping with worship-related activities or encouraging members to use their knowledge, skills and energy to benefit the larger community. The kind of volunteer action promoted can range from direct services to disadvantaged people, education and health services, supporting community based activities such as neighbourhood associations, and advocacy for changing social situations in areas such as the environment and civil rights (7).

Throughout literature regarding volunteerism, recognition of religious volunteers and donors is almost universal. Sargeant, et al. bring attention to the fact that religious people tend to volunteer and donate more than non-religious individuals (321). A prevailing question remains: why? - Sargeant, et al. also suggests that religious conviction results in higher levels of volunteering (321). They also theorize that religious institutions promote a lifestyle of volunteering, saying there is “evidence that religious institution involvement indeed acts as a feeder mechanism for individuals' movement into a variety of volunteering activities over time” (Sargeant, et al., 749). Finally, religious efforts are recognized in the international sector as well; Leigh states, “Historically, FBOs [Faith Based Organizations] have been at the forefront of the fight against disease in the developing world” (8). Thus, the contribution of religion in volunteerism and charity work is well documented.

I hesitate to assume that non-religious individuals are less caring than religious individuals; rather, it may be that the prevailing view is that the government should be more involved in health services, or that charities are too fallible and ineffective to give to or volunteer for. However, if a person internalizes their respective religious requirements to participate in community engagement, then they will likely have a purposeful focus on charitable efforts. As such, I believe it is less that nonreligious individuals are heartless, and more that religion can provide additional reasoning to engage in charitable acts, as well as provide groups for people to work in and increase commitment.

Even so, participation from the church is not what it could be. Religious individuals likely volunteer more than non-religious members due to their own religious convictions and desires; churches can do much more to embody this outlook. Given the size of the American church, the strength it has in forming member mindsets, and the potential for change it holds, the church as an institution lags far behind its individual members in community engagement. As Kolimon details, the church tends to fail as a force of community engagement and development, often even creating imbalances faster than it closes them (55). Moe-Lobeda theorizes that religious justice in society is not being expressed to the church body well enough (26). She suggests that people in the west, including Christians, are complicit in the creation and perpetuation of structural inequalities (Moe-Lobeda 26). There is a disconnect between Christ's example of loving solidarity with the oppressed, and the church's current place in a society that perpetuates the plight of the poor, widowed, and marginalized. There is not a disconnect between a society that stands for freedom and equality while failing to reach it, and a church that does the same. I theorize that this implicit continuation of inequalities is not due to an explicit desire to

block community development. Rather, it is because churches perceive challenging inequality as too difficult.

This returns to my previous discussion of individualism in western society. As the church works in a system that puts single people ahead of communities, it is hard to challenge this process and instead focus on group efforts. Rather, it is easier to promote individual efforts, hoping these efforts will spread among people in a church, and create community action as a result. However, compounded individualism does not create collectivism. I do not think churches have no desire to see bonds broken, chains opened, or love enacted. I believe church leaders, and Christians in general, want to help the downtrodden, restoring hope to the person trapped in a difficult situation. But, I theorize that the individual efforts within the church simply fail to encompass or transfer to the church as a whole. They remain individual, without an overarching community effort to add into. There is no reason that individuals should embody Christ's love better than their respective churches, but this will continue to be the case without a change in strategy. Transitioning the focus of the church from individual efforts to whole body efforts will create this higher level of focus, and will compound individual efforts into that of a unified group.

Churches can do this by using the psychological strategies of appealing to individual motivations, focusing on the importance of community engagement, and using groups that work as extensions of the church itself. By doing this, the church can provide a community that strengthens personal commitment, drawing on individual intrinsic motivations to generate greater community efforts. In this way, leaders can use the individualistic nature of members an asset. Here, the unique aspects of western culture become complementary to the goals of love and community engagement that is so important to Christian theology.

Meyers researched how certain Pentecostal churches in the global south were better suited towards localized development than international NGO's in the late 80's and 90's (115) and resulted in more long-term growth (118), and suggests that the personal motivations and call of Christian faith were the reason why (115). He presents the ideals that the Pentecostal churches were "material, psychological, and spiritual in nature" (Meyers 116), providing the opportunity for identity reformation and intensive personal transformation (Meyers 117). Meyers then suggests that the success of these Pentecostal churches in development arose because the development was community led and funded, based around moral and societal improvement consistent with Biblical messages, and focused on individual that led to positive community growth (118). His results show that a focus on people, specifically within the church, as well as a focus on structural change, can lead to extensive community growth.

Of importance to this study is the location, as this development occurred largely in the region of West Africa, Kenya, and Ethiopia, regions that are traditionally collective as opposed to the American norm of individualism (Hofstede et al. 97). Perhaps this high rate of change occurred because it was a counter-cultural movement, and thus was attractive. After all, the area is not traditionally individually focused, and this could be an alluring way to try something new. However, it is more likely that the positive change occurred because this method, while focusing on individuals, ultimately centered on the value of community, both in the church and at large. As such, the communal aspect of Christianity was at center stage, using individual motivations as a source of energy to accomplish the larger goal.

Indeed, the church is wonderfully suited to be an active force in development. Smidt explains that churches have the capacity to provide a stronger basis for group co-operation than secular groups (218). This is because religious sources tend to provide a higher level of



commitment than secular institutions (Smidt 217). No system in the United States is better suited to this effort than the church. For Christians, the religious rule to actively love others adds to any pre-existing desires to be active in one's community. This is crucial opportunity for church leaders to capitalize on. Churches are already gathering places, and they appeal to people with similar beliefs. In this case, it is a desire to align with Christian ideas. This centralized meeting place bypasses the difficulty of having to search to find groups of people with similar ideas to their own. Churches also have the infrastructure necessary to connect these like-minded people into powerful groups. And thus, it is here that engagement becomes so viable for churches. First, a focus on spreading love and helping a community grow must be the central focus. Leaders will draw in members by tapping into and developing intrinsic motivations. Then, using the overarching religious rule as a connector, leaders help mold individually minded into a community.

### **Case Study**

#### *Reasoning*

My theory that a focus on people's motivations, and on group cohesion, results in more impactful community engagement is largely research based. As such, it may appear ethereal or vague, and thus is difficult to put into practice without a strong example to guide the way. To this end, I include a case study that contains practical examples of churches where community engagement is a prime focus. In this section, I explain the time that I spent with the organization ReWire San Francisco, a para-church group that works with churches to enact community engagement principles. However, I would be remiss to not mention the most famous example of community engagement, the Church of the Saviour, based in Washington D.C.

This church is well known for its outreach programs, social services, and practical ways of service, and is very open in its mission to “embody more fully the nature of Jesus Christ, who brings good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed-proclaiming an era of Jubilee for all God’s family” (The Church of the Saviour). O’Connor, an early member from the church’s formation shortly after World War II, details the beginnings of the church, explaining how they specifically set out to be an active example of Christ’s love to the community, targeting specific need areas in the community and working to fill them (15). The church radically focused on the unity of community, both between members and in the surrounding community (27). The church has grown and expanded into many smaller; faith communities, which provide services such as addiction recovery, discipleship classes, financial support, job placement, and a myriad of other community service projects (Ministries).

The Church of the Saviour is often cited as an example of community engagement, and is to this day influential in the growth of this movement. However, the church was originally explicitly formed to be different from traditional churches, representing an alternative way that Christians can gather and operate as a church. For most church leaders or members, the Church of the Saviour represents a radical change to operation, one that is practically unachievable, no matter how admirable. In my opinion, change of this magnitude is not necessary for the average church. While increasing the focus on community engagement is vital for church growth, and better exemplifies Christ’s love, the operational style of the Church of the Savior is not the only way to do it. When I began my research for this thesis, I set out under this belief that members and leaders can successfully incorporate an increased focus on community engagement into already established, traditional churches.

I began, then, to search for an organization that employed similar principles of community engagement as the Church of the Saviour, but with some differences. First, I hoped to find an organization with a replicable model, one that could be either grafted into an existing church, or adopted as a complementary focus. Second, I hoped to find an organization whose processes included a specific focus on group cohesion and community building within the church, as this is an attractive model for any church hoping to grow or become better known and regarded in the local community.

Practically and theologically speaking, churches tend to view growth positively, and as such, any practice that promises to increase number base is attractive. Relationship and community are two strong aspects of any church, as they lead not only to higher rates of giving, but also to more in-church volunteering, and most importantly, to a connected mutual faith that helps believers grow with each other. The community aspect of the gathering of believers in Acts 2 is commonly regarded as an example of this, stating:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day-by-day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47).

I wanted to find an organization that focused on both community building and individual members, because I thought it would make the organization more attractive to prospective churches. With these criteria in mind, I reviewed multiple organizations, and decided that the best case study for this thesis was ReWire, a parachurch organization that focuses on church

revitalization and community engagement. ReWire is a branch of the larger organization CRM, or Church Resource Ministries, and currently operates in San Francisco, Seattle, and Chicago. In discussions with Doug Humphreys, the Seattle Director of ReWire, I found that the organization had recently expanded to the city, and would benefit from research into its processes to help with further growth. As my research would prove to be beneficial for both parties, I set out to learn the culture, customs, and habits of ReWire, gaining valuable information on community engagement principles along the way.

### *ReWire Ethnography*

My research entailed spending close to three weeks researching ReWire, using Wolcott's ethnography-based participant observation model of "experiencing, enquiring, and examining" (ch 3, par 1), in which I immersed myself in the processes of ReWire to gain a wide understanding of the organization's operations and strategies. My research occurred in August 2016, under ReWire Directors J.D. Ward, and Doug Humphreys. During this time, I performed nine separate interviews, participated in a three-day pastoral retreat, traveled to two churches that ReWire partners with, and sat in on over a week of ReWire strategy meetings. Additional data that I gathered includes interviews that I conducted and transcribed, personal notes, location mapping, and in-depth notation of the planning and theorizing I participated in with the ReWire team. My goal in this time was to answer two questions: First, how does ReWire plan to achieve its goals of church revitalization and rewiring the church for mission in its respective churches of operation? And second, where can ReWire grow and improve to achieve greater success in carrying out its ministry focus? Throughout my research, I took intensive notes, measured ReWire's successes, and performed a program evaluation for their San Francisco/Bay Area

branch. This form of intensive participant observation allowed me to become very familiar with the organization.

Overall, I found that ReWire does have the potential to achieve its goal of church revitalization. In multiple instances, ReWire successfully equipped church leaders and church members to transition to an increased level of community engagement than they had before ReWire's implementation. However, the organization did not fully transform any specific church, but instead operated as a complementary program to overall church operations. Secondly, ReWire has many opportunities to grow, including increased efforts towards group cohesion, more intensive processes of equipping pastors, and greater transparency regarding marketing and outreach to other churches. The following portion goes into greater detail of these results, and provides a thorough description of the organizations purpose and strategies. Names of ReWire Directors are readily available, but for all others, I changed the names.

### *ReWire Practices*

ReWire's stated mission is "To transform churches from the inside out by equipping members to impact their community, foster missional spiritual formation, and develop a sense of calling" (ReWire). ReWire partners with any combination of whole church, church leaders, or specific members, and begins to work with them in a process that transitions the church "from 'consumer,' or church as a vendor of religious goods and services, to 'missional,' or church as a sent community to manifest God's Kingdom" (ReWire). This ideal that western Christianity has consumerist tendencies grows due to televangelism. Similarly, churches that focus on Sunday services only, and that offer minimal community options throughout the week, continue to promote this theory. Yates explains that in the case of televangelism, "listeners and viewers are, quite literally, consuming their religious media 'products'" (440), often staying at home and

pursuing a form of Christianity that is entirely individual, with no community options whatsoever. In response to this consumer model, ReWire seeks to transition towards missional, community based action. ReWire seeks to achieve this transition through implementing several practices, ranging from seminars, to pastoral retreats, to long-term internship programs (Humphreys). The most intensive portion of this is a process that ReWire refers to as Missional Spiritual Formation, a program that is two to three years in length and includes up to 12 separate classes on community engagement, and a full internship program (FAQ). During this program, members learn about the importance of community engagement, and take on practical ways to be active in their community, all while working in small communities of ten to fifteen people (Humphreys).

The mission of ReWire, then, is held in the organization name: to instill in existing church leaders and laity a new, permanent way of thinking and doing for all people involved in an American church. This comes by taking the current church model of receiving guidance, faith, and salvation, and rewiring it to a focus on a giving mentality, building community with fellow believers and with community members, and in so doing, creating a deeper and more disciple-like relationship with God. One of ReWire's Directors, Yovani Alvarado, explained that "The goal of the program is to train people in this lifestyle, that then train others, and so on; it is discipleship, and replicable. This form of discipleship works well in one to one relationships, but is more applicable and even more successful in supporting communities through constant practice if it is done by a group, with a guide" (Alvarado).

The change in mindsets is meant to be permanent, and it is meant to be replicable. Humphreys explained to me, during a car ride conversation to a pastoral retreat, that as spirituality and faith arise as facets of belief, any movement to alter or magnify individual beliefs

must occur on a grassroots level (Humphreys). Any grassroots movement will fail if it is not replicable, able to be adopted and personalized to a city. Thus, ReWire specifically does not have pre-set community engagement activities, such as youth mentoring or homeless companionship and capacity building, and instead requires communities to do their own research, find needs specific to their church, and focus on addressing them in a manner consistent with their own motivations (Humphreys). In this way, ReWire's efforts are focused in on the specific community, in a replicable manner that simultaneously requires and creates capacity in participants.

Through my research and interviews, I identified three specific themes that ReWire uses to achieve its goals. These are called the Inward, Outward, and Together Journeys, three simultaneous ways that participants grow in over their time in the program (Humphreys). These three themes detail the different main areas in which ReWire seeks to enact change in individual and community mindsets. My description of these three processes comes from interviews with ReWire Directors, from participants in the Missional Spiritual Formation process, and from pastors of two churches where this process was enacted. Norm, a participant, first described these three processes to me. He explained that Inward is largely based on Spirituality, personal relationships with God, meditation, study, and prayer (Norm). Outward focuses on outreach, and each person in the program has a community engagement assigned to them based on interests they state earlier in the program (Walters). Finally, Together focuses on group cohesion, prayer as a group, and the relationships between participants (Walters). According to another interviewee, Alejandro, these three themes are so prevalent that they are interwoven into almost every conversation (Alejandro). He stated, "We learned about spirituality through those 3 principles; they were so prevalent, the baseline to all we did, that I can't recall any class that

didn't go over one of them" (Alejandro). These three processes make up the core vehicles that ReWire uses to create a permanent change in participant's mindsets.

As mentioned, Inward is based on the growth of each participant's personal faith, focusing on specific ways to make this a top tier priority. One participant, Alejandro, explained how this entailed anything from prayer in a group, to meditation, to Biblical study (Alejandro). To experience this myself, I partook in a pastoral retreat that focused specifically on the Inward Journey. I, the ReWire Directors, and the pastors in the retreat spent hours in private meditation, wandering the hills near the Las Trampas Wilderness north of San Francisco. We met for meals, as well as for a quick session in the morning and the evening, where we discussed what we meditated over; pastors described their struggles and successes in their relationships with God, and outlined hopes for the future. ReWire holds these pastoral retreats quarterly (FAQ), and focuses on similar practices within their group classes and internship, albeit with greater follow up due to the intimate nature of repeated, weekly sessions with small groups of people (Hutt).

An aspect of motivation that is unique to Christianity is the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit. In this case, Christians believe that the Holy Spirit, part of the Triune God, comes into each Christian and brings new life, as well as provides capacity to grow and be more like Christ. The Inward journey from ReWire seeks to recognize this, and works to train members to tap into and understand the prompting from the Holy Spirit. For church leaders, recognition that members believe in the Holy Spirit then provides an additional reason to engage. This inward focus is like the theory around internal motivations mentioned earlier, and participants are encouraged to find something that is a personal motivator and pursue it, working as a point to build upon throughout the ReWire process.



As such, personal growth is a central focus for ReWire participants, and as has been discussed, this focus on meeting personal motivators promotes increased commitment and stronger motivations (Clary and Snider 158; Liao and Ji 165). Supporting this, in my work with ReWire participants, I found that most participants tended to stay involved in the pursuit of these motivations, working either with ReWire or on their own towards them even after the program has finished. I interviewed participants that started in the past two months, that have been participants for close to two years, and that have been involved in the ReWire process for over five years. Members with the original internal motivations towards community engagement reacted well to the program, bought in, and found increased commitment as a result. ReWire's focus on individual motivations and the ways to pursue these proved a stunning success in the Bay Area. This is likely due to ReWire's focus on building capacity and empowering individuals to take control of the specific community engagement on their own; in this model, idealized motivations are quickly converted into acted motivations, which leads to this process quickly becoming habitual.

In one interview with Ward, we discussed the Outward journey, which he described as a "Biblical call to act like a missionary, and to work towards justice and equality in one's community" (Ward 2). It is in this journey that ReWire seeks to instill the importance of community engagement with members; Outward is the vehicle used to create action, and both the Inward and Together journeys build off the specific actions taken in the Outward step. According to Humphreys, these steps occur by working with participants to find out a communal issue that they consider in need of change; for some, this is homelessness, for others it is companionship for reclusive members of society, and for others, it is youth in need of educational assistance (Humphreys). Of course, many participants have a general desire to

engage in and be a blessing to their community, but are not sure how; Humphreys explained to me that “we always assign the actual goals. We work for a few weeks with people, and then provide them with a few options that they have to choose; this is because we think at this stage, it is more important to be acting than to be waiting for a specific call” (Humphreys). In this stage, the organization prioritizes action over theory; participants are not assigned only to perfect fits. Instead, the process is more experimental, with engagement processes assigned if they touch on the internal motivations of the participant. One participant, Steve, echoed this, saying “it began with working with immigrant support, for those moving in and in need, and ended up in a one-on-one mentorship program for underserved kids in the area” (Steve). In this way, participants built through action, empowering them to feel comfortable in engagement situations they may not have otherwise.

The action-orientation of this Outward journey also provides the groundwork for commitment to increase, as it both familiarizes participants with community engagement as a habit, and empowers participants to pursue community engagement as their own, internalized process in the future. Steve told me the following: “I do feel that the process excellently equipped me to missions and outreach. Now, my wife and I run a small group that uses Inward, Outward, and Together on our own” (Steve). This small group is unaffiliated with ReWire, but uses the same theory, learned specifically through ReWire’s multi-year program. In Steve’s case, the ReWire process became a replicable model. As his motivations were met, with is motivations met, his commitment and capacity grew. Now, community engagement is a core part of his life. This empowerment and capacity creation are powerful predictors of a program that increases individual commitment beyond what it was before the program’s intervention.

The third journey, Together, focuses on community relationships between members, working to create stronger connections (Ward). Throughout the Missional Spiritual Formation program, participants work through the different classes together, update each other on their Outward actions, and work to create a community that is inter-connected and familial (Humphreys). One participant, Sarah, explained that through this process, her group has become closer than they were before ReWire's intervention, saying "we're very aware of community partnership. We've become little communities" (Sarah). Alejandro told me that "we grew together, as we weren't more than acquaintances before the program. We bonded over this specific task, which helped us become extremely close over the year. Now that the program is over, we're still close, but not as much as we were when we were together" (Alejandro). As such, group ties correlated to the amount of time spent together working towards a goal, and if this time lessened, so did the close nature of the community.

The community model employed by ReWire allows for participants to have accountability in their Outward journeys, providing fellow members to grow with and create deeper connections. Hutt explained to me that in the Together journey, "you learn to submit yourself in the most positive way possible to the collective and ideas of other. It's a humbling and vulnerable place to be; when others respect you or that, you wind up building relationships that are really deep" (Hutt). ReWire attempts to foster this deep level of community, creating groups that rely on each other and live with each other. Recalling Sinclair, effort and resilience tend to increase when people are in a close-knit community (781). With an understanding of this, the Together journey of scheduled meeting, and of creating intentional community, is built under the theory that it will increase engagement levels and strengthen member commitment to the group. Clawson, speaking of community support and the benefits it provides, discusses the

church in Acts 4, saying “They weren’t just individuals, trying to make sense of what it means to seek justice and follow Jesus each by themselves; this was something they did as a community. Having the support of a community helps all of us better commit to seeking justice” (185). This sums up the goal of ReWire’s three-tiered process of building community, empowering individuals, and reaching the community with Christ’s love.

### **Conclusion: Implications for Churches**

The American church can be an active vehicle for community growth. By offering practical support for a community, the church can appeal to many that may not otherwise walk through the front doors. Christians and church leaders can do much to change the mindset of the traditional church, as well changing the way many think of the church in modern society. To do this, leaders must focus on spreading love, putting action to the well-known words about Christ’s love, grace, and care for the people of His creation. This change is not simple, and is different for every church. What I suggest here is not a fix-all, but instead a broad, four step process for church leaders and members to transition towards a community engagement mindset, the first step towards changing the perceptions of, and actions by, Christianity in the west.

First, church leaders and staff must teach the Biblical mandate of social justice as a core element of Christianity. This can be in sermons, with seminars, classes, or anything of the sort. The church that I attend, Creekside Covenant Church in Redmond WA, teaches community engagement in sermons, and brings in practitioners from local non-profits monthly, to ensure a prominent focus on community engagement. As I have detailed above, churches often ignore this mandate in favor of consumer ideologies, focusing on providing a space for members to engage in personal growth. This avoids the complex and hard process of growth as a church body and community. However, this difficulty is not an excuse, and is a challenge worth facing. American

Christianity tends to build people up in isolation. Instead, it must transition into a faith system that enables people to act in love towards their community, as a pre-cursor to any in-depth process of church-sanctioned engagement.

Second, church leaders must promote and lean into the existing intrinsic motivations that people have. These motivations center around engaging one's community, positively impacting the future of the community, and providing help and assistance to the disenfranchised and marginalized. Third, the church creates and facilitates opportunities for fellow members to involve themselves in exploring, expanding, and solidifying their motivations, all occurring within the context of a church community that explicitly values community engagement. This includes weekly action towards community engagement, tailored by either church leaders or members to align with their motivations. Fourth, churches reinforce this mandate over time, working to strengthen individual commitment and group cohesion, finally normalizing community agency and doing away with the idea that it is an optional and an individual pursuit.

By following these four steps, church leaders can transform their churches from “consumer to missional” (ReWire). By doing this, leaders foster communities that have stronger connections, that have high value in their community, and most of all, that work to fulfill Christ's call to show love to the world. As ReWire Director Dan Hutt explains, “we aim for inner transformation of the people in the group; as they go deeper and deeper in their heart, in their journey with the poor, that's where you find people thirsting, and unable to set aside their desire to see a social transformation with the people they are in community with” (Hutt).

Throughout this thesis, Christianity has been the main example of a religion that is ready to increase community engagement for believers and members of the faith. The theological reasons have been largely made as an interpretation of Christian ministry. However, similar

arguments apply for other religions. The motivation theory, and subsequent case study of ReWire's implementation, are applicable for any religion that promotes community engagement as a main tenant. It is also applicable for any religion that includes engagement as a primary motivator for its constituents. As such, the ideas presented in this thesis are built to be applicable for any religion, and if followed, will result in strong and committed community engagement from believers in any faith system.

A transition in modern Christianity is on the horizon. As the world becomes more connected, the need to oppose unfair systems, pursue equality for the disenfranchised, and build strong and motivated communities will only grow. People desire to see a better world, and to live in communities that are welcoming, empowered, and thriving, and they will not turn away from the opportunity to take part in a movement that champions this community betterment. The church is wonderfully situated to be the vehicle for this movement and in so doing, be a blessing to the world with Christ's love; it need only act.

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