

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ECCLESIOLOGY-TO-GO: DISCERNING CHURCH IN SFC
(AND OTHER UNEXPECTED FORMS AND
PLACES)

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Introduction

In the first lecture, we explored the idea of an ecclesiology-to-go. We proposed that, anchored in five communal events, a community of faith can creatively have a liquid ecclesiology—one that is fluid and flows freely into forms and structures in order to be the church in its particular context. A correlate to a liquid ecclesiology is a generous ecclesiology; a characteristic of seeing other members of the body of Christ who are different in both form and structure and still welcome them as a member-church.

We argued, along with Thiselton and Giles, that Pauline theology leaves no room for an image of church as an isolated and autonomous gathering of believers. Rather, the primary vision of the New Testament Church was that of a city or region-wide network of local churches, connected with one another under the headship of Christ, through apostolic leadership, and living under a rubric of shared faith, which guided their life together.

What is church? The church through the Spirit is a much larger, more mysterious entity than an agreed upon partnership of local groups or the sum of the many local churches. We believe that church is an eschatological foretaste of the coming gathering of God's people, an anticipation of how things ought to be. The church, because it is the work of Christ through the Spirit, is greater than the local congregation or even the sum of local congregations. Christ's work in the church pleads for a "subjective attitude of openness" to other churches, especially in the climate of individualism, the consignment of religion to the private sector, and the centripetal nature of many

churches.¹ Stephen Bevans asserts that working together begins with an extroverted orientation that “recognizes the validity of the claim to ecclesial status by other bodies.”² In our Pentecostal, specifically European and U.S. orientation, we picture the typical church in an individualistic culture as a building plus a pastor plus a congregation (see Figure 1).

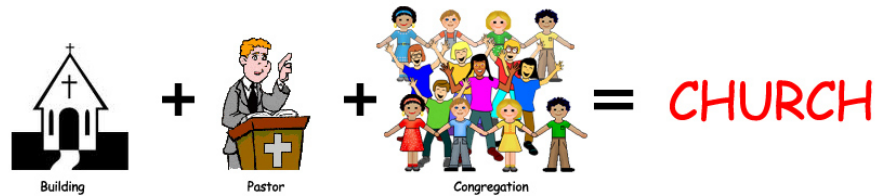


Figure 1. Church Influenced By Western Cultural Individualism.

In contrast, we suggest that the image as the church-in-the-city be embraced, in which all the different groups (or member-churches) are participants in the one body of Christ.

Berlin Germany

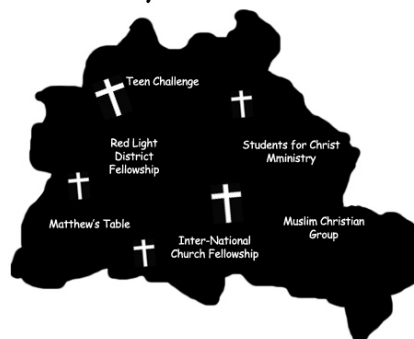


Figure 2. Multiple Member-Churches in a City or Region.

The first lecture explored the *theory* of a generous and liquid church; this lecture explores the challenges of living out this image using primarily the example of University ministry in which we have invested our lives—Students for Christ (SFC). As another fascinating example, we will

¹Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 138.

²Stephen B. Bevans, “The Church as Creation of the Spirit: Unpacking a Missionary Image,” *Missiology* 35, no. 1 (2007): 5-21.11.

explore Matthew's Table, a ministry based on a missionary couple's gracious hospitality. An invitation to dinner creates a sacred space for fellow-dwellers in their apartment complex and community who are living alternative lifestyles to share fellowship around a table—people who would never feel at home in a typical “church”.

A case must be made that there are ministry contexts that require unique forms of “member-church” in order to establish communities that are the presence of Christ in unreached places. New and liquid forms of church can be justified, rather than continually employing traditional forms of church. As one missionary asked concerning Western European culture: “Why, in a culture where 98 percent or more of the people never go to church [although they have the opportunity], do we still put so much emphasis on perpetuating such a failed mode, i.e., through traditionally conceived church plants?”³

Population groups exist that traditional churches shrink away from, finding it difficult to receive them into their pews and social circles. Sometimes these groups are considered dirty and dangerous, sinful and secular, or they are feared due to their critical thinking and demands for rational answers. Drug addicts require a Teen Challenge, prostitutes require a Project Rescue; students require a university ministry church and the homosexual community, prostitutes, goths, and punkers of Berlin need Matthew's Table.

Second, these population groups are often suspicious of, or prejudiced against traditional churches. They are not what could be called “near neighbors” even though they speak the same language and exist in the same cultural context.⁴ As sub-groups, their worldviews and identities

³John D. Butrin, Private email correspondence, June 1, 2010. John is the second person who has voiced the same observation in my hearing.

⁴Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in the 21st Century Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009).

impede trust relationships necessary to perceive gospel truth as it is lived out in the typical church culture. Most traditional church efforts with these people focus on evangelism that saves a few, extracts them from the community, and transplants them into the church, leaving the community without a *presence* of the family of God among them.

This lecture will build an apologetic for a University member-church that considers the socio-cultural context of the European student. Second, we will ask the question: “On the basis of the anchoring events, are student ministries member-churches?” Third, this lecture will explore the challenges of being church-in-the-city as a community of faith in relationship to the traditional church model. Finally Matthew’s Table, a member-church in embryonic form, will be explored as a case study in which the five anchoring events serve to channel the ministry on a trajectory towards a mature member-church.

Justification for Having a Student Member-Church

Disillusionment with Historic Churches

Earlier we quoted from Miroslav Volf who said it was necessary to wash the face of Jesus, and we proposed that it is also necessary to wash the face of the church. We claim that a fully “other” form of church, one that is considered “authentic,” non-controlling, and accessible is necessary to embody the love of Christ to the students. The backlash of Western European Christianity is the context of the University, where pointed skepticism and critical thinking has shaped the spiritual worldview since the 1960s.⁵

⁵The year 1968 is a pivotal year in European history. Called by some the “year of the barricades,” it was set in a decade of student demonstrations and revolution—against American imperialism and the Vietnam War, against authority and the authoritarian control of the universities, and pro-free love. This decade brought an end to culturally legitimized nationwide organizational structures and dictators that wielded power without accountability. For more information, see Stephen Kreis, *1968: The Year of the Barricades* 2000, <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/lecture15.html> (accessed September 9, 2010).

A World Value Survey among the secularized countries in Europe, revealed that “half of the people fault their local churches for not offering adequate answers” to their moral questions.⁶ Students on the universities of Europe told us that they had ceased participation in church because of the lack of answers to their questions while attending parochial schools.⁷ Many no longer recognize the exclusive claims of Christianity. The exodus from regular church attendance results in a continent filled with architectural monuments such as cathedrals, monasteries, and other impressive edifices that imply a religiosity that some scholars say was never present in the rank and file of the nations, even to the point of saying, “the ‘Age of Faith’ is unfounded nostalgia.”⁸

Questioning the “Christianization” of Europe

Missiologists like Wilbur Shenk argue that Europe has never been truly Christianized.⁹ Stark and Iannoccone note that the Middle Ages were not Christian, as is the general assumption, but that the peasants were simple spirit worshipers who added the Christian God to their folklore.¹⁰ Johnson and Weber point out the historic neglect of the Scandinavian church toward the peasantry and the resulting low participation in the Church.¹¹

⁶Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, “A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the ‘Secularization’ of Europe,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1994): 230-252.

⁷Gabriel Ringlet, a priest and influential Catholic, suggests the church’s inability to relate to real-life concerns partly explains its fading influence. Around three-quarters of Belgians describe themselves as Catholics, but church-going has slipped drastically in recent decades: while 42.9% of Catholics said they attended Sunday mass in 1967, that figure had plummeted to 7% by 2006. See also, Leo Cendrowicz, “Belgium’s Catholic Church Repents: Too Little, Too Late,” *Time*, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2019305,00.html#ixzz0zcNF6w2U> (accessed September 23, 2010).

⁸Rodney Stark, “Efforts to Christianize Europe, 400-2000,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 1(2001): 105.

⁹Wilbert R. Shenk, “Contemporary Europe in Missiological Perspective,” *Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2007): 126.

¹⁰Stark, and Iannaccone, 242.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 242, 246.

Some comments regarding religion in England in the 20th century shed light on the attitudes common in much of Europe today. In the 1909 Brampton Lectures, former Oxford Don, Walter Hobhouse, said, that the chaos the Church [of England] finds itself in today is because of “fundamental mistaken choices the church had made starting in the 4th C.”¹² His summation concluded that the greatest weakness of the church is “membership without obligation.”¹³ It is then not surprising to learn from a 1902-03 census that “80 percent of the population of London was indifferent or hostile to religion.”¹⁴

Paradoxically, in spite of the evidence for the lack of church commitment, Europeans have always had a form of religious activity that one could describe as “thriving.” British sociologist Grace Davie noted, “Religion and religious values aren’t disappearing among young people but being redirected ... profoundly altering the relationship between popular belief and the institutional churches ... known as ‘believing without belonging.’”¹⁵ This sounds strikingly similar to Hobhouse’s commentary a century ago. Once again, the European Values Study reinforces this concept:

There are even more people who consider themselves as religious as there are people who attend church. It is a kind of ‘believing without belonging.’ People pick and choose religious beliefs, doctrines and practices and they are mixing and matching them, as they would select food in a cafeteria. Sociologists talk about this trend as a ‘cafeteria religion,’ or as ‘church-free spirituality.’ Europeans remain religious, their approach is eclectic, and they borrow

¹²Shenk, quoting Walter Hobhouse, 127. The fundamental mistaken choices that Hobhouse made reference to were: “the establishment of Christianity as the official religion, and continuing with the means used to “convert” the pagan tribes of Europe, the institutionalization of the church, culminating in the Protestant Reformation that reinforced nationalism and Erastianism.”

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Grace Davie, “Believing Without Belonging: Is this the Future of Religion in Britain? *Social Compass* 37, no. 4 (1990): 462. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 94; Shenk, 130.

ideas from several traditions. Meanwhile many institutionalized churches, especially in the West, are running empty.¹⁶

Europeans pushed back from the *power* of the church granted by monarchies who legitimized Christianity in the Middle Ages. Sacralization, religion courting politics, granted institutions such as education, governments, and political parties an appearance of religiosity. This dual power relationship between church and state gave legitimacy to the one State church, hindering the development of other religious groups. “Sacralization of the political sphere is the *quid pro quo* [something for something] by which a religious firm enlists the coercive powers of the state against its competitors.”¹⁷ Today, Europe faces the process of de-sacralization as the state re-regulates the monopoly faith’s claims to exclusive legitimacy.¹⁸ However, “in a messy mixture of ways the authority of church and state has remained intertwined across Europe.”¹⁹ In reality, actual church attendance is low throughout all of Europe and the required religion classes in grade school are philosophical and ethical in content, further hastening the demise of Christianity in many nations, as students find the church to be increasingly irrelevant.²⁰

¹⁶“Religion,” European Values Study, <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/evs/research/themes/religion/> (accessed September 25, 2010).

¹⁷Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2000), 200.

¹⁸Stark and Iannaccone, 230-252. “Monopoly faith” is the term that Stark and Iannaccone apply to a religion that is legitimized and protected as a state regulated monopoly.

¹⁹“The Fate of Catholic Europe, the Void Within,” *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/node/16740795?story_id=16740795&CFID=148497953&CFTOKEN=33780326 (accessed September 23, 2010)

²⁰Stark and Finke postulate this will result in the growth of other competing religions like the Pentecostals in Latin America at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church which has been stripped of its monopoly standing. However, desacralization can give the appearance of secularization in the lag time between the decline in religious participation until pluralism fully develops in a nation; Stark and Fink, 200.

Scandal and Resentment toward the Catholic Church.

Scandals of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church that have been concealed for fifty years only add fuel to the fires of resentment and distrust held by many European citizens. According to a recent editorial in *The Economist*, these scandals are the worst where the church claims the greatest legal power.²¹

Trusted Peers Open Doors to Community of Faith

Embedded deeply in a context of individualism and mistrust, few people will cross the threshold into a community without the help of trusted peers. Social ties need to be established with trusted peers before students are willing to consider a new religion. The initial believers in a community are converted through the efforts of people outside the group, but real growth arises through friendship networks; for it is here that the most natural connections for worship, friendship, discipleship, and evangelism are found. “Spiritual beliefs are present but the mistrust of institutions is so great that belief is not expressed in terms of formal affiliation with a church.”²² Even after conversion and a period of discipleship, introduction for students into most Pentecostal churches is a costly decision that requires crossing cultural barriers.²³

²¹The Fate of Catholic Europe.

²²Shenk, 131.

²³Thinking in terms of Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, some of these cultural barriers would include: entering a culture where uncertainty is avoided (truth with a capital T) rather than a culture that accepts pluralism, patriarchal hierarchy instead of egalitarianism, and pre-determined (sometimes legalistic) moral behavior, not to mention styles of music and dress. See Geert Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).

European individuals do not make good neighbors because people are socialized to break relationships as readily as they form them.²⁴ The European Values Survey claims that there is a “thinning of social connections” and a “weakening of social bonds and a loss of social cohesion,”²⁵ casting the responsibility for the needy individual onto the efficient European state welfare systems. Isolation and individualism spurred on by the lack of trust, creates communities of individuals, side-by-side, but not connected. As Robert Bellah points out, self-identity and understanding is difficult to define without meaningful relationships: “There are truths you will not see, you will not find out who you are nor ever get to the ‘bottom of yourselves on your own.’”²⁶ Without the relationships found in groups, associations, or communities, students will remain half-formed or half-lost.

A Safe Place to Question Truth

Most university students question truth more critically than what is found to be comfortable in a typical church. In a recent study of traditional Pentecostal churches in Germany, a non-Christian student made these statements in response to the question: “Who should determine truth and vision?” His comments provide insight into the mindset of Europeans outside the church:

- Relationship and trust are the primary basis for leadership. If there is no relationship, there is no leadership.
- Words like obligation (*Verpflichtet*) or sin (*Sünde*) sound so legalistic and final (*endgültig*), it would be better to let go of them. It is time for a change.

²⁴Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*, Theory, Culture & Society, trans. Patrick Camiller, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 2002); 2.

²⁵Loek Halman, Ruud Luijkx, and Marga van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values* (Leiden, Belgium: Brill, 2005), 94.

²⁶Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 21 quoting Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985), 84. For a discussion of individualism from the perspective of a European sociologist, see also Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim; Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001).

- The pastor's role is to suggest or stimulate thought or point in a certain direction, but members have power and freedom to decide.
- Some accept the Word without questioning, but I ask questions to be aware of what I believe. I can give my opinion, but every person must find the truth for themselves. There are so many different Christians who have such different interpretations.
- It is important to have experience in discussions and exchanges with Christians who have grown up in other religions and faiths. I have a friend who grew up Catholic, then left the church and went seeking in Islam, Hinduism, etc., and finally came back to Christianity. This gives people different impressions.²⁷

Smith describes the vast majority of emerging adults in the U. S. as “moral intuitionists.”²⁸

The above statements show this to be true in Europe as well. The major values held are tolerance, exploration, individual discovery of truth, and enjoyment of life as one sees fit. What others believe is fine for them. Students have difficulty in discerning between “objective moral truth and relative human invention.”²⁹ Reality is a “multitude of subjective but ultimately autonomous experiences.”³⁰ The self-delusion of freedom is upon them as they create their own life game plan, including the rules by which to play the game. “They are *defacto* doubtful that an identifiable, objective, shared reality might exist across and around all people that can serve as a reliable reference point for rational deliberation and argument.”³¹ It is difficult for many of today's young people to see an objective reality beyond themselves which is not to say that they are not striving to put together a moral basis for their lives, but rather that they are like children putting together a 1000 piece puzzle with no picture to guide their decisions.

²⁷Koeshall, Anita L. “Toward a Theory of Dynamic Asymmetry and Redeemed Power: A Case Study of Reflexive Agents in German Pentecostal Churches.” (Ph.D. diss., School of Intercultural Studies Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 186-187.

²⁸Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 45.

Secular students desire the space for exploration, examination, dialogue, and discussion. The above mentioned study of German Pentecostal churches demonstrates that in a traditional Pentecostal church, members had a relatively high sense of obligation to submit to the pastor (and elders) in terms of his determining vision and defining truth for the congregation.³² For secular students, having been trained to think critically and determine truth for themselves, to be forced into the mold of accepting truth as a given is just short of brain washing. On the other hand, many traditional Pentecostal pastors have not been taught to engage with laity to discover truth together, and by and large they are not university graduates and simply do not have the same breadth of experience in grappling with intellectual issues. This trend is changing, but slowly.

Sociology of Students and the Liminal Space in Life

University students, between the ages of 18 and 25, stand in the liminal period between “not yet adult” and “no longer children.” During this time, students are experimenting, desiring the freedom to take life into their own hands, including their religious experience. As children in the home, they experienced life as a simpler reality, guided by their parents, but in the university world they encounter multiple viewpoints, worldviews, opinions, philosophies, and lifestyles making their moral decisions more complex. “Conflicts will arise for youth as they experience discrepancies between values of their peer groups and their parents.”³³ Anderson (referring to William Perry) defines this as a dualistic stage where students are “modifying a simplistic, right-and-wrong,

³²Interestingly, approximately half of the 185 church members interviewed balked at the word *verpflichtet* (obligated). They would continue to choose a high number on the Likert scale, indicating a strong sense of obligation. The differences between churches were remarkable, although none of the churches scored low on the scale.

³³Frances Anderson, “Adolescent Development,” in *Nurture that is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education*, ed. James C. Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni, 159-170 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).167; See also, Smith and Snell. 34.

authority-oriented structure of belief.”³⁴ The next stage is relativism, which applies to only certain categories of problems, but progresses to include all thinking. At this stage, the student critiques his or her authorities’ definitions of truth and is “doubting beliefs and grasping for faith.”³⁵ As a student struggles through the stage of defining his or her position and embraces the resulting implications, the student begins to own his or her way of life. Perry categorizes this final stage as commitment.

In our experience, regardless of whether or not a student chooses to follow his or her parent’s religious beliefs (whether atheism, State church affiliation, or Pentecostal), university students long to experiment with their own community of faith. Students flourish when they own the control of worship styles, community life, exploration of the Word, and moral decisions. They want to develop a faith community that is theirs, and not just belong to a group controlled by the pastors and (older) elders. Student led groups bring the leaders to maturity as they take on the challenge of doing evangelism, worship, discipleship, prayer, and fellowship. This tension within the university student, most certainly the Christian, catalyzes continued spiritual and moral critical thinking and development. A life-giving university ministry inspires growth rather than retreat into fundamentalism or, worse still, abandonment of faith.

Students: Autonomous Agents and Self-directing Choosers

In today’s world, individuals are autonomous agents who relate to each other as “self-directing choosers.”³⁶ Their inner direction tends to rely on instincts or intuition in decision-making. Terms, such as “*duty*, *responsibility* and *obligation* feel to them somehow vaguely coercive or

³⁴Anderson, 168. It is necessary to state that although these developmental stages vary from culture to culture, a level of differentiation and separation from the home and parental control exists. With globalization, this independence is sought for by young people from every nationality. How they deal with it and whether they are constrained to return to the faith and moral values of the family differs significantly.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Smith and Snell, 49.

puritanical,”³⁷ in direct conflict to the very idea of religion or church, which are measured by their capacity to “generate extended and exclusive commitments.”³⁸

Stark and Finke describe the difference of a group’s norms and values within a culture on a continuum from “high tension” to “low tension.” Church attendees of historic churches are involved in communities defined as “low tension” groups; obligations and commitment to radically differentiated moral values from the general culture are minimal. Students for Christ is a high tension community. As students on the Uni pass out “coffee-to-go” or take surveys with classmates to open discussions about God and faith, they are drawn into zones of discomfort. This stands in stark contrast to the apathy or inertia produced by a mainstream church that allows members to be passive observers. A thriving student church depends on the active involvement and the investment of energy to create community, rather than having one dictated for them. Students then rise to new levels of self-giving, commitment, and maturity.

Summary of Justification for Student Member-Church

In summary, students in the university settings of Europe are a people group who need a liquid church, one that can morph and fit into the university context and “wash the face of the church” through redeemed relationships that demonstrate a truly *authentic Christian community* in contrast to cultural or historical Christianity. The liquid church on the university campus must be a *community on location*, present where friendship networks extend natural invitations to experience, belong, and then believe. It should be a place *where truth is both embodied and explored*. More than mere legalism, critical minds are taught to think biblically and apply truth to their lives and the problems of the world. A university church should bring spiritual light and wholeness to the

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Stark and Finke, 144.

university, offering dialogue partners for the many “-isms” that find their home on the university.

The university church also *allows for hands on, participatory roles by students* as they explore their beliefs, create worship expressions, and make their faith their own. The university church creates an *extroverted community* that expresses deep love while perceiving the lost-ness of the entire university community—fellow students, professors, and administration.

Christian community lived out on university campuses challenges the commonly held opinion, especially fond of in individualistic societies, that religion is a private, personal choice. On the contrary, “human beings of every level are bound together in communities of various sorts.”³⁹ Sociologist Bauman describes this concept in his chapter entitled, “Faith and Instant Gratification,” when he says, “A crucial part of any faith is the investment of value in something more durable than the evanescent and endemically mortal individual life; something lasting, resistant to the eroding impact of time, perhaps even immortal and eternal.”⁴⁰

I submit that is precisely what we find in Christ. The gospel declared in words and lived out together on the university is not only an apologetic that will be a lasting polemic, but also an answer to the problem of loneliness in our society. The gospel must be presented in words and lived out in a way that transcends the culture. It needs to be a blending of theory (or Truth, as Christians would say) and practice with a reflective and active dimension.⁴¹ The member-church formed by the student has greater possibilities of meeting these criteria to serve their fellow students than does the traditional church.

³⁹Giles, 21.

⁴⁰Bauman, 158.

⁴¹Gerald L. Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 1.

Do Student Ministries Qualify as “Church”?

In our first lecture, we identified five communal activities that were anchoring events, signs of the presence of a member-church:

- a community responding in worship and obedience to Christ’s presence,
- a community studying Scripture to learn and live by God’s truth,
- a community of Spirit-gifted members mutually ministering to one another,
- a community of covenant relationships, and
- a community that is extroverted, driven by the Spirit to the world.

We also explored J. Philip Hogan’s insights in regard to churches. He stated that churches might be “fragile, shallow, and poorly formed,” often composed of “the poor, the marginalized, the powerless, and the deprived ... but the fact that it was made up of men and women whose lives had been changed and whose hope had been placed in the power of the gospel,” was sufficient sign that they were a church.⁴² Continuing to quote Hogan in Wilson’s book, “The church so born may not have a building, it may meet under the trees ... it may have only the weakest of leadership, it may know nothing of Western forms of worship. But if it is a community-identified testimony of Jesus Christ, it is worth everything.”⁴³

It was important to Hogan that a group of believers maintain a “continuing impact” through discipleship that resulted in spiritual reproduction. The fruitfulness of the harvest would not really be demonstrated until the church, “however small and humble,” reproduced itself, thus demonstrating its’ “spiritual maturity.”⁴⁴ In summary, Hogan’s ecclesiology included the activities

⁴²Everett A. Wilson, *Strategy of the Spirit: J. Philip Hogan and the Growth of the Assemblies of God Worldwide 1960-1990* (Cumbria UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), 65.

⁴³Ibid. University ministries also find themselves creating sacred space where there was none. I remember being expelled as a Christian student group from the University of Nice, France and worshipping God under palm trees with our illumination being the moon and nearby street lights, or studying God’s Word in apartments near the Free University in Brussels, not allowed on the university. We, too, identify ourselves as an association of believers, a “community-identified testimony of Jesus Christ,” a part of the body of Christ.

⁴⁴Ibid., 66.

of gathering, discipling converts, and reproduction, resulting in church planting as a mark of spiritual maturity. On the basis of both Hogan’s ecclesiology and the anchoring events of the first lecture, we will examine SFC for differences and similarities to make our case that a student group is or can be a member-church in a city.

Correlating the Five Pillars and the Five Anchoring Events

Student ministry has a five-fold strategy based on community⁴⁵ that is consistent with the concept of “belonging and then believing.” The five pillars that are the elements of a healthy student ministry closely correspond to the anchoring events and the elements listed by Hogan as seen in Table 1. Accordingly, student ministry should be considered a member-church and part of the body of Christ in a region.

Table 1. Presence of Ecclesiological Anchors and Student Ministry Pillars

Hogan’s Criteria	Lecture 1: Ecclesiological Anchors	Student Ministry Pillars
	1. Experience the presence of God—worship and obedience	Worship
Maturity	2. Community of the word - discipleship and prophetic voice in marketplace	Discipleship
Reproduction	3. Spirit gifted members, serve one another, the elder guiding and mentoring, the younger learning and growing	Discipleship
	4. Covenanted Community marked by Communion and Baptism	Fellowship
Gathering	5. Extroverted Community-Driven by Spirit to World	Evangelism

⁴⁵Dennis Gaylor, ed., *Chi Alpha: Building a Community on Campus* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2009). The Chi Alpha model has been adapted for cross-cultural ministry.

Student Ministry Pillar: Worship

Worship (which corresponds to the Anchoring Event 1) is gathering together for praise and adoration to God giving Him the glory for which humankind was created (Isa. 43:7). It includes serving one another through the ministry of the gifts of the Spirit and in all that a believer does (1 Cor. 10:31). Ideally, one's place of worship is on the university campus knowing that as believers gather together in the name of Jesus, He is in their midst. We invite the university community to give honor to God and experience His presence with us.

Student Ministry Pillar: Fellowship

Fellowship (corresponding to Anchoring Event 4) is an act of joint submission to Christ's command that we love and serve one another (John 13:34). It is a powerful testimony in a lonely and often uncaring world of Christ's active presence in the believer's life. At a *Stammtisch* (table reserved for discussion) in the student cafeteria, sitting outside university buildings or drinking coffee or tea, we welcome the students to join in our moments of *allelous* (one another). We have seen the bond of fellowship stretch through the years and into the arena of business, politics, and family life. The act of belonging is deliberate, commanded, and blessed by Christ's presence.

Student Ministry Pillar: Discipleship

Discipleship (corresponding to Anchoring Events 2 and 3), grounded in God's Word, nurtured by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and mentored by more mature Christians, brings about obedience to Christ's commands and produces maturity in the believer in a relational context resulting in spiritual reproduction (2 Tim. 2:2). Small groups of students meet and are mentored as they study God's Word, hone their skills, and practice ministering to one another with Spirit-given gifts. Together they find their lives transformed even as they draw their friends into the loving network of the small group.

Student Ministry Pillar: Evangelism/Witness

Evangelism/witness (corresponding to Anchoring Event 5) is the community proclaiming with words, acts, and worship that God “so loved the world” (John 3:16-17). Coffee-to-go, bicycle repair, helping students move in, spiritual surveys, preaching on a box, friendship, and a variety of other creative forms are employed as a means of creating a presence and being known on the University, even as students share with friends and in classrooms the hope found in Jesus. Life together in a loving community is itself a testimony of the love of God and a sign of Christ among us.

Student Ministry Pillar: Prayer

Prayer is a fifth pillar of student ministry. It plays an integral part in all matters of faith and practice within a student ministry on a secular university. This could include prayer walks on the university, one-on-one on a bench, Friday night prayer meetings, all-night prayer, or fasting on weekends, which create venues to talk to God and listen for His reply.

Not Complete in Itself

On the basis of the correlation between the student ministry pillars and the Anchoring Events, a healthy student ministry should be recognized as a member-church. However, no single member-church has all the resources necessary to be the body of Christ in a city or region. A university church is not an exception. Even though the anchoring events are present in a healthy and mature student group, some missing features are evident. First, many student groups do not share communion or baptism, often in deference to the local traditional church, whose ecclesiology limits the practice of the ordinances to the “church” and/or appropriate members of the clergy. Second, many of the student groups are led by University pastors or missionaries who, in the United States would be credentialed. Other groups are led by students, and the teaching, discipling, or mentoring

activities are accomplished by peers, age-wise, but of differing levels of spiritual maturity. Outside of the U.S., the role of a pastor is limited to the one man who is the leader of a church with a building and congregation. The liquid leadership structure of student ministries lies outside the typical paradigm of church, causing student ministry to be viewed as lesser than church. We would argue that discipleship in small groups, led by student leaders, combined with active responsibility in the life of the larger gatherings tends to be more life-changing than long years of sermons and Sunday schools. There is in the student led groups, however, the missing link of the truly older, wiser person. Third, because of the brevity of a generation of students, there is a certain tenuousness about student ministry: if one generation fails for some reason to “pass the baton,” the group will weaken and die. On the other hand, with the steady turnover of members, each generation has the opportunity to be discipled and take their turn at leadership, giving them great life-skills. In a sense, student ministry is a greenhouse for condensed but energized, accelerated growth in Christian living.

Incomplete as it is, we are convinced that student ministry is a member-church in the body of Christ of a city. As a community that stands outside the box of the traditional church in regard to organizational structure, place of meeting, and worship style, SFC displays a liquid ecclesiology. A new paradigm of member-church, will affect how a student ministry finds its identity in relationship to the rest of the church-in-the-city. Furthermore, the church-in-the-city will be enriched and empowered by the presence of this particular member-church, as well as others in the city.

What is the nature of the relationships between the member-churches in the church-in-the-city with a *generous ecclesiology*? How do they function to nourish and sustain a student church or Matthew’s Table without subsuming them or requiring them to be a “typical church” that is:

- No longer on location (at the University, in the context)
- No longer free to dialogue about truth

- No longer experimental/experiential and participatory
- No longer extroverted, a vital witness in their setting?

Typology of Relationships between Member-Churches

Presently, models of student ministry that can best be described by their relationship to local churches in the city or region. On the one extreme, a student group is fully dependent or subsumed by a local church or, on the other end of the dimension, it stands fully independent, autonomous, and sovereign.

Figure 3: Dimension of student-church relationships



Total Independence: Parachurch

Groups that function totally independent of a local church are often described as parachurch organizations and are defined as “organizations that are not part of the traditional, organized church, yet that are engaged in churchlike activities.”⁴⁶ The characteristics of these stand-alone models are best known for their implementation in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship or Campus Crusade for Christ.⁴⁷ “The parachurch is the ‘beside-church,’ trying to do God’s work alongside the traditional church.”⁴⁸ Gaylor quotes White’s definition as, “Any spiritual ministry whose organization is not under the control or authority of a local congregation.”⁴⁹ Often there are clear boundaries drawn

⁴⁶Wesley K. Willmer, David J. Schmidt, and Martyn Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 12.

⁴⁷My thanks to Dennis Gaylor, National Director of Chi Alpha Campus Ministry in the USA, for his research on this subject.

⁴⁸Willmer, Schmidt, and Smith, 12.

⁴⁹Jerry E. White, *The Church and the Parachurch: An Uneasy Marriage* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983), 19.

between the church and the parachurch organization and it is not unusual for tension to exist between the two. The independent organizations are accused of exploitation of the faithful congregations, draining the church of needed people and money. The lack of accountability or spiritual authority to anyone but themselves, though, is perhaps the accusation that should be taken the most seriously.⁵⁰ It can be countered, though, that many pastors are sovereign with no accountability structures either. Student ministries in the Assemblies of God was never intended to be without relationship and accountability; however, conflicts arise when the local church sees itself as the primary instrument of God in mission, the locus for community, discipleship, worship, and ordinances, while viewing the university as the place where students are evangelized and brought into the local church.

This model of student ministry has several advantages. It appeals primarily to students, fulfilling their desire to experiment and make their faith their own. They want to belong to what they create, resist being branded, enjoy freedom from traditional church demands, and focus on the particular segment of the population where they are immersed. Often the university requires that the student group be free of formal denominational ties in order to be a recognized organization on the university. The student group embraces people from many churches, has praying relationships with others, and disciples, and trains students who do not attend the local Pentecostal church.

On the other hand, students who are attending both a parachurch student group plus a church on Sunday are often challenged to know where their spiritual home is, where they should give their offerings, who their primary spiritual mentors are, and how to divide their time between the two communities. Upon completion of their studies, students often flounder, have difficulty finding a church home, and tragically lose their faith. Young adults may choose not to be involved in a

⁵⁰Larry J. McKinney, "The Church-Parachurch Conflict: A Proposed Solution," *Didaskalia (Otterburne, Man.)* 6, no. 1 (1994):49.

church at all due to the disappointment in the transition from a student-based, participatory, discipleship-rich environment to a church environment, which focuses primarily on preaching and lends itself to a spectator mentality.

Total Dependence: The Church Youth Group

On the other end of the dimension, the totally dependent student ministry usually takes the form of a Sunday school class, youth group, or cell-group within a church. Often this model functions to protect the young people who grow up in the national church from the university intellectual and social environment. Students who come from Christian backgrounds tend to participate in these kinds of churches. A pastor and church that welcomes and adapts to make room for students can be a great resource, supplying a place to meet, prayer support, and hospitality.

In reality this model displays several centripetal tendencies. First, churches insisting on this model often have a non-liquid, one-size-fits-all ecclesiology (pastor plus building plus congregation). The pastor or elders are often the only ones allowed to disciple and teach, primarily through sermons. In more extreme cases, the pastor insists that he or his representative be present at all the meetings, limiting the possibility of the students to gather for prayer and discipleship to the pastor's time schedule. In Europe, this has been one of the greatest conflicts between student ministries and churches.

Second, the local church is seen as "The Church" or the only legitimate expression of the Kingdom in the world; therefore, the programs and needs of the church are the primary concern. Students are expected to attend the church's meetings and help rectify the perpetual need for Sunday School teachers, greeters, janitors, youth workers, translators, and worship leaders. Ministry on the university is secondary. Students are encouraged to evangelize on the university to bring their friends to the church. The church fears losing students to the world, or fears the loss of

“workers” and other resources in the church. Often, the church is unwilling to release and empower workers to reach their friends outside their church’s walls, and the group has trouble maintaining a missional focus on the university.

This model extracts the students from their daily environment resulting in the loss of community on the university. Time and resources necessary to build networks with non-Christians on the university are otherwise invested, diminishing the salt and light factor so that there is no longer a ministry that is:

- on location,
- experimental/experiential and participatory,
- free to dialogue about truth, and
- extroverted in its setting.

The Partnership Model

A third model is the development of a partnership between a national church and student-pastor-missionary. The ministry takes place normally outside the church walls and near the community of students, either in student housing or in the *Mensas* (student meeting rooms). On the university, the group is identified as “multi-denominational”—anyone is welcome to come, whether Catholic or Pentecostal, atheist or believer. However, as a Pentecostal gathering of believers, the student ministry exercises the gifts of the Spirit, studies God’s Word, disciples new believers, and trains everyone for service. Although it is a multi-denominational community of believers, there is no compromise on these principles.

When the partnering church is healthy and “loves on” the students, the leadership attends and is supported either materially or spiritually by the church and trust relationships grow. The pastor and local church participate through prayer-walking with students and staff, visiting lectures, and in short, trying to understand the student and the challenge of their university world and the

multiplicity of challenges to their body, soul, and spirit.⁵¹ The advantage of this model is that the student ministry has longevity as it is supported, empowered, encouraged by the church, and students who come to Jesus find a church home. This is an ideal situation, but a rare find.

Concluding Thoughts

Several challenges present themselves in these models that focus on self-understanding or identity issues. First, a student group that understands itself simply as a club or a fellowship, a prayer group or Bible study on the university, but not a church, is defanged of their spiritual and prophetic power. It is of critical importance that they embrace a self-identity as a fully equipped body of Christ on the university: gifted by the Holy Spirit to stand firm in a hostile environment, to preach on the square, to pray for repentance and healing, to expect the Spirit to baptize and miracles to take place, and to theologize and understand their world through the lens of Scriptures.

Second, if the vision of church is non-liquid (pastor-building-congregation), then the role of a pastor is also non-liquid. To train, ordain, or financially support a student pastor is outside the typical paradigms of “clergy” and is virtually unheard of in the Pentecostal churches of Europe. However, for a student member-church to maintain stability a campus pastor is advantageous if not crucial, due to the transitory nature of student-hood and the particular skills required of a leader in this context. The parachurch model solves this problem by independently training their own staff, while the dependent model relies on youth leaders who are inadequately equipped and often over-worked to truly be a pastor to a university church.

Third, young people who have grown up in the non-liquid church experience difficulty in being missional on the university. Often they have a fortress mentality and have difficulty building

⁵¹Being a good listener is also part of the portfolio of a successful pastor. To reprioritize precious time to do all of this is quite challenging. Pastors who have children that are students are naturally more interested and prone to investing themselves in the ministry.

bridges to, or friendships with non-Christian students. They, too, have a vision of church as events happening only in their buildings, directed by their pastor and together with their congregation. Spiritual truth is separate from rational truth; what they learn in church tends to be non-critical; what they study in school is critical, questioned, and rational. Therefore they experience difficulty formulating faith concepts and values, leaving them with feelings of intimidation in the questioning atmosphere of the university.

Student ministry church redefines member roles. Students disciple students, and sometimes lead and pastor the church. Laity participates in all the aspects of church life that happens where the students live and study. Ideologies are taught at the university in the same halls where the church gathers to worship the God who reigns over all ideologies. A church-in-the-city with a generous ecclesiology will seek to support and nurture this member-church among them.

Matthew's Table: A Different Kind of Church

The second example that we will explore briefly is that of Matthew's Table. We have chosen Matthew's Table as a member-church because of its uniqueness and stage of development. A church plant ministry birthed in the hearts of John and Gayle Butrin, AGWM missionaries, is established on friendship networks that are developed via table fellowship, opening the door for sharing Christ with hidden people groups in Berlin. Starting with their neighbors, the ministry has "mushroomed outwardly ... one contact leads to another and like children working at a puzzle, we simply continue to connect the dots as the Spirit leads: from Matthew's Table to our neighbors at M...straße 17; to friends throughout our city; to the Evangelische Kirche in Marktoberdorf; to a bed & breakfast in Gernsheim; to neighbors' relatives in Saarland—Only God knows how the final

picture will look.”⁵² In response to the query, “Is Matthew’s Table “church?”” they stated: “No, we do not see ourselves as A church; but yes, we are THE church—taking the message to those who will not yet come to A church. If we were not so thoroughly convinced that we are THE church, we could not justify the ministry of Matthew’s Table” (emphasis as in original).

The Butrins minister in a context where people have “a cultural bias which has little or no regard for the reality of a personal God,” and also with a people group that would be considered “too weird to be accepted into ‘normal’ congregations,”—the homosexual community, prostitutes, goths, and punkers. “Pre-evangelism discipleship” describes the current stage of this ministry; beginning in the form of a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing before the meals, which leads to questions of faith and further personal dialogue. “Rarely has an encounter passed when opportunity has not arisen for spiritual seed to be sown.” True friendship has flourished around this table, as evidenced by the continuing activities, which Butrin enumerated: “coffee and *Kuchen*, offers to help a neighbor clean his storage room or repair a bicycle, taking a new Berliner shopping for used furniture, or sponsoring occasional mini-concerts or open house parties in our home.” The prayer of this warm and caring couple, who emanate the love of God, is that “ongoing relationships will lead our friends to make deliberate decisions to follow Jesus, find their place to grow and serve in the community of faith and in the process, lead others to him.”

The challenge of finding traditional churches that would welcome these people groups into their worship gatherings and social networks, motivates the Butrins to grapple with the necessity of establishing a liquid faith community. “We do not currently view Matthew’s Table as a church as

⁵²Much appreciation goes to John and Gayle Butrin for their thoughtfulness and response to our inquiries regarding their ministry. This and all other quotes from the Butrins are from two private emails, one received on June 1, 2010, the other on September 17, 2010.

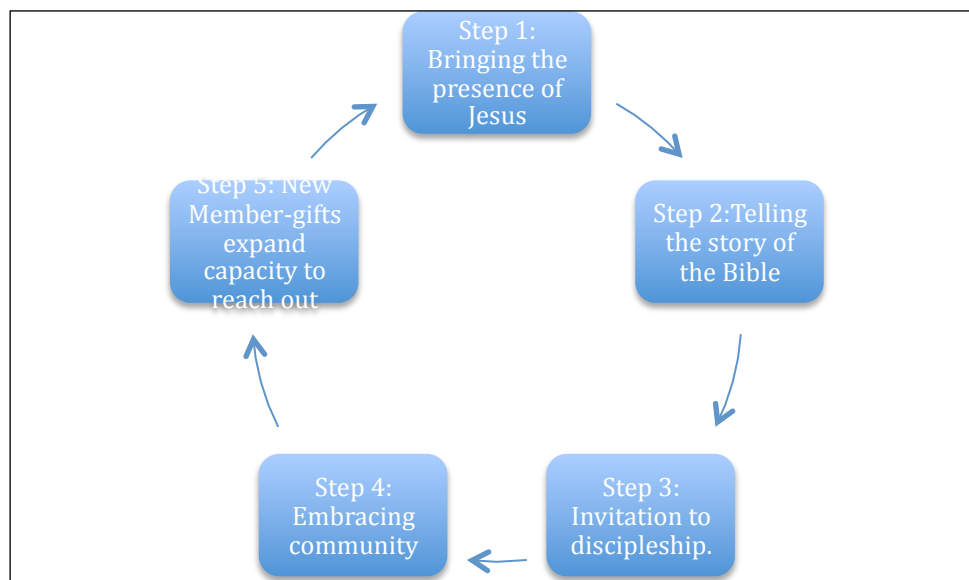
traditionally defined, but we definitely see ourselves as an “expression” of the church.” Butrin claims as his *modus operandi*, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn’t take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn’t just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it! (The Message)

Butrin is searching for creative and improvisational ways to be church for people who will never find their way to Jesus in traditional church forms. The five anchoring events are not yet in place, Hogan’s points of winning the lost, discipleship, and reproduction have not yet commenced, still, the Butrins feel they are *being* church in this very lost setting. How does a liquid and a generous ecclesiology serve to give birth to and engender life in this “not-yet-church” that is, however, experiencing “church” through the presence of the Butrins and their colleagues?

There are many similar ministries in AGWM, which because of the context, the missionaries *are* the church, but for some reason are not yet planting a church. Good will ministries in Muslim settings or Project Rescue are two such examples. Rather than dismissing a ministry for being less than a church, or refusing to acknowledge their spiritual potential by leaving them as non-churches, the church-in-the-city views the *telos* (purposeful end) of this ministry, and hopes, prays, and works until a healthy *liquid* church is established.

Figure 4: Trajectory of a Matthew's Table Ministry.



The goal should be that each ministry continues to progress through the steps toward becoming a healthy church in the liquid sense. Each step is a seed of one of the anchoring events and follows a logical trajectory:

Step 1: God's presence is brought to a community through His people filled with His Spirit (the seed of Anchoring Event 1). A small group of believers shares acts of kindness, whether in the red-light district of Antwerp or on the University in Amsterdam, as a witness; giving cold water, polishing nails, delivering food packets, dispensing medical expertise, and repairing bicycles. Because of the Spirit of Christ, demonstrated by the believers through caring acts, the presence of Jesus illuminates the place and those present become aware of the supernatural mercy of God.

Step 2: The Jesus story is told (the seed of Anchoring Event 2). The script of the Bible from God's good creation and intention, the fall of human beings, Jesus' life-giving sacrifice and His soon return is the narrative within which believers live, define the role and destiny of the community, and clarify the community's gracious action. This is the story that sets the captive free and relieves people of their burdens.

Step 3: The participants find truth and hope in the script as lived out by the community of faith present with them. They begin to accept it as their own and are eager to be discipled and grow into claiming their own role in the narrative community (the seed of Anchoring Event 3).

Step 4: The anchoring events become prevalent in the group as they meet together. The members grow in their participation with one another, learning to love, submit to, and serve each other. They begin to understand that they are the people of God, whose history stretches from the beginning of time to the banquet of the lamb (the seed of Anchoring Event 4).

Step 5: The community of faith recognizes the Spirit-given giftings in the new participants and makes room for their role among them. Because of the addition of new actors, the community is created anew—capable, innovative, and able to improvise and be present in new contexts (the seed of the extroverted Anchoring Event 5).

The church-in-the-city with a generous ecclesiology envisions the dynamic trajectory of church for Matthew's Table and other ministries of this kind. Understanding that a "one size fits all" church is limited in its ability to reach into the hidden people groups of the city, the *generous* church will breath life into these beginnings. The church-in-the-city realizes that a *liquid* community of faith that is authentic in its relationships, embedded in its community, experimental, experiential and participatory, free to dialogue about truth, and extroverted in their context is the hope for these hidden and lost people.

Looking Back and Pressing Forward

In conclusion to this second of three lectures, student ministry and Matthew's Table have served to demonstrate that there is justification for churches that are found outside the box of traditional churches, ministering to a city's unseen populations, employing peculiar methodologies by extraordinary leaders. We have argued that instead of removing new followers of Jesus from

their contexts, that they remain at home in their community and become a body of Christ that is salt and light to their networks of friends. A liquid, member-church remains on location, improvises and develops church for their culture, demonstrates and verbalizes truth, and is driven by the Holy Spirit outward to those with whom they have daily contact.

As a member church in the city, each of these ministries bring refreshing giftings to the whole body of Christ. Matthew's Table, for instance, illustrates hospitality, a lost art in the individualistic world, while student ministry demonstrates the capacity of laity to participate in the discipling process. In essence, these member-churches can encourage and motivate traditional churches to move beyond themselves, even as they all learn the art of understanding their giftedness in the city and serve one another. No part of the body is indispensable!

A non-liquid ecclesiology in the DNA of a church tends to duplicate static leadership and pastoral roles and nurtures believers who are uncomfortable in their spirituality outside the church walls, resulting in a centripetal mentality. Fear of losing the place of primacy as "the church" often leads to conflict, territorialism, and control. A resonating question remains: "How is a non-liquid church transformed into a liquid one?"

Having laid the foundation that multiple liquid churches together constitute the church-in-the-city, the next lecture will focus on the capacity of a Spirit-driven, generous church to partner and covenant with one another. Biblically, are there clues for how a generous church-in-the-city should be organized? Are any of our preferred sociological terms, such as partnership or network, appropriate to describe these relationships? After laying a biblical foundation for power-giving relationships and critiquing the acid individualism that is implicit in our "self" culture, we will explore possibilities for covenant relationships in the church-in-the-city.

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