

Moving Outward:

A Companion to *The Fullest Possible Love*

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Introduction: The Journey Outward

I first encountered Paul Chilcote, “Bede” as he is endearingly known in the Benedictine community, through his writings. Like so many others, his books were assigned readings in my theological education. When I was a young, burgeoning United Methodist pastor, Paul’s articulations of the Wesleyan way made me proud to be a Methodist.

I am one of the fortunate souls who has also had an opportunity to learn with Paul in the classroom. During my ministry residency program, we were privileged to have a class with Paul on Wesleyan theology. So you can imagine the impact that experience had on me. The person I had only encountered through words on a page had become word made flesh!

Paul teaches, and lives, how he writes. Every word is imbued with a deep, graceful wisdom, and his presence can only be described as an aura of the “inexpressible sweetness of love.”

For the past twenty years I have followed his writings, and produced some of my own, many of which reference Paul’s work. During the course of that time, our relationship has grown, and I now call Paul a mentor and a friend.

So you can imagine my delight in being able to offer a short resource that helps teams translate Paul’s work into the practice of ministry in the twenty-first century. And I do this with a great sense of questioning my own ability to be up for the task. Surely there are those better suited to attempt to translate the work of this prolific mind and heart to the emerging practitioners of incarnational ministry. Nevertheless, with the encouragement of my persuasive editor, Connie Stella, here we are. So I will make my best but surely insufficient attempt.

In the *Fullest Possible Love: Living in Harmony with God and Neighbor*, Paul describes how the two streams of the Benedictine and Wesleyan ways converged in his own life. He describes this not as a turbulent process but rather as a calm confluence in which two paths merged into one.

In this guidebook I want to offer a third convergence. I want to show how what Paul calls the “Benedictine Wesleyan way” converges in a movement called *Fresh Expressions of Church*.

Paul and I have frequently brushed saddles as we travel around the US making holy mischief in the spirit of the circuit riders of old. One such occasion happened in the summer of 2024 at the Texas Annual Conference. We were grateful for the invitation of Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey to provide teaching sessions in the plenaries before the incredible laity and clergy of her episcopal area.

This convergence provided us an opportunity to test run some of the ideas in this book. The focus of our teaching was simply the three movements of the spiritual life:

- The journey *inward* a movement into solitude, pushing past the false self and into the depths of our inmost self.
- The journey *upward* into union with God, a movement from illusion to prayer.
- The movement *outward* toward our fellow human beings, discovering the oneness we already are.

Paul taught about the inward and upward movements (perhaps no one is more adept at this), and I taught about the outward movement, suggesting that Fresh Expressions, at the dawn of this third millennium, is a practical pathway to make that journey.

The Fresh Expressions movement is a Holy Spirit-led approach to cultivating new Christian communities with the growing number of people not currently connected to any church. It is an awakening of the apostolic way of the early church that serves the present age. While it is an ecumenical movement that transcends denominational boundaries, simultaneously in another sense, it is the most Methodist thing in the world today.

At its core, Fresh Expressions resonates with and is a recapitulation of the Benedictine Wesleyan way. As Paul demonstrates, there is a Benedictine commitment to harmonize all of life in devotion to God, to not retreat out of the world but form communal life in Jesus amid it. Benedictine spirituality includes practices that enhance the interrelationship of the physical and spiritual, the personal and communal, seeking to synthesize work, study, and prayer. It rejects the false dichotomy of the sacred and the secular.

The Benedictine tradition unleashed a small group movement of empowered laypeople. The three values of the Benedictine way—community, Christlikeness, and harmony—are three core values of the Fresh Expressions movement as well.

People are often surprised to discover the first Methodist Fresh Expression in history was started by Susanna Wesley. Her role and influence as the “Mother of Methodism” has been historically downplayed. Yes, she raised ten children, including John, Charles, and Mehetabel (a notable poet in her own right), but there’s more to the story.

In 1710 Susanna began conducting irregular worship services in her home. A nine-year-old John Wesley grew up in this environment of ecclesial innovation. She broke many social and ecclesiastical conventions of her time. Her husband, Samuel Wesley, was himself a priest who traveled frequently, spent time in debtors’ prison, and struggled to provide financially for the family. He asked her to stop these irregular gatherings as they were upsetting the local curate. Susanna resisted these attempts, as you can read in the exchange between her and Samuel in the now archived letters.

Susanna’s ecclesial innovation is part of the treasured inheritance of the people called Methodists. Methodists are wired for the blended ecology, in which new innovative forms of church spring up alongside existing congregations.

This spirit would live on in the Wesley brothers. John Wesley often received harsh critique for being “big with mischief” regarding some of his “innovative” practices like field preaching. The Wesley’s also unleashed the priesthood of all believers through an army of “lay preachers.” The different Methodist gatherings were sustained by the laity.

Laities were unleashed into the fields, prisons, and mining communities, as well as into the societies, classes, bands, and Methodist preaching houses. Wesley was an apostolic leader who advanced the gospel from a heart strangely warmed with compassion for those outside the church. The flame of love awakened in his heart moved inward, upward, and outward into the fields. He did this while sustaining the larger institution’s integrity.

Cultivating missional movements among inherited systems is part of the original impulse of the people called Methodists. This was something the young Wesley brothers learned in their mother’s kitchen.

Just as Benedictine monastic communities were centers of spiritual formation, Fresh Expressions communities intentionally shape discipleship and character today.

In a hybrid ecology of church, Fresh Expressions move toward harmony, recognizing the need for a blended ecology of church. It combines attractional (gathered) and missional (sent) approaches, as well as analog and digital expressions.

This mirrors the Benedictine balance of *ora et labora* (prayer and work) and Wesleyan mobilization for mission.

Fresh Expressions adapts to cultural shifts, much like the Benedictines did throughout history. It seeks to be incarnational in a changing world.

Wesleyan theology encourages contextualization—making the gospel accessible to diverse contexts. Fresh Expressions embodies this by meeting people where they are.

In summary, Fresh Expressions is a dynamic fusion of ancient wisdom (Benedictine) and vibrant spirit (Wesleyan), creating fresh wineskins for new wine in today’s mission reality. It is a beautiful convergence of the ancient wisdom of the Benedictine tradition with the vibrant spirit of Wesleyanism. It invites us to build upon the rich heritage of faith, adapt to our context, and create fresh expressions of church that resonate with today’s seekers and believers.

In an epidemic of isolation and loneliness, where firearm violence is now a major health crisis and the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, are we willing to explore new ways of being church that bring healing in the everyday spaces of life?

This guidebook is a resource to help your team practice the Benedictine Wesleyan way in your local community.

On any journey you need a few key items: a map, a compass, food, and a destination. So, this guide for the journey outward is structured around those four items.

I am convinced that the Benedictine Wesleyan way is a “practical divinity” so simple that anyone can practice it in their daily life. The movement outward includes fundamental aspects of following Jesus such as evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. I want to demystify the more esoteric aspects of those categories and guide your team as you make the journey.

This easy-to-use guidebook provides primarily three basic tools toward that end:

1. A simple **companion** to *The Fullest Possible Love* that offers a convergence of these three paths in a shareable resource for leaders, teams, and congregations.
2. **Sermon outlines** for each chapter that are suggested guides for a sermon series or Bible study. They are a kind of skeleton from which a preacher or teacher could flesh out the chapters in a large group.
3. **Discussion questions** that can be used in small groups to stimulate conversation around the key ideas. Following the sermon outlines are a series of questions framed in the three broad categories of head, heart, and hands. Groups could work through each of the questions following the sermons, or a group facilitator could choose a couple of the questions in advance.

Week One – The Journey Outward

Introductory Sermon

“The Way to a Fuller Life”

“I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.”

Key Passage: John 10:7-10

Big Idea: The Christian life is a journey toward the fullest possible love. It is a fuller life of greater purpose.

Sermon Summary:

The first Christians were called followers of “The Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This meant that they lived their lives in the way of Jesus of Nazareth (John 14:6). It was in Antioch that these followers were first called “Christians” or “little Christs” (Acts 11:19-30). Those first followers’ lives so resembled that of their master that they were identified as Jesus in miniature! In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as “the gate of the sheep” (John 10:7). He is the entryway to a new kind of life. Often, we have read this in a diminished way, as if Jesus is the entrance into heaven or the golden ticket “to go to heaven when we die.”

However, salvation is much more expansive than this. It is about a whole life, a healed life, and a fuller life. Jesus comes to give us “life abundantly.” Jesus being a “gate” is less about an escape hatch to another dimension and more an entryway into a new kind of life now—a life that includes every dimension of our daily rhythms. This is more than simply “going to church on Sundays.” This is a new way of being in the world. Jesus is a “gate” in that his life is a *pathway* to the fullest possible love. Elsewhere Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The Benedictine Wesleyan way is really about the ongoing journey of discovering the genuine purpose of your life which is love—a lifelong quest for the fullest possible love of God and neighbor in real time in this life. Are you ready to go?

Key Points:

- Benedictines and Methodists are always “on the way,” moving forward, pressing toward the goal.
- When our Christian life is limited to “going to church” on Sundays, it diminishes the interrelationship of the physical and spiritual, personal and communal.
- There is a gap in our Christian lives the other six days of the week. But also, a gap has grown between head, heart, and hands (i.e., what we believe, and how it shapes how we feel and live).
- The lifelong journey includes engaging the living Word, saving faith, accountable discipleship, formative worship, and missional vocation in the world.
- The Benedictine Wesleyan way takes place in the ordinary places and rhythms where life happens.
- It’s soul-destroying work to try and follow Jesus alone. We are on the journey together!

Week One – The Journey Outward Discussion Questions

“The Way to a Fuller Life”

Key Passage: John 10:7-10

Make sure everyone in the group has read the introduction to *The Fullest Possible Love* by Paul Chilcote. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes (whatever the group decides in advance). Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person’s face can be seen. Try to give each

person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a number predetermined by the group. Sometimes it's appropriate to ask, "Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?" or "Can we hear from someone who hasn't shared yet?"

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read John 10:7-10 out loud. Perhaps have another person of another gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- Have you ever considered that being a Christian is about growing in the "fullest possible love"? How does that idea resonate with or challenge you?
- What is your definition of "discipleship"? Describe what the lifelong journey of grace looks like for you.
- What does the idea that Benedictines and Methodists are always "on the way," moving forward, pressing toward the goal, mean to you?

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Does the idea of following Christ leading to a "fuller life" inspire you? Have you felt fulfilled in the way the passage describes? What does "abundant life" look like?
- Have you ever felt like your Christian life was limited to "going to church" on Sundays?
- Have you ever felt like the interrelationship of the physical and spiritual, personal and communal seems fragmented? Why or why not, elaborate?

3. Doing (Hands)

- Can you think of some practical ways that reconnecting head, heart, and hands (i.e., what we believe, and how it shapes how we feel and live) could look in your normal day? Describe some examples.
- How do the Gospels portray Jesus's discipleship taking place in the ordinary spaces and rhythms where life happened? Give some examples.
- Make sure everyone has the time and location of the next meeting on their calendar.
- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

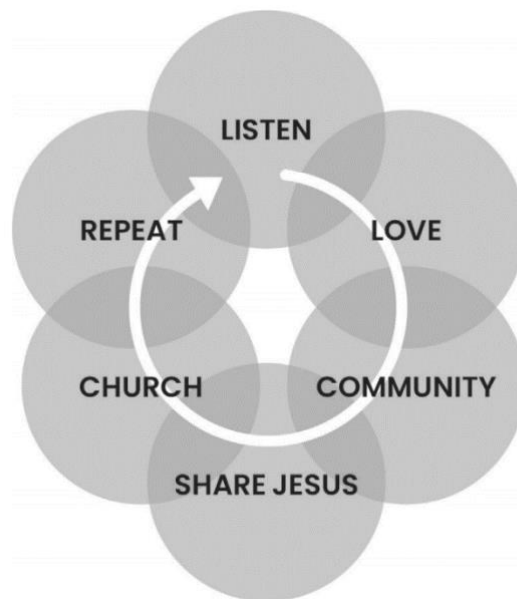
Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

I. A Map

In *The Fullest Possible Love*, Dr Chilcote describes how attentiveness is an essential aspect of a Benedictine Wesleyan way. Listening—practicing attentiveness, awareness, or mindfulness—opens up life and enables it to blossom.

In Fresh Expressions, our map is called the “listening first journey” or the “loving first journey.”

This is a map for our movement outward. It is a journey of listening, loving, forming community, sharing Jesus, church taking shape, repeat.



Of course, this process is messier in practice than this diagram might lead us to believe. It’s not usually a neat or even linear journey. The church is often guilty of looking for quick-fix solutions, shortcuts, and formulas. Thus, I prefer the metaphor of a journey in which there is a series of movements. A team can move forward and backward, one simple step at a time.

For the most part, the journey of forming Fresh Expressions will happen in some sequence of these stages. Perhaps it is most helpful to think of these moves as an adventure filled with unexpected twists, turns, and even setbacks. As we keep moving, following the Spirit, we explore new horizons of possibility. Each movement overlaps with the ones that precede and follow it. We never stop “listening” and “loving,” or “building relationships,” as we journey toward community. It’s also important to note that each movement of the journey is inherently good in itself. These dimensions are not a means to an end, rather each is an end in itself.

God wants us to listen. God wants us to love. God wants us to deepen relationships. God wants us to share our faith when appropriate. Even if a church never forms, the journey itself is worth taking and is innately fulfilling. We carry with us the learnings and relationships formed over each step that we take together.

Stage One: Listen

The first stage of cultivating fresh expressions within the community is prayerful “double listening.” Double listening includes attentiveness to both “God and context.” Rather than assuming we already know our context, this requires us to take a posture of curiosity and wonder. We look at our community with the soft eyes of a learner.

This is the Benedictine Wesleyan way of *Lectio Mundum* ... attentiveness to God’s world.

Think of it as a treasure hunt for the goodness that is already there. We are seeking the goodness that is baked into every place and every person that makes up our community.

Like the first disciples, we go out two by two, looking for “persons of peace.” We are prayerfully listening to how God is already at work before we arrive. We never assume we bring God with us. Our posture is one of being good guests. We are not the hosts. We are looking for spaces where we might gather. We are looking for practices that connect people. What are people up to in our community? What are they doing together? Where are they eating? What stories are they telling themselves?

Chilcote suggests we learn the habit of *lectio vicinitas*. This involves cultivating the habit of regularly prayer walking our community. We simply pray for different people and locations. Noticing. Paying attention. Making observations. If someone strikes up a conversation, we try to do more listening than talking. We try to be genuinely curious about who they are and what their story is.

Here is a great place to utilize the fourfold pattern Chilcote suggests: *lectio*—see, *meditatio*—reflect, *oratio*—converse, *contemplatio*—write and act.

Stage Two: Love

This is simply about finding ways to be with people in our community, loving and serving them with no agenda.

As we are out in the community, learning, making connections, we lead with love. How do we genuinely be attentive to the people in this community? Who is flourishing? Who is isolated? Who is unseen? Where is our gut stirred with love? Why are we feeling that? Is our tendency to move away from painful aspects of our community? Can we stay with it? Ask ourselves how we can be helpful and not harmful.

Where is love already pulsating all over the community? Is it between parents watching their kids play soccer? Is it in the dog lovers who gather at the park for their fur babies to play? Is it in the fitness groups who gather together to prioritize stewardship of the body? Is it at the local pub where the regulars circle up to process another day at their 9 to 5?

Are there obvious injustices in the community? Hungry children in a food desert? People caught in the grips of addiction with little resources to facilitate their healing? Racism in the workplace or redlining of certain neighborhoods? Are there LGBTQ persons who feel shunned or disconnected? Are farmers faced with a bad crop due to climate and soil issues? How might we cultivate little pockets of compassion in the gaps between the fullness of God’s kingdom and our present reality?

Stage Three: Community

The fresh expressions approach is one of long-term incarnational engagement. It is through the repeated patterns of faithful presence that the practice of loving and serving becomes authentic community. Time is the fertilizer of relationships. As relationships gain strength, trust begins to build among the group. A profound sense of connectedness begins to form as we gather around the habitual practices. The community becomes a

source of life as we experience the healing of our isolation. Not only do we enjoy being around each other, but it becomes something we look forward to. We start to find an authentic sense of belonging.

Being intentional about being together in a regular rhythm and being focused and present is foundational to the community-building stage.

We try to be story collectors. We try to remember the names of each person we meet, and ask questions about where our conversation left off. The listening and loving doesn't stop like we are checking off the boxes to bait and switch someone into becoming a Christian. Community doesn't typically just happen. We have to be intentional. Listening. Loving. Learning. These are key practices in the ingredients of cultivating community. Often there are signs that relationships are growing deeper. We start to gel. We want to hang out more. We start a group text. We start to genuinely feel cared for and connected.

Stage Four: Share Jesus

In this stage, the group begins to intentionally explore the Christian faith. This occurs through a mixture of both formal learning (intentional conversations) and social learning (simply sharing in the rhythms of life together). More mature believers may begin to form mentorships with younger apprentices, spending time outside the group, discipling them through the messy relational process.

There is no formal program. We are operating primarily in the realm of improvisation, sensitive to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, responding and adjusting as we go. This kind of evangelism requires us to be sensitive to the fact that God is already at work in every life. But this must be balanced with our call to share our faith in Jesus with others.

If we are listening and loving well, if community is starting to form, people will naturally begin to move into the spiritual. As we listen and love, people will naturally be intrigued. They will ask questions. Then we know togetherness is starting to coalesce. Most of the time, they will invite us to pray for them or send positive vibes. They will respond to our curiosity with curiosity, trying to figure out what's different about us.

Sharing Jesus is not about trying to convert someone. It's about sharing our own faith story in a no-pressure and organic way. I often must preface, "So you know I'm a Christian, right, but not that kind." Or more simply, "I pray because it helps me ..." or "I find meditation really useful."

Here also is the place where we explore ancient spiritual practices like contemplative prayer. Everyone in the group doesn't need to identify as a "Christian" in order to enjoy these practices. The practices themselves help us all turn to solitude, to make the journey from the false and illusory self toward the true self. We trust the Holy Spirit to meet each person in an appropriate way to them.

We also share this work so it's not one person tasked with doing the spiritual stuff every week. We ask who would like to lead the prayer next time, or who would be willing to share a Jesus story. This gives participants in the community growth opportunities. It's one thing to bow in prayer, it's another to lead it. It's one thing to participate in a Jesus story, it's another to share one.

When disciples of Christ are beginning to be formed, we are moving fully into *ecclesia*, a community centered around the Risen Jesus, or simply ... church.

Stage Five: Church

When people are beginning to enter into relationship with Jesus, explore the living Word together, and become passionate about self-giving, other-oriented "witness," church is taking shape. This may not appear to be our conventional understanding of church. Each fresh expression may be as diverse as the group or practice it is centered around.

At some point we might introduce the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Communion often becomes a normal part of these gatherings. People will ask about contributing to the group, articulating a desire to give back. When we begin to take a formal offering, it is often best if the group decides together where the donations will go.

The key marker of where church has started to form is that we are intentionally connecting with and worshiping God in some way. There is an upward movement of deepening connection.

The four marks of the Nicene Creed are a good framework for when a church community has formed. The community is *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*. Those four words really describe four interlocking relationships: *One*, the inward relationship of community and belonging. *Holy*, the upward relationship of being transfigured in our interaction with God. *Catholic*, an outward relationship with the wider church across time and space. *Apostolic*, an outward relationship with those who are not connected with any church.

It's important to consider the minimal ecclesiology of Jesus here: "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am with them" (Matt 18:20). Where there are people gathered around the Risen Jesus, there is the church.

Stage Six: Repeat

The potential for multiplication with fresh expressions is huge. In the McDonaldized church we are often focused on durability. Something is healthy if it withstands the test of time. However, a close reading of Scripture and Christian movements in history show that "durability" in an institutional sense is not the main concern. There are periods of the church's life when it flourishes briefly then goes underground or takes a new form, for instance in Jerusalem or Antioch. The greater concern is multiplication. While there is certainly a sameness and stability in the church, she has survived the test of time not by staying the same for long periods of time but through multiplication in an unending array of contextual variations, while staying rooted in the first principles revealed in Scripture.

The journey is the normal process through which a fresh expression of church forms. The movement outward can be summarized by these simple steps:

- find a friend (or more);
- prayerfully discover a simple way to love the people around you;
- deepen relationships with them
- share your feelings about Christ as part of a fuller life;
- encourage those finding faith to form a small Christian community where they are and connect to the wider church; and
- repeat the process again, or multiply what you have started.

Week Two: "A Map" Sermon Two

“After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, “May peace be on this house.” If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, “God’s kingdom has come upon you.””

Key Passage: Luke 10:1-9

Big Idea: The map for our outward journey is Listen, Love, Community, Share Jesus, Church, Repeat.

Sermon Summary:

Luke 10 is Jesus’s missional blueprint for a pre-Christian world and an effective guide for a twenty-first-century, post-Christian world. Jesus gives a kind of road map for how to form and multiply new Christian communities.

First, the disciples are to pray, “ask the Lord of the harvest.” They are to listen, to notice the context, that the “harvest is plentiful.” Then they are sent to love. It’s a posture of vulnerability, leaving behind their baggage, entering fully into the world of the people they find, and loving and serving them. They locate the “persons of peace” who welcome them and open the community to them, and they build relationship with them over time. As they share Jesus, doing life around the table, church begins to take shape. They heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom. They then repeat the whole process again in the next town. This is the way the church spread across the entire world. This map reconnects the great commandment, “love God and neighbor” (Matt 22:35-40), with the Great Commission, “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18-20).

Key Points:

Each part of the map displays an intrinsic aspect of God’s kingdom:

- Listening shows respect, which is a kingdom quality (Acts 11:12).
- Love can take the form of pastoral care. For example, environmental concern (love for creation) or promoting social justice (love for marginalized persons) are kingdom traits (Matt 25:40).
- Community is integral to the kingdom. Human beings were created to live in loving relationship with God and each other (Luke 10:25-28). We were created for community.
- Sharing Jesus is having conversations about the person who announced the kingdom (Mark 1:15).
- Church and the kingdom will become one when Jesus returns (Rev 21:1-2).

**Week Two: “A Map”
Discussion Questions**

Chapter 1.

Key Passage: Luke 10:1-9

Make sure everyone in the group has read chapter 1 of *The Fullest Possible Love*, titled Attentiveness. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes, whatever the group decides in advance. Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person's face can be seen. Try to give each person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a time predetermined by the group. Sometimes it's appropriate to ask, "Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?" or "Can we hear from someone who hasn't shared yet?" Invite those who have journaled about their discipleship to share.

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read Luke 10:1-9 out loud. Perhaps have another person of another gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- Can you think of a story when you or someone you know embodied the map by Listening, Loving, Building Community, Sharing Jesus, Forming Church, and Repeating? Give some examples.
- What year was your congregation planted? Describe how it came into being. Are there parallels with the loving-first cycle?
- Can you think of a time when you started some new ministry or community, when you tried to skip over one of the circles? For instance, not listening, not loving, and so on?

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Describe how each circle might feel to someone outside the church. Perhaps give some examples from your own experience.
- In the practice of following the map, what feelings might you experience with each circle?
- Can you imagine how outsiders might feel when the church skips one of these circles, like starting a ministry without listening, doing outreach without forming community, or never sharing Jesus?

3. Doing (Hands)

- What group of people are you called to? Describe some of the practical ways you could go about starting on the journey?
- Is there a place in the community you have in mind to form a new Christian community? How might you begin to inhabit and listen in that space?
- Who in your community might never be reached if you didn't follow the map?
- Make sure everyone has the time and location of the next meeting on their calendar.

- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

II. Compass

Any time you set out on a journey, it's good to have a compass to point you in the right direction.

In *The Fullest Possible Love*, Dr. Chilcote describes the essential aspects of a Benedictine Wesleyan way as a fellowship of love and grace, life together around the table, accountable discipleship, and harmony. Let's think of these four essential ingredients as the four points of our compass.

These four directions also have deep resonance with the four core missional values of Fresh Expressions: inclusive, accessible, transfiguring, and connectional. The grace-centered communities we seek to cultivate are:

1. **Inclusive:** a manifestation of God's outreaching love, a place of healing rather than harm, an environment of grace, a belonging-before-believing space where all are welcome and where the "good news" is good for all and made available to all (Luke 4:18-19). The community exists primarily for people not currently connected to any church.

Inclusivity is another way to describe the commitment to be a fellowship of grace and love.

2. **Accessible:** meaning close, culturally appropriate, and speaking the common language(s) of the context. This value was embodied by Jesus in the incarnation when he came and "made his home among us" (John 1:14).

Accessibility is another way to describe the commitment to a life together around the table. For many, the church has become inaccessible. It meets in an intimidating space where strange rituals occur. The people who gather there don't have the best reputation. The once-a-week rhythm on a Sunday morning is also exclusive for those who work or rest during that time.

Doing life together around tables means we move from having one big banquet once a week to throwing little dinner parties and picnics meeting all over the community at many different times. Some meet in homes, others meet out in restaurants, others meet in a community center, or public park.

This way of being church reaches all the way back to the first vision of Christian community we see in Acts 2:43-47:

A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

3. **Transfiguring:** here we acknowledge the innate "very goodness" in every person and understand how each of us are also on a journey of renewal. People can be honest about their wounds, challenges, and

the progress of their spiritual growth in a community of love and grace. Members are free to process their discipleship journey in an unfiltered and prayerful way that brings real healing (James 5:16). This empowers us for works of compassion and justice in our communities.

Transfiguration is a good way to describe the distinct Benedictine Wesleyan way of understanding the nature of grace and salvation. Contrary to much fundamentalist Christian teaching about the bankrupt nature of our human condition, in the Bible the starting point of our story is *original goodness*. God creates human beings in the image of God and calls the whole masterpiece *very good* (Gen 1:31).

This goodness precedes any business about being irreparably bad. Perhaps original trauma and the virus of sin is a better way to talk about the current fragmented condition of the human race. In a journey toward healing, if we don't get the starting point right, we can end up on the wrong path. If we are irrevocably bad and powerless to change, not much of a response is required on our part. We are born bad, stuck helplessly bad, and salvation is collapsed into being rescued and "going to heaven when we die" if we can just recite the correct credal formula. In Fresh Expressions our focus is not transformation but rather transfiguration ... awakening people to the goodness they already are.

Transfiguring grace is facilitated through a community of accountable discipleship. In these smaller groups, as we watch over one another in love, we each support each other in our own journey toward the fullest possible love.

- 4. Connectional:** fresh expressions exist in a relationship with each other and the wider church. They assume the emerging social structure of the network society in a digital age. This connectionalism resembles the nature of the early church and is particularly evident in the relationship between Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 15).

In it we see a commitment to harmony, not just among those in the community, but with the wider church and the world. Various reformation movements across history have sometimes sought to burn the bridges between tradition and innovation. This is not the Benedictine Wesleyan way, nor is it the approach of fresh expressions. Rather, it is a *conjunctive* way of being church committed to the *both/and*. We call this a "blended ecology of church," in which inherited and emerging forms of church live together in a harmonious union.

Week Three: "A Compass"

Sermon Three

"In addition, we have a most reliable prophetic word, and you would do well to pay attention to it, just as you would to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Most

important, you must know that no prophecy of scripture represents the prophet's own understanding of things, because no prophecy ever came by human will. Instead, men and women led by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

Key Passage: 2 Peter 1:19-21

Big Idea: On any journey we need a compass. For the Benedictine Wesleyan way, this is a set of four values: inclusive, accessible, transfiguring, and connectional.

Sermon Summary:

One of the key ideas in this chapter is that on a journey toward cultivating community we need key values that serve as a compass to point us in the right direction. Jesus has been called the "compass," our "true north," and the "morning star." Jesus ultimately points us in the right direction on our spiritual journey. Jesus is "the way" of the fullest possible love. The compass is really a set of four values: *being a fellowship of grace and love*, *doing life around the table*, *embracing accountable discipleship*, and *being in harmony*. Jesus's own life is the embodiment of those values.

Jesus lived an *inclusive* life: his gospel of love was for all people everywhere (John 3:16). Jesus embodied *accessibility*, he "moved into the neighborhood," tabernacling among us, taking on the rhythms and flavor of his context (John 1:14). Jesus himself was on a *transfiguring* journey (Luke 2:52) and invited his disciples into a journey of *transfiguration* in which they became his witnesses, embodying his own way of life (Acts 1:8). Jesus was being *connectional* by cultivating harmony with people right where they did life, like at a dinner table for example (Luke 22:17-20). Jesus's own life becomes the "compass" for how we can be the church in the world.

Key Points:

These four values embodied by Jesus became some of the great doctrines of the Christian faith:

- the inclusive mission of God (God inhabits the world in generous love);
- the incarnation (God enfleshed in human culture);
- the Great Commission (God calls his followers to make disciples); and
- the church's catholicity (God connects all people together across space and time).

So these values become our compass on the journey toward forming new Christian communities that are

- Inclusive. Most who gather in the new community don't go to church.
- Accessible. Activities, worship, etc. are shaped by the context.
- Transfiguring. Gradually, those who attend are being formed in the faith.
- Connectional. So right where they are, they become new Christian communities for the people in them, growing links of harmony with the wider church.

Week Three: “A Compass” Discussion Questions

Chapters 2-3.

Key Passage: 2 Peter 1:19-21

Make sure everyone in the group has read chapters 2 and 3 from *The Fullest Possible Love*. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes, whatever the group decides in advance. Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person’s face can be seen. Try to give each person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a time predetermined by the group. Sometimes it’s appropriate to ask, “Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?” or “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet?” Invite those who have journaled about their discipleship to share.

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read 2 Peter 1:19-21 out loud. Perhaps have another person of another gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- Do you see the four values (inclusive, accessible, transfiguring, connectional) embodied in the life of Jesus? Give some examples.
- How can those four values point us in the right direction when it comes to our spiritual journey? How do we live them out as the church?
- How do you see these four values in some of the great doctrines of the Christian faith? (the mission of God, the incarnation, the Great Commission, the “catholicity” of the church).

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Do you feel your church embodies these four values? If so, give some examples of where you see them being expressed.
- Describe a time you experienced the church being inclusive, accessible, transfiguring, connectional. What feelings were associated with each value?
- Can you imagine how outsiders might feel when the church doesn’t embody these values? Describe what those feelings might be like.

3. Doing (Hands)

- Think of the new Christian community stirring in your imagination. Describe some of the practical ways you could go about getting started.
- How could you begin to prayerfully live out these values in your daily life?

- What are some of the practices of your congregation that don't seem to embody these values? Explain why.
- Make sure everyone has the time and location of the next meeting on their calendar.
- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

III. Food

You won't last long on a journey without something to eat to sustain you. In *The Fullest Possible Love*, Chilcote lifts the importance of listening to God's word through the practice of *lectio divina* and feasting together on the Eucharist.

Lectio divina, or "sacred reading," refers to the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, the sequence of which is: read, meditate, pray, and contemplate. Chilcote goes on to elaborate four lessons about the importance of the Lord's Supper to sustain us. First, it is a means of spiritual nourishment, a feast of grace. Second, it helps us conform to the image of Christ. Third, it unites us in a community of joy. Fourth, it forms us as a missional community for witness and service in the world.

In Fresh Expressions, Scripture and Eucharist serve as our two primary food groups for the journey toward communal life in Jesus.

In fact, we use the *lectio divina* method as our primary form of preaching and teaching. Typically, there is no formal sermon time or extensive monologue in the conventional sense. It's contextually inappropriate in most cases. So we employ sermonic conversations through the practice of "Jesus stories," which refer to narratives from the life of Christ. These stories capture moments of Jesus's teachings, miracles, interactions, and compassion. Rather than focusing solely on theological concepts or abstract doctrines, they emphasize an accessible aspect of Jesus—the compassionate healer, the radical teacher, and the friend of sinners.

Even before the Gospels were written down, the early Christians gathered in homes and public spaces to tell stories about Jesus and his teachings. This was called the *kerygma*, the treasury of Jesus's life and teachings that were passed down orally. In Fresh Expressions, which are primarily focused on people who aren't already part of the church, the simple practice of sharing Jesus stories brings this tradition alive today.

These are simple, short retellings about something Jesus said or did in five minutes or less. These stories can be told by any disciple (not just clergy). Jesus stories are accompanied by open-ended questions that spark discussion. Gathering around Jesus stories provides opportunities for open and honest conversations about the joys and struggles in our lives that people from any or no religious background can enter.

Here are some simple instructions for how to tell a Jesus story. As with anything in Fresh Expressions or mission, don't go alone! At least two people should partner together to lead these kinds of conversations (Luke 10:1). They happen best in neighborhood spaces or homes where people are comfortable gathering and have already begun to form relationships characterized by listening, loving, and building community.

Crafting the Jesus Story

Step 1: Prayerfully Choose a Jesus story.

Prayerfully search the scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you as you read. What is something Jesus said or did that resonates with you? Read the passage multiple times, consulting commentaries to see what others have said about this passage.

Step 2: Locate Yourself in the Jesus Story.

Prayerfully ask yourself why this Jesus story is so meaningful to you. Why does this story touch your soul? Where do you see yourself in what Jesus said or did? How has this changed you? If the story or teaching doesn't move you personally, you should find another one that does.

Step 3: Prepare the Jesus Story.

How will you share this Jesus story with others? If it helps you to write it down, feel free to do so. However, it's better if you can tell the story without notes. Perhaps read the passage aloud, then rehearse how you will communicate to the group.

Step 4: Deliver the Jesus Story in 3-5 Minutes.

Share the Jesus story with your community. It doesn't need to be long. Three to five minutes is a good rule. You could simply read a couple verses of the story out loud, then summarize. Try thinking of the narrative form you are using like the one offered below.

Step 5: Ask Questions to Spark the Conversation.

Here are some questions you might consider: What would this story look like today? What if this Jesus story is true? If it is true, how would it make a difference in my life? What is this Jesus story saying to me? What is one small thing I can change in my daily life as a result of this Jesus story? What is one thing I might do differently?

These questions give access for non-Christians to join in the conversation. They are intentionally designed not to be "right or wrong" answer questions but to invite curiosity and reflection.

Delivering the Jesus Story

Telling a story is an art form that you can improve upon with practice. Remember the four movements of a good Jesus story:

Set the Tension: Invite your hearers on a narrative journey with something provocative or curious that upsets the equilibrium (ex. "Jesus ate good food with bad people." "Have you ever felt unclean?" "Jesus was guilty of shepherd malpractice; he left 99 in the wilderness to pursue a lost wild one." "Here's a story Jesus told about a reckless sower, who cast good seed wastefully all over the place," etc.).

Paint the Picture: Tell the group exactly what the story says. Look for details in the text that color the story for your hearers.

Personal Experience: Why is this Jesus story meaningful to you personally? How has it healed, challenged, or changed you? Give personal testimony about Jesus in your own life.

Resolve the Tension: Close with answering the question you asked or restoring equilibrium to the quandary you raised. Better yet, invite your hearers to resolve the tension by using the kinds of questions suggested above!

That's it—it's that simple! Each time you gather, invite someone else to share the Jesus story. Give them these guidelines to help them along.

Facilitating the Conversation

As we share Jesus stories, people who are not quite comfortable getting “preached at” on Sunday mornings find space to ask questions and join the discussion. People respond with personal insights, questions, and challenges. The “proclaimer” shifts into the role of “facilitator.” The engagement draws from the collective wisdom of the group. It is modeled after Jesus, the master teacher, who asked more questions than he gave answers. Jesus told lots of stories and parables that invited deeper questions and reflection.

1. Don’t Dominate. Once you have delivered the story, your role now shifts into that of facilitator. Now you are mining for the questions and insights of others in the group. The genius is not in the room; the genius is the room.

2. Honor Each Contribution. There are no right or wrong answers; each person’s contribution must be valued and celebrated. Give each person the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes hecklers show up, some come to scoff, but they often stay to pray. If people issue challenging or undermining comments, honor their contribution but then reframe it, “that’s an interesting way to think about that, here’s how Christians have interpreted that...”; “This is a complicated topic, people have a variety of ways they understand this, here’s my thoughts... who else has a perspective on this...”; “It sounds like this is something you are really wrestling with; can we stay after the group so we can talk it out together?” The key is not to shut down or exclude but also to protect others in the circle.

3. Spread the Love. Some folks can get really excited and want to make lots of contributions. Let them, but try not to let one or two people dominate the entire time. You can do this by simply saying things like, “I can see you are really passionate about this, who else wants to jump in?” “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet.” “Before you double or triple dip, let’s give everyone a chance to share.” You could also set a boundary up front: “Let’s all limit our sharing to 3-5 minutes and make sure each person has an opportunity to share before we double dip!”

4. Do No Harm. As facilitators, we do have a responsibility to minimize people potentially being harmed. If someone is being particularly rude or disruptive, you may need to turn the group over to another teammate and have a side conversation. Sometimes you will need to be direct: “Thanks for sharing your perspective; do you realize how that might be harmful to others here?” “That’s not really the focus of this Jesus story; can we talk about that offline?” “I can feel that this is a big issue for you; can you stay after with me so I can get a better understanding?” In extreme cases you might have to call in outside support or law enforcement—though that would be exceptionally unusual. The key principle is to protect the members of the group.

Why Jesus Stories?

a. Relatability

- **Universal Themes:** “Jesus stories” touch on universal themes such as love, forgiveness, compassion, and justice. They resonate with people regardless of their religious background.

- **Human Experience:** By sharing stories of Jesus’s encounters with ordinary people, we connect with the human experience—our joys, struggles, doubts, and hopes.

b. Accessibility

- **Non-Threatening:** For those unfamiliar with Christianity, “Jesus stories” provide a non-threatening entry point. They don’t require theological expertise or doctrinal knowledge.
- **Emotional Impact:** Stories evoke emotions and create lasting impressions. People remember stories long after hearing them.

c. Authenticity

- **Jesus as the Protagonist:** When we share “Jesus stories,” we present Jesus as the central character. His actions and words speak for themselves.
- **Authentic Witness:** Personal testimonies related to these stories demonstrate authenticity and vulnerability.

Here are some key advantages to proclamation in this form:

- Anyone can lead these Bible discussions. It’s an “every member” ministry (1 Pet 2:9).
- Enquirers can easily join in, even if they are agnostic, atheist, or “spiritual but not religious” (Acts 8:26-40).
- Scripture does the evangelism and disciple-making, as the Holy Spirit works on each person’s heart at his or her own pace (Rom 10:17).
- Christians share their faith almost without knowing it. You don’t have to be a long-term disciple or seminary trained to tell a story and ask some questions (Matt 25:37-38).
- Seekers see how the Bible and the Christian community impact life (John 8:30).
- Leadership is shared with newcomers, increasing their commitment to the group (John 4:29).
- New Christians learn how to study the Bible, apply it to their lives, share it with their friends, and find helpful resources (John 4:39-42).
- If the leader moves on, the group has the means to keep going. Sustainability is built in (1 Thess 2:17).
- Congregations expand to become a constellation of little communities spread across an entire area with laity who are empowered to help lead. These gatherings are distributed across a seven-day workweek, meeting at different times and places, making church more accessible to those not currently connected with any congregation.

In this way, the Bible becomes spiritual nourishment for the journey. It's not just a book to be studied but a living text that sustains and guides believers. Fresh Expressions communities often explore Scripture together in ways that resonate with their unique context.

"Jesus stories" bridge the gap between theology and lived experience. They invite people to encounter Jesus in a personal, transformative way. As we share these stories, let's remember that the gospel is not just information—it's an invitation to encounter the living Christ.

Holy Communion in Fresh Expressions: Embracing New Forms

Most fresh expressions that reach full maturity begin to engage in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. When people are ready to enter more fully into life in Christ, we prepare them for baptism.

Holy Communion symbolizes Jesus's sacrificial love, the forgiveness of sins, and the unity of believers. It's our ongoing spiritual nourishment as a community. Traditionally, it has been celebrated within the context of established church structures.

Fresh Expressions challenges us to reimagine how we engage with God and one another. It encourages us to meet people where they are—whether in coffee shops, parks, or community centers. In this context, Holy Communion takes on new forms:

a. Communion in Everyday Spaces

- **Coffee Shop Gatherings:** Imagine sharing coffee and pastries in a local coffee shop in a sacramental way. The table becomes an altar, and the ordinary becomes sacred.
- **Picnics and Parks:** Communion outdoors, surrounded by nature, connects us to God's creation and reminds us of Jesus's earthly ministry.
- **Burritos and Bibles:** In this network of churches that meets in Tex-Mex restaurants, we often use a tortilla (probably closer to the unleavened bread the disciples used) and whatever juice or soda is available in the space.

b. Inclusive Language and Symbols

- **Bread and Beyond:** Fresh Expressions invites contextual adaptivity. Instead of traditional bread, consider using tortillas, pita, or gluten-free options. The cup can hold grape juice, wine, or even water. Let the space determine what you use.
- **Shared Stories:** Alongside the elements, share stories of Jesus's meals with diverse people. Emphasize inclusion and hospitality.

c. Relational Emphasis

- **Communion as Conversation:** Fresh Expressions encourages dialogue during Communion. Ask questions, discuss Scripture, and invite personal reflections.
- **Community Participation:** Let everyone contribute. Encourage participants to bring their own elements or share a meal potluck-style.

- **Balancing Simplicity and Depth:** Fresh Expressions must maintain theological integrity while adapting to context. Leaders can provide brief explanations during Communion.
- **Honoring Tradition:** Fresh Expressions doesn't discard tradition; it reinterprets it. Acknowledge the rich history of Communion while embracing innovation.
- **Varied Rhythms:** Fresh Expressions allows flexibility in Communion frequency. Some gatherings may celebrate it weekly, while others may do so monthly or seasonally.

One of the ongoing struggles in the cultivation of these communities has to do with the sacramental authority bestowed upon ordained persons in various traditions. Communities are often led by lay leaders, and clergy must sometimes function like circuit riders, going between the communities assisting the lay leaders with the elements. Laity have long been authorized to take communion elements that were consecrated in worship to hospitals and shut-ins. As the church has always done, we find creative ways to work within these constraints.

Holy Scripture and Holy Communion remain central to a Benedictine Wesleyan way, but through Fresh Expressions the form of their presentation evolves. As we gather around tables, in parks, or at community events, we encounter Christ anew. Let us offer Christ in ways that resonate with our context, inviting all to taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Week Four: "Food for the Journey"

Sermon Four

"If you point these things out to the believers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus who has been trained by the words of faith and the good teaching that you've carefully followed."

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 4:6

Big Idea: Scripture and Sacraments are our spiritual food. We can offer them in fresh ways that nourish new communities in the faith.

Sermon Summary:

No one can make the spiritual journey toward the fullest possible love without being nourished by the Scriptures and Eucharist. Paul instructs Timothy, his protégé, to "put these instructions before" the people, so that they might be "nourished on the words of the faith" (1 Tim 4:6 NRSVue) But how can we do this in a twenty-first-century way when many people outside the church have an aversion to the Bible? One approach is "Jesus stories" and sermonic conversations. Rather than a professional telling the rest of us what the Bible means, we as a community ask questions and discover answers about the Bible together. We can contextualize the practice of Holy Communion.

This approach teaches us to orient our thinking around the scriptures and to be shaped by them. But it helps avoid giving answers to questions people aren't actually asking. We can share Jesus in such a way that the Bible itself is doing the evangelism.

Key Points:

Every member of the church can learn to use simple framing questions like these:

- If this story happened today, what would it look like?
- What is this story saying to me?
- Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?
- Did this story make a difference to my life? If so, how?

This is a way to “put the words before the people” that is accessible and shareable:

- Anyone can lead these Bible discussions. It’s “every member” ministry (1 Pet 2:9).
- Enquirers can easily join in (Acts 8:26-40).
- Scripture does the evangelism and disciple-making (Rom 10:17).
- Christians share their faith almost without knowing (Matt 25:37-38).
- Seekers see how the Bible and the Christian community impact life (John 8:30).
- Leadership is shared with newcomers, increasing their commitment to the group (John 4:29).
- New Christians learn how to study the Bible, apply it to their lives, share it with their friends, and find helpful resources (John 4:39-42).
- If the leader moves on, the group has the means to keep going—sustainability is built in (1 Thess 2:17).

Week Four: “Food for the Journey” Discussion Questions

Chapters 4-6

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 4:6

Make sure everyone in the group has read chapters 4-6 from *The Fullest Possible Love*. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes, whatever the group decides in advance. Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person’s face can be seen. Try to give each person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a time predetermined by the group. Sometimes it’s appropriate to ask, “Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?” or “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet?” Invite those who have journaled about their discipleship to share.

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read 1 Timothy 4:6 out loud. Perhaps have another person of a different gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- How has studying the Scriptures nourished your own faith? What are the different ways you engage the Bible? Give some examples.
- Can you think of a time when the Bible helped you through a difficult situation? Share the story.
- What do you think of “Jesus stories” as a way to read the Bible in community, asking questions and seeking answers together? How might this be inviting to outsiders?

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Describe how it feels when the Bible seems overly complicated and inaccessible. Perhaps give some examples from your own experience.
- Has someone ever asked an intimidating question in a Bible study? One in which you felt you had to have the “right answer”? How did that make you feel?
- Can you imagine how outsiders might feel when the Bible is presented as a series of right or wrong answers? If someone has limited experience with Scripture, how might a more conventional sermon be off-putting?

3. Doing (Hands)

- Chose a Jesus story you like and tell it to the group. Ask some framing questions and let the group respond: If this story happened today, what would it look like? What is this story saying to me? Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how? Did this story make a difference to my life? If so, how?
- Make sure everyone has the time and location of the next meeting on their calendar.
- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

IV. Destination

To embark on any journey, we must have some kind of destination in mind. The Benedictine Wesleyan way invites us to embark on a transfiguring journey. Unlike a mapped-out route, this expedition involves exploration, adaptation, and discovery. Fresh Expressions is less about a fixed destination or a predefined endpoint. It's not about reaching a finished "product." Instead, imagine your team as adventurers with a compass. Every step isn't known; there are detours and U-turns.

However, as mentioned previously, the four historic marks of the church can serve as a framework to identify a mature fresh expression.

One: Koinonia

The early church emphasized unity, recognizing that they were part of a single body of believers. In the context of fresh expressions, this means fostering unity within diverse communities. Fresh expressions should aim to bring people together, transcending barriers and divisions.

We seek to build bridges across cultural, generational, and social differences by emphasizing a shared mission and values. This is the *inward* relationship between one another.

Holy: Love

Holiness refers primarily to the nature of God. Fresh expressions should embody holiness by reflecting God's character and values. In the Benedictine Wesleyan way, the emphasis here is love of God and neighbor ... the fullest possible love. As we interact with this God of love, we become people who more fully love God and our neighbor.

Fresh expressions help people grow in integrity, authenticity, and the sweetness of love. We cultivate practices that lead to personal and communal transformation. This is the *upward* relationship with God.

Catholic: Universality

The term *catholic* means universal. Fresh expressions recognize their connection to the broader body of Christ. They are not isolated entities but part of a global movement and anchored in traditional streams of church life.

We encourage fresh expressions leaders to learn from other traditions, engage in ecumenical dialogue, and participate in local collaborative efforts. This is the *ofward* relationship with the wider church.

Apostolic: Mission

The apostolic mark emphasizes the church’s mission to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Fresh expressions should be outward-focused, seeking to reach those who are not yet part of any church.

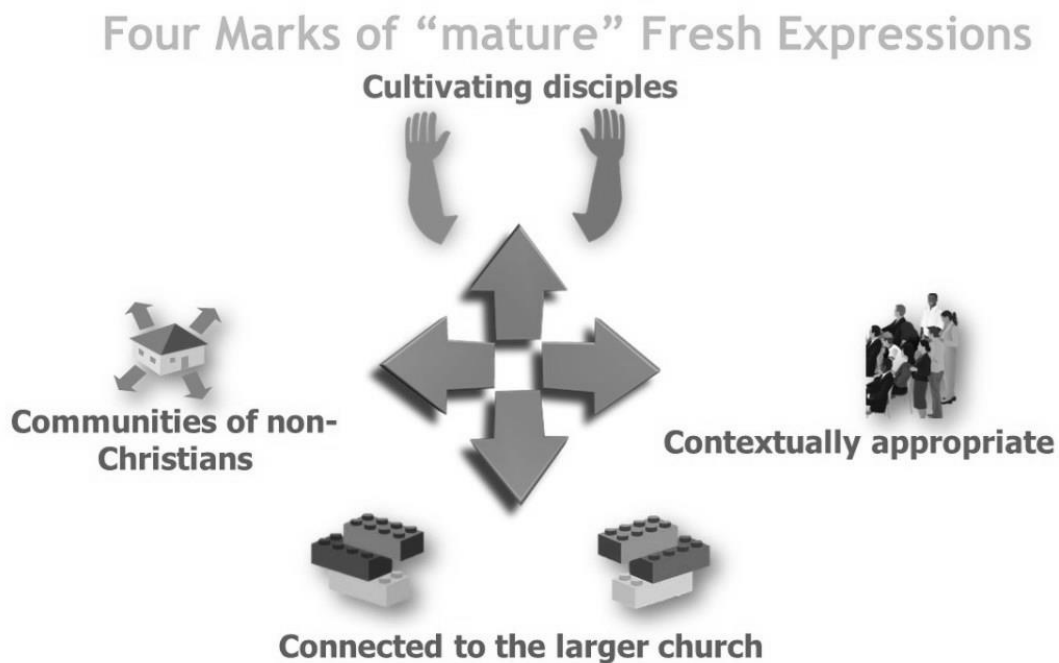
We equip fresh expressions leaders to engage their local context, adapt to changing cultures, and creatively share the gospel. We encourage missional innovation that forms communal life in Jesus with those not connected to any church. This is the *outward* mark, a relationship with the world.

Fresh expressions, birthed by the Spirit, can thrive when they embody these historic marks. Community, holiness, universality, and mission provide a robust framework for mature and impactful expressions of church in our changing culture.

Perhaps an even simpler way to describe the address of that destination is the language of four overlapping sets of relationships:

- With God directly in prayer, worship, and study.
- With the outside world.
- With the wider church.
- Within the new community itself.

Michael Moynagh and I have also developed another helpful framework between a “potential” fresh expression in its infancy and a “mature” fresh expression. While we should be careful not to become the “fresh expressions police” and therefore institutionally confine the movement in any way, it is necessary to provide something like mile markers for your team’s missional journey. To that end, we have developed the “Four Cs” as a guide to help identify a mature fresh expression:



- **Cultivating disciples:** Disciples of Jesus Christ are being formed. This is not just playing church.
- **Communities of non-Christians:** These are gatherings with and for people who are not Christian. They are not just groups of already-Christians hanging out in the community.
- **Contextually appropriate:** This community has emerged organically from the context, it takes on the shape, patterns, and language of the people there. This is not planting a colonial version of church in foreign soils.
- **Connected to the larger church:** The fresh expression is tethered to the inherited church in some relational way. These are not little colonies isolated from or in opposition to the inherited church.

Week Five: “The Address of Your Destination”

Sermon Five

“Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let’s grow in every way into Christ, who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.”

Key Passage: Ephesians 4:15-16

Big Idea: A church that’s all grown up in love will be mature in these four interlocking relationships—With God, With the world, With the wider church, Within the new community itself.

Sermon Summary:

What is the final destination of a new Christian community? How do we know when it’s “mature” and no longer simply “on the way” to becoming church? Ephesians shows us that the church is “growing up” in four overlapping sets of relationships all founded on Jesus. The church is literally the “body of Christ” of which Jesus is the “head.” The church “grows up in every way through a relationship with God directly through Christ, empowered by the Spirit. The church grows up in their relationship with the outside world by welcoming others, and a range of gifts is given for this purpose (Eph 4:11-12). The church grows in relationship with the wider church as a connection when “each part” is working properly. Relationships within the new community itself are strengthened overtime, knit together, like the muscles and ligaments of a body. By growing in these relationships, we become a strong and healthy body, moving out and connecting with others.

Key Points:

The destination of a new Christian community is a set of four relationships:

- With God directly in prayer, worship, and study.
- With the outside world.

- With the wider church.
- Within the new community itself.

One way to understand the destination is to distinguish between the *essence* of the church and what is *essential* for the church.

- The four relationships are the essence of the church; a community that lacks one of these relationships cannot truly represent a Christian community.
- Scripture, sacraments, leadership, discipline, and so on are essentials that can take on many contextual variations.
- God as Trinity is a divine movement of interpenetrating relationships.
- Human beings were created to be in relationship with God and each other.
- The church as this set of relationships can take on many shapes and sizes.

Week Five: “The Address of Your Destination” Discussion Questions

Chapters 4-6.

Key Passage: Ephesians 4:15-16

Make sure everyone in the group has read chapters 4-6 from *The Fullest Possible Love*. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes, whatever the group decides in advance. Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person’s face can be seen. Try to give each person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a time predetermined by the group. Sometimes it’s appropriate to ask, “Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?” or “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet?” Invite those who have journaled about their discipleship to share.

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read Ephesians 4:1-16 out loud. Perhaps have another person of a different gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- How can you see the four interlocking relationships in your own church? Are some of the relationships weaker than others? Give some examples.
- Why do you think it's important to understand church in a relational way? Of what you know of God, why is relationship the essence of the church?
- Have you ever confused the essence of the church with the essentials? Like going to a building for prayer and hearing a sermon, rather than seeing church as a community of relationships? What is negative about a nonrelational view of church?

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Describe how it feels when the community is “growing up in love” in these four relationships? Perhaps give some examples from your own experience.
- Have you been a part of a church where one of the relationships was severely neglected? Which ones? How did that make you feel?
- Can you imagine how outsiders might feel when the church is understood by what it does (essentials) rather than what it is (essence)? How might this be confusing?

3. Doing (Hands)

- Describe how you might seek to grow a community in each of the four relationships. What practical things might you do?
 - With God directly in prayer, worship, and study.
 - With the outside world.
 - With the wider church.
 - Within the new community itself.
- Make sure everyone has the time and location of the next meeting on their calendar.
- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

Conclusion—A Framework for Life Together

In the final section of *The Fullest Possible Love*, Dr Chilcote emphasizes three common goals of life together: humility, hospitality, and holiness.

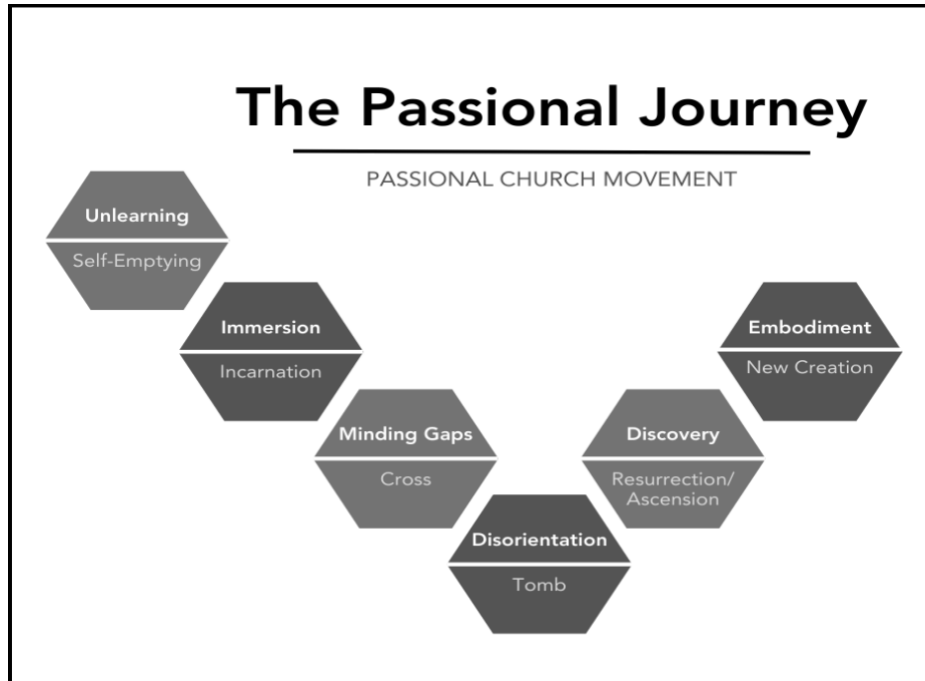
So, I want to offer a final integrative framework for how we go about co-creating communities in which these goals take on flesh and blood. Chilcote suggests that in Philippians 2, the “mind of Christ” provides a framework for the kind of incarnational mission that the Benedictine Wesleyan way is about. This is a journey that starts with self-emptying, being vulnerable, and immersing ourselves fully in a context where we can “mind the gaps” of the fragmentation in our communities. There, the compassion of Christ can be embodied through us in new and creative ways.

The person of Jesus—his journey of incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit—is the foundation for the framework. Paul the Apostle implores the church community to have the “same mind ... that was in Christ Jesus.” Then he describes it step by step:

Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:
Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.
But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.
When he found himself in the form of a human,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,
so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus’s incarnation is the “way” we should do life together. I describe this pathway as the *passional journey*. Think of it as a pathway for your team to travel together toward the goals of humility, hospitality, and holiness. The following diagram describes each move highlighted in Philippians 2, correlated with a corresponding move in the passional journey:



These moves could be called the *fundamentals of incarnation*—the ultimate contextualization.

1. Self-Emptying (unlearning)

The first move is about “emptying self.” The courage to empty, to unlearn, to embrace vulnerability, is a fundamental characteristic of the mind of Christ (Phil 2:7-8).

For the church, this initial move requires, first and foremost, humility. Our mental models were formed in a world that is fading from view. We don’t have all the answers, and we have asked the wrong questions. This emptying process includes some of our foundational assumptions as a primarily attractorial, propositional, segregated, and colonial iteration of the church.

Thus, the first move in the passional journey is *unlearning*: to cleanse the gates of perception; to consciously choose to give up, abandon, or stop using knowledge, values, or behaviors to acquire new ones. In the organizational sense, it includes a process of clearing out old routines and beliefs that no longer meet current challenges. This enables us to see our communities again with fresh eyes.

2. Incarnation (immersion)

The second move is about vulnerability. Through the incarnation, while Jesus remains sinless, he descends into a human condition that is ultimately fallen and marred. He takes a risk. The incarnation—God coming in human flesh—is a missional endeavor. God immerses himself fully in the context of humanity. The universal One enters into particularity. Jesus brings healing to the cosmos, not by manipulating it from the outside but through living a cruciform life in the middle of it—true contextualization.

In the North American context, Jesus's very life and death provides a model for our mission. Hence, incarnation is the form of our mission. The church as the body of Christ is an extension of the very incarnate flesh-and-blood Jesus that we proclaim, a channel of God's grace in the world.

Thus, we reject some more traditional renderings of "hospitality." We are not actually the hosts but rather the guests.

The church in the West has been able to play host for centuries. You come to us. Into our space. at a time we have determined, to worship in a way we have already decided before you get here. We have hospitality programs, hospitality training, and a hospitality team. Jesus didn't instruct us to be good hosts; he instructed us to be good guests.

Thus, *immersion* is the action of immersing someone or something in a context. We must immerse ourselves in our communities in risky, vulnerable ways. Through immersion, we learn about the people in our community outside the church walls. What are their fears and challenges? What are their hopes and dreams?

3. Cross (minding the gaps)

The third move requires a willingness to sacrifice. Jesus willingly gives his life in the most devastating and shameful way possible. There is a gap between the covenant God has made with humanity and our ability to live it out. Jesus is the way God heals the gap.

Thus, the church is not in the self-preservation business; the church is in the self-donation business. The very eucharistic nature of the body of Christ is to break pieces of ourselves off and give them away to a hungry world. Unfortunately, when our church is caught in a decline cycle, we clench our fists, desperately grasping at what's left. Yet if we open our hands and give what we are away through our own self-death, we release God to catalyze resurrection (John 12:24). Infilled by the Holy Spirit, we as the church descend into the messy brokenness of those who suffer as the hands and feet of Jesus. We stand in the tragic gaps with Jesus, bringing healing and reconciliation.

Thus, this move in the framework is *minding the gaps*, which originates from a visual-warning phrase issued to subway riders to be careful crossing the spatial gap between the train door and the station platform. For our purposes, this is seeing the sore spots, the fragmentation, the disconnects in our community, the injustice, the voids where we need to sacrificially build relational bridges.

4. Tomb (disorientation)

The fourth move requires faith and obedience in the face of uncertainty—an often-overlooked component of the incarnation is the three days that Jesus spends in the grave. God doesn't stop where we live but goes before us into death. Meeting with us in our brokenness, Jesus does not bail out when things get uncomfortable; he willingly gives his life. He trusts the Father and moves into the unknown.

The tomb forces us into an uncomfortable state of liminality and confusion. We join the disoriented march back to our familiar Emmaus, saying, "We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago" (Luke 24:21).

The tomb represents separation, disorientation, and living in the in-between. As we carry the cross, innovate, and create new things, we hit the wall of disappointment and failure. We will fail. There will be pushback. Sometimes people in our own inner circle will abandon or sabotage the work. It's in those very moments when

we are completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit that we must press through—one moment, one hour, one day at a time.

Thus, in the framework, *disorientation* describes the state of having lost one's sense of direction and meaning. Organizationally speaking, this is living on the edge of chaos, between stagnation and innovation.

5. Resurrection/Ascension (discovery)

The fifth move is about God's supernatural intervention and how that epiphany opens our awareness to the possibility of resurrection life. In the resurrection, we discover the victory of God over sin, shame, and suffering.

It wasn't until the resurrection that the disciples were transformed in their perceptions, resulting in a new mental model. In the language of Alcoholics Anonymous, they experienced *an entire psychic change*. This transformation is captured by the biblical concept of **Μετανοέω**: to change one's mind, to turn in another direction, a transformative change of heart, especially a spiritual conversion (eventually translated as "repent").

Metanoia is an unending process of unlearning, learning, and relearning. We need shifts in our ecological, social, political, economic, emotional, relational, and spiritual understanding. It doesn't happen by merely reading books or downloading new data; we have to bring our heart and hands to the work. This kind of transformation comes through bringing our bodies together with other bodies as we form new creation communities. There we discover the Risen Jesus, liberator of the oppressed, in our midst.

Thus, in the framework, this move is described as *discovery*, the action or process of attaining new insight. New discoveries lead to innovation. Once we move through the process of liminality and disorientation, our reality can be transformed. However, if the discovery is not scaled or downloaded and spread throughout the system, it fails. This leads us to the final move: embodiment.

6. New Creation (embodiment)

The final move is about a new form of embodiment, ranging from a transformed life individually to the formation of a new community. Meaning, taking this journey may lead to a new you, a new ministry, a new contextual Christian community, and so on. Philippians 2 envisions an ascended Lord, surrounded by a new communal embodiment consisting of every knee and every tongue bent and confessing "in heaven and on earth and under the earth," heralding a transformation that is cosmic in scope. Philippians 3:17–4:1 envisions the mature community living a resurrected life now with our citizenship already in heaven.

For better or worse, the gifts God gives to the church is us—gifted persons (Eph 4:10–11). An embodied and gifted community called the church is God's missional instrument of reconciliation on the earth. Thus, the final move of the framework is described as *embodiment*, the tangible or visible form of an idea, a quality, or, in our case, a person. The mind of Christ is now embodied in a community.

Guiding Questions for the Framework

- Here are some questions designed to help your team move through the framework. As you walk, drive, or bike through your neighborhood or community, pray as you go and spend time observing and reflecting on these questions:
 - What am I noticing as I immerse myself here? Use all five senses to describe it.

- Where are there gaps between the fullness of the kingdom of God and what I'm seeing and sensing here?
- Where is God already at work?
- What are signs of the kingdom of God already here?
- What might embodiment of the good news of God's kingdom look like/feel like/sound like/taste like here?
- What do I need to unlearn?
- What preconceptions do I need to shed?
- How must I/we change in response to what I'm learning about my parish?

Week Five: "Life Together"

Sermon Five

"Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit."

Key Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

Big Idea: Every follower of Jesus can cultivate communal life in Jesus.

Sermon Summary:

In the Old Testament, God promises Israel that they will become a "kingdom of priests." This promise is fulfilled in Jesus. Peter gives us the language of a "priesthood of all believers" to describe the church. Meaning every single Christian is a priest, a re-presentation of Jesus in the world. The early church flourished and multiplied in part due to how those first Christians shared life and ministry together (Acts 2:43-47). In many churches you would assume there was only one "priest," the professional who leads the services and delivers sermons. But what if the pastor's role is more appropriately the chief cultivator of a community of priests?

Traditional modes of church planting feel like it's the work of experts or religious specialists. But what if every Christian can be a "church planter" in the sense of cultivating small Christian communities with friends, co-workers, and loved ones? The traditional mode of church planting leaves many people out. People who may never hear the Gospel or come to know the love of Jesus Christ. As a community of priests, every person can be involved in the democratization of church planting. Philippians 2 is the framework for this life together.

Key Points:

Traditional modes of church planting leave people out. Every Christian can cultivate a new Christian community by:

- prayerfully gathering with one or more friends;

- listening to God and their context;
- finding a simple way to love people around them;
- deepening their relationships with them;
- sharing the gospel appropriately as part of a fuller life;
- forming a new Christian community with those coming to faith and connecting them to the wider church; and
- encouraging new believers to repeat the process.

Life together involves:

- every believer in mission;
- a twenty-first-century discipleship that has a clear focus;
- small communities where people can be more open;
- several of these communities linked together that can accumulate to be a large group of people (multiplication is built in); and
- a both/and way of being church, where both traditional and emerging forms can live together.

Week Five: “Life Together” Discussion Questions

Chapters 7-9.

Key Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

Make sure everyone in the group has read chapters 7-9 of *The Fullest Possible Love*. Gather with your small group in a comfortable place. Limit the meeting to an hour or 90 minutes, whatever the group decides in advance. Perhaps seat yourselves in a circle where each person’s face can be seen. Try to give each person in the group an opportunity to share. If needed, use a timer to limit sharing to a time predetermined by the group. Sometimes it’s appropriate to ask, “Has everyone had an opportunity to share who would like to?” or “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet?” Invite those who have journaled about their discipleship to share.

Agenda:

- Nominate a group leader to open the meeting in prayer.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 out loud. Perhaps have another person of another gender reread it aloud.
- What in the passage grabs you? Let each person respond briefly.

Questions:

1. Thinking (Head)

- What do you think it means to be a “priest” with the “priesthood of all believers”? What traditionally have you seen as your role in the church? Explain why.
- Why do you think traditional church plants leave people out? Can you describe groups of people in your context who don’t connect with traditional church?
- Can you explain why you think many churches are declining today? What percentage of your congregation is actively involved in the work of ministry?

2. Feeling (Heart)

- Describe your feelings about being considered a “priest” or a re-presentation of Jesus (for instance, excited, intimidated, or overwhelmed). Why do you feel this way?
- What suggestions in the chapter help you feel more confident about cultivating new Christian communities? Share some examples.
- Describe how you feel about the “mind of Christ” as a framework for your own life? How does it feel to think of Jesus’s incarnation as a pathway for your team to “do life together”?

3. Doing (Hands)

- What are some normal practices you use to try and grow in “kenosis”? For example, prayer, meditation, worship, study, fasting, and so on.
- What practical takeaways from this chapter do you feel you could start implementing in your discipleship journey right now? Give some examples of how you will do it.
- In the beginning we suggested that the Benedictine Wesleyan way was about pursuing the fullest possible love. How has this study made you more or less prepared for that journey?
- Invite people to keep a journal of what their journey looks like throughout the next week.

Conclude the meeting with a closing prayer.

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