

Reclaiming the Triune
Life of a Congregation:
Shared Missional Characteristics
of Minnesota ELCA
Congregations



Created by Mitch Nelson and Scott
Pederson 2012

Research Question

What are the shared characteristics of Minnesota ELCA congregations that have a good reputation for engaging in the four missional practices of inviting (sharing the good news), encouraging (being community), serving in God's world, and generous financial giving?



Region Three of the ELCA

Minnesota

3d: NW MN Synod

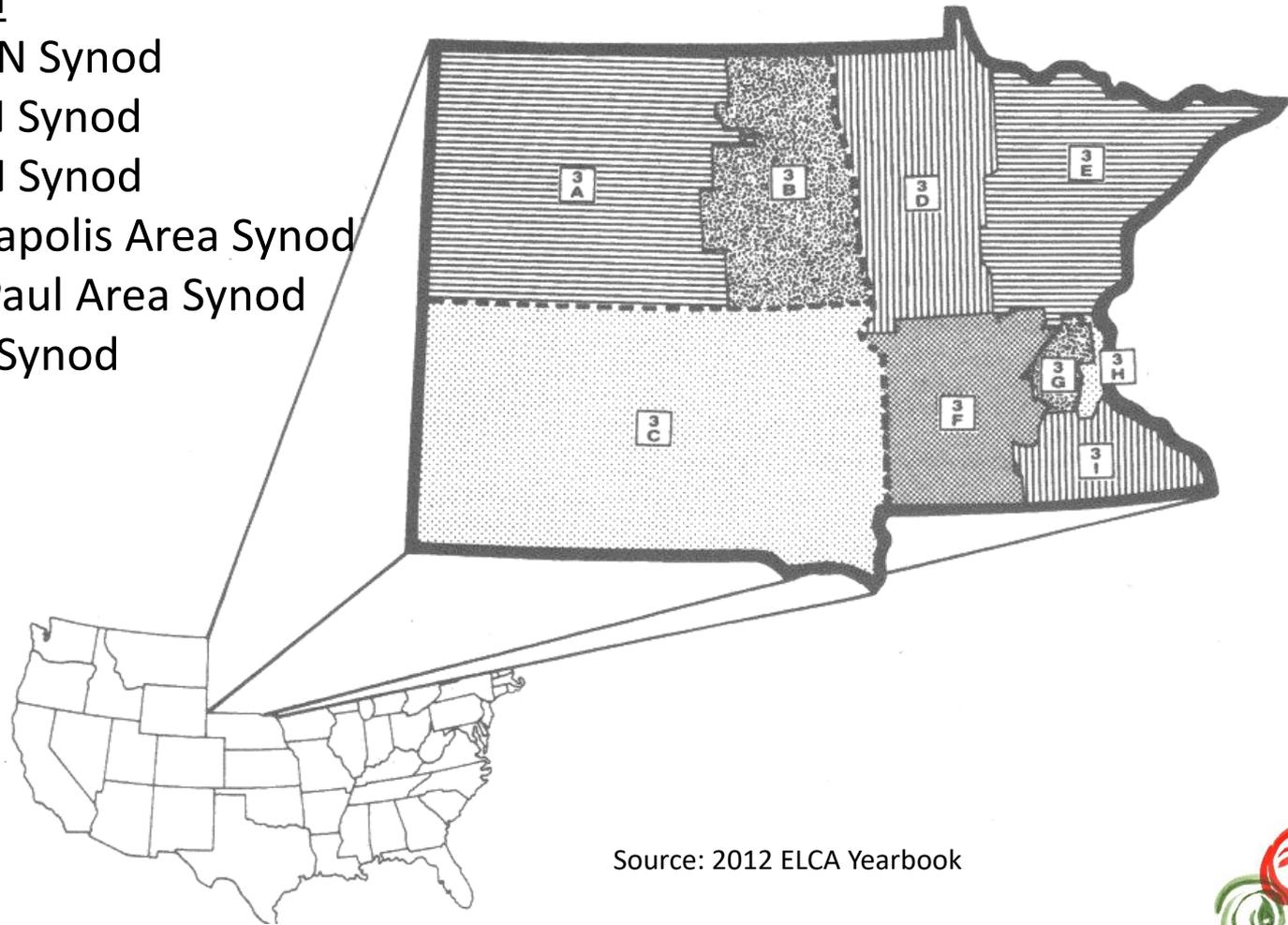
3e: NE MN Synod

3f: SW MN Synod

3g: Minneapolis Area Synod

3h: Saint Paul Area Synod

3i: SE MN Synod



Source: 2012 ELCA Yearbook



The Lenses

Theoretical

Open Systems Theory
Organizational Learning
Leadership
Global Civil Society (GCS)

Biblical

Discipleship
(Teaching/Learning)
Biblical Notion of Reclaiming
Missional Faith Practices

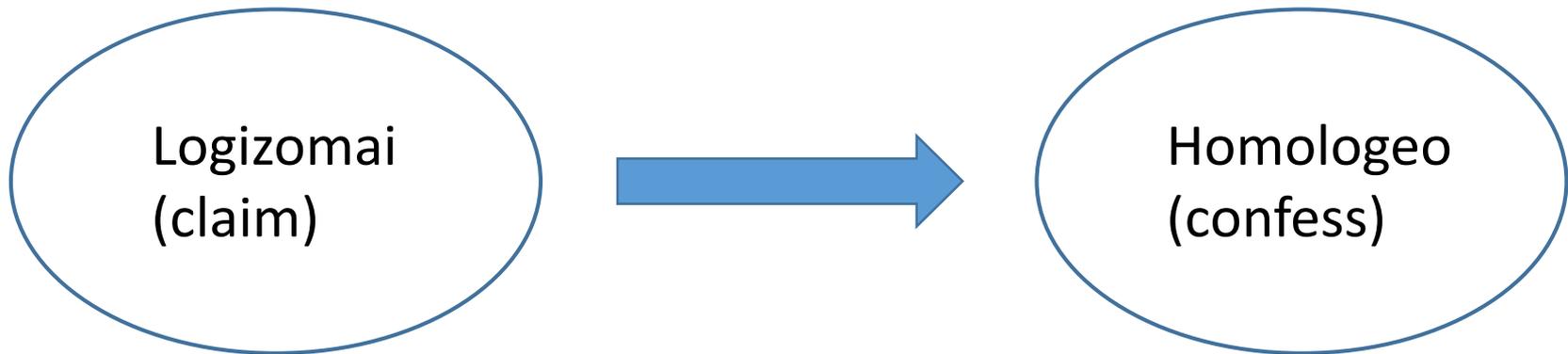
Theological

Law and Promise
Simul. Just and Sinner
Perichoresis



Reclaiming

Reclaiming: To critically reflect upon claim what the triune God *has been* doing in a particular missional context, in such a way, that leads to confessing.



Research Phases

Phase One (Oct. thru Dec. 2013):
Meet with synod staff to select six congregations (two from each synod).

Phase Two (Jan. thru Mar. 2014):
Conduct *qualitative* research with congregations. Pastor interviews and leader focus groups. *

Phase Three (Apr. thru Jun. 2014):
Conduct *quantitative* research with the congregations using online questionnaire. **

(*) Leader focus groups composed of eight to ten men and women, including congregational president.

(**) Questionnaire given to staff, members of focus group, *ten* current formal and *ten* informal leaders of the congregation.



The Congregations

Love One Another
(large northern)

Sharing with the Saints
(small northern)

Go Therefore
(large metropolitan)

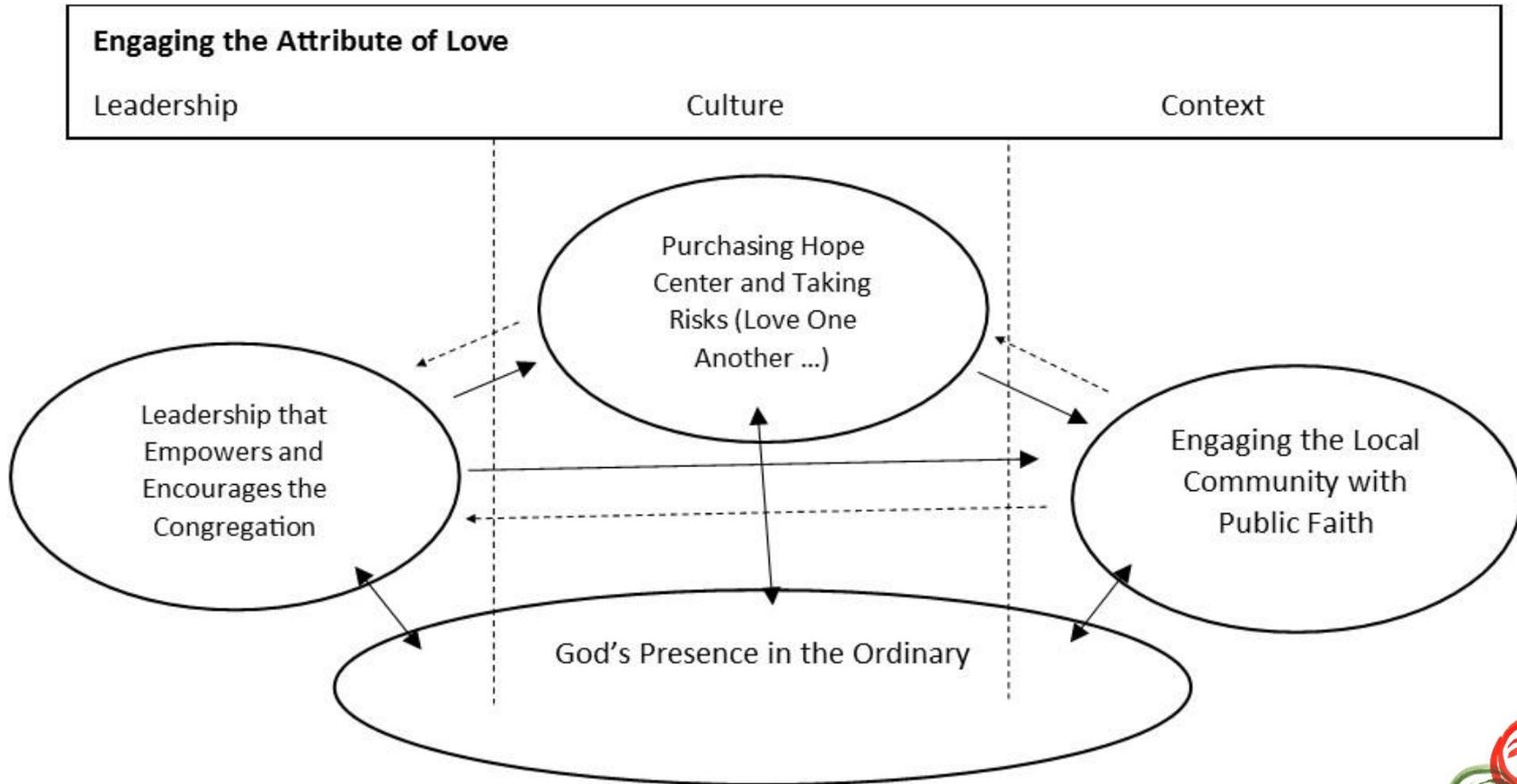
Unto Me
(small metropolitan)

Come and See
(large southern)

Take Up Your Mat
(small southern)



Love One Another: Theoretical Code



Organizational Culture

“... the sum of solutions to yesterday’s problems.”

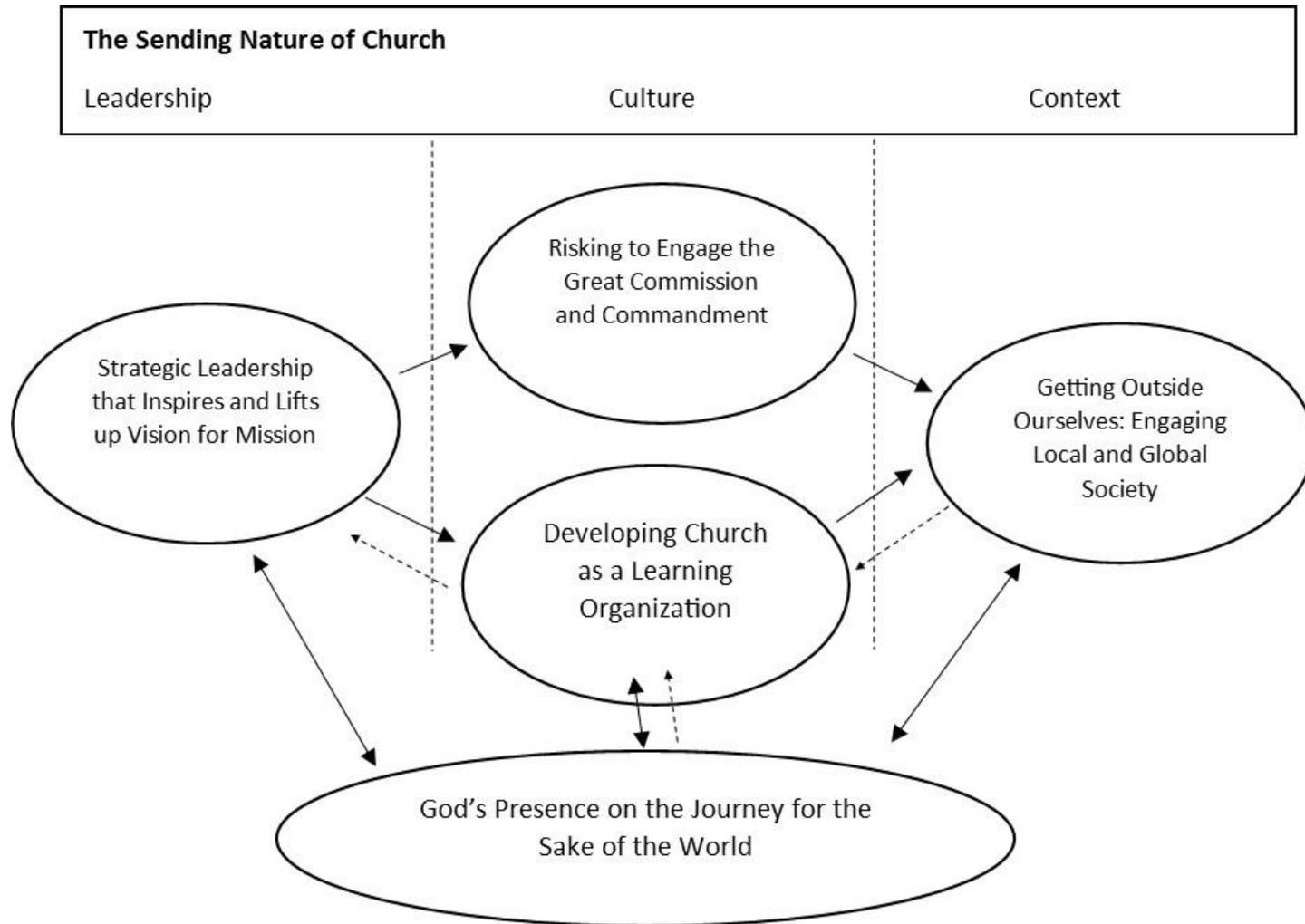
Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*

“It includes the shared history, expectations, written and unwritten rules, values, relationships, and customs that affect everyone’s behavior.”

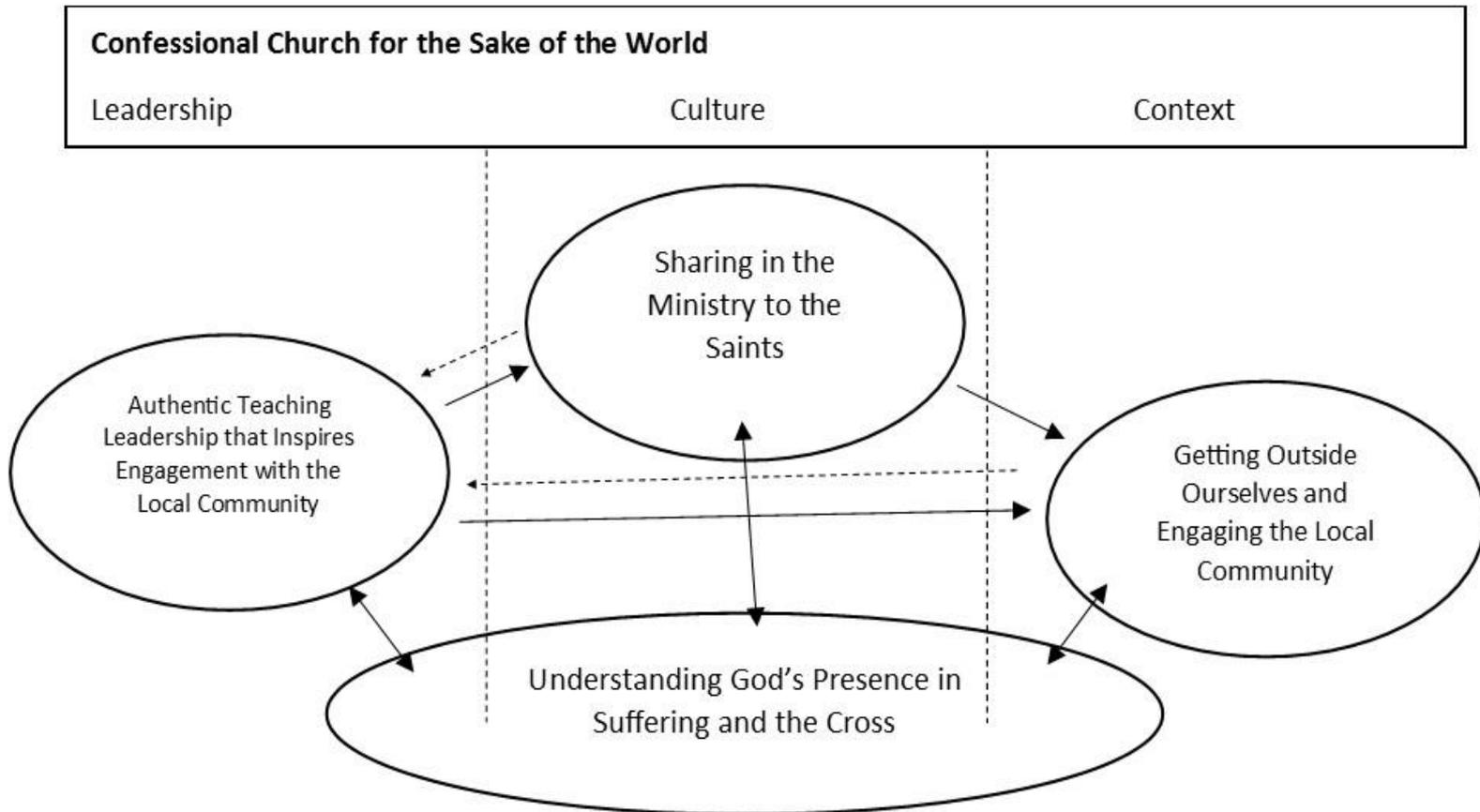
Marcia Conner and James Clawson, *Creating a Learning Culture: Strategy, Technology, and Practice*



Go Therefore: Theoretical Code



Sharing with the Saints: Theoretical Code



Results and Conclusions

Congregational Leadership

- Leadership is authentic, transformative, and other-oriented
- Pastors lead by example
- Pastors are strong encouragers
- Pastors effectively proclaim the gospel in real and understandable ways
- Congregations have high degree of confidence in their leaders

Leadership and Culture (moderately high correlation $|0.5| < r < |0.7|$)

Effective lay leadership and ...

- Being excited about engaging in God's mission
- Valuing respectful conversation when there is disagreement or conflict

High degree of confidence in lay leadership and ...

- Being excited about engaging in God's mission



Results and Conclusions

Leadership and Culture (moderately high correlation $|0.5| < r < |0.7|$)

Pastor challenging me to live out my faith and ...

- Being excited about engaging in God's mission
- Valuing respectful conversation when there is disagreement or conflict

Pastor focusing on members of local community and ...

- Congregations focusing on needs of local community
- Feeling the congregation is more vibrant and effective now



Results and Conclusions

Congregational Culture

- Reclaimed important historical markers in the life the congregation that flow from a deep-running biblical narrative that engages the living God in the present
- Willing to take risks for the sake of God's mission in the world
- Tend to focus more “outwardly” than “inwardly”
- Excited about engaging in God's mission
- They take time to learn form mistakes and missteps
- Learn by “doing” or “practicing” and then reflecting
- Value respectful conversation when there is disagreement or conflict

Beliefs about culture (moderately high correlation $|0.5| < r < |0.7|$)

Congregations focusing on needs of local community and ...

- Needing to focus primarily on what God is leading them to do
- The congregation is more vibrant and effective now than in the past

Congregations need to focus primarily on learning new things and ...

- My congregation is more vital and effective now than in the past



Results and Conclusions

Understanding God's Presence in Relation to Context

- God's presence is *very* real waiting to be engaged
- God is primarily operating in the world, *outside* of the church, waiting to be engaged
- These congregations have developed critical networking partnerships with other churches, non-profit organizations, others in the community or other missional contexts
- Understand the primary presence of God to be found in the "other" who they will engage in the local and/or global context
- Engagement will vary in degree from merely serving, to more perichoretic ways
- Tend to describe God as Father, Son, and/or Holy Spirit



Shared Characteristics: Faith Practices

Sharing the Good News /Inviting

- Primarily through “telling” about what is going on with their church
- Primarily through “inviting” to church related activity

Being Community/Encouraging

- Deliberate about forming and engaging smaller groups and incorporating these opportunities into everything they do

Serving in God’s World

- Four of the congregations ... serving involved partnering with existing agencies or networks in local/global community
- Two of the congregations ... “two-way approach”

Generous Financial Giving

- Four of the congregations reported some “struggling” financially
- Two of the congregations had achieved breakthroughs in engaging more meaningful and effective ways of financial stewardship
- Continuum of wrestling and engagement



Three great sins of the church ...

1. To believe that the greatest days of the kingdom have already come. *Instead, remember that the coming of God's kingdom is happening right now and there is no stopping it, because it is bound by God's promise and will.*
2. To believe that one day your congregation will be big enough, excited enough, and rich enough to be a missional congregation. *Instead, engaging God's kingdom can happen right now. Perhaps, the only thing standing in the way is you.*
3. To be blind in seeing God's kingdom unfolding outside of the "church." *Instead, remember God can work through any person or thing, any situation, and any time, because it all belongs to God ... including the church, which is the body of Christ in the world, created to engage God's kingdom work in the world.*