

Central Baptist Theological Seminary

DESIGNING A FUTURE BEYOND THE BUILDING:
EXPLORING THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DESIGN THINKING
PROCESS FOR CHURCHES RETHINKING THEIR BUILDING AND PROPERTY

A Dissertation Submitted to
The Faculty of the Department of Doctor of Ministry
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry in Creative Leadership

by

Rev. Jason M. Mack

December 2022

Accepted by the Faculty of the Central Baptist Theological Seminary in
partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor in Ministry

Examining Committee

Faculty Advisor

Field Advisor

Reader

DMin. Director

Abstract

Purpose

The church finds itself in a unique historical position, fraught with opportunity and peril. Because of factors within and outside of their control, many congregations across the United States find themselves inhabiting buildings and property far too big for them. For many churches, the cost, both financial and otherwise, of maintaining these buildings and properties far outweighs their usefulness for ministry. This study explores the strengths and weaknesses of design thinking tools for churches to explore new solutions to this problem.

Biblical and theological grounding

This study assumes that the church is called to be something more than it currently is. This assumption is energized by the biblical image of the Messianic Banquet found (among other places) in Isaiah, chapter 25, along with Jesus' Parable of the Great Dinner in Luke, chapter 14, and the church's contemporary practice in the celebration of Communion.

Method

In this study, a dozen people representing five churches were interviewed twice, roughly six months apart. During the study, each church was undergoing a process using design thinking tools to explore new ways of utilizing their buildings and property. The study compares the answers between the first and second rounds of interviews to help measure the effects of the process.

Results

The essential tenets of design thinking are *human-centered*, *possibility-driven*, and *iterative*. There was strong evidence in the data that human-centered and possibility-driven were helpful emphases for this work. Iterative did not appear in the study due to its relative absence in the process.

Conclusion

Design thinking tools can benefit churches in exploring new ways to utilize their building and property. However, the question of the church's mission showed up as essential to work through as part of this process. Whether or not design thinking tools can help a church re-discover its mission remains an open and urgent question.

Contents

- Abstract 3
- Contents 4
- Dedication 7

- Part One - Introduction and Rationale for the Study..... 8
 - Research Question..... 8
 - Key Terms..... 8
 - Introduction: Underwood Memorial Baptist Church..... 9
 - The Postaberrant Time 10
 - The postaberrant time: the reasons why 14
 - The postaberrant time: telling a new story..... 16

- Part Two – Biblical and Theological Grounding..... 18
 - Introduction 18
 - Biblical Grounding, The Messianic Banquet: All Are Invited to the Party..... 18
 - Old Testament reading: Isaiah 25 18
 - Reading the text from a different context: 21
 - New Testament reading: Luke 14..... 22
 - Reading the text from a different context: 25
 - Theological Grounding, Communion: Rehearsing the Messianic Banquet 26
 - Conclusion: Why Design Thinking to Solve This Problem? 29

- Part Three – Literature Review: Design Thinking..... 31
 - Introduction 31
 - Define the Problem 38
 - Ideate 42
 - Prototype 47
 - Test..... 52
 - Conclusion: what is the shape of design thinking?..... 53

Part Four – Contextual Analysis	56
Introduction	56
Underwood Memorial Baptist Church.....	56
Other Churches in the Study.....	59
First Church.....	59
Second Church.....	60
Third Church	62
Fourth Church.....	63
Conclusion.....	64
Part Five – Research Design and Procedures	65
Introduction	65
The Oikos Accelerator	65
The Questions and Process	66
Some themes and patterns.....	67
San Antonio.....	67
Anxiety	68
Building and property as asset and liability	68
Concrete Examples.....	68
Redevelopment	69
More/Less optimistic.....	69
Partners.....	70
Low attendance/participation	70
Leader’s meeting	71
Rentals.....	71
Conclusion.....	71
Part Six – Summary & Significance.....	73
Introduction	73
Themes.....	73
San Antonio.....	73
Storytelling.....	77
Change Journey	79

Shift to a focus on community.....	82
Recommendations.....	84
Concrete examples sooner	84
More training and preparation for team leaders	85
Strengthen the iterative	85
Alumni network	86
Further Questions for Study.....	87
What else might the design thinking process be used for in the church?	87
The question of mission	88
Conclusion.....	90
In summary.....	92
Appendix A: Interview Questionnaires	96
Church Leaders First Interview	96
Church Leaders Second Interview	98
Underwood Oikos Team First Interview.....	100
Underwood Oikos Team Second Interview.....	101
Underwood Non-Leader Interview.....	102

Dedication

To Ethan and Tara.

You are my home.

Part One - Introduction and Rationale for the Study

Research Question

How can design thinking tools help congregations that want to utilize their building and property in new ways to further the Kingdom of God?

Key Terms

Design thinking: “Design thinking is a non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test. Involving five phases—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test—it is most useful to tackle problems that are ill-defined or unknown.”¹ Rikke Friis Dam and Teo Yu Siang, in their article *What is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?* on the website *Interaction Design Foundation*.

Congregation: Although the questions of property and building belong at the regional and denominational levels in some denominations, this paper will focus on churches in “congregational” polity. Meaning that individual congregations own and manage their building and property and therefore have the power and responsibility to decide what to do with them.

Building and property: This paper will address the use of the entire property that a congregation owns, not just the physical building but the plot of land as well. This paper will not focus on a church’s human capital or other financial resources.

¹ Rikke Friis Dam and Teo Yu Siang, “What Is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?,” The Interaction Design Foundation, accessed February 3, 2022, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular>.

Kindom of God: Is a contemporary re-imagination of the traditional theological idea of the *Kingdom* of God.

Using “Kindom” language emphasizes the non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal vision of the world that Jesus and the scriptures speak about without losing the conviction that it is the world as God wants it to be. The goal explored in this paper is not simply to better utilize the building and property for each congregation’s survival but for furthering God’s *Kindom* in the world.

Introduction: Underwood Memorial Baptist Church

I began as the solo pastor of Underwood Memorial Baptist Church on June 14, 2020. My first Sunday was a bit of a shock. I assumed that most people would show up on the first Sunday of the new pastor and that it would be a good indication of what there was to work with. I knew Underwood was small, but I was surprised when only twenty-five people attended that morning, including staff, my family, and children. All in all, there were about a dozen households represented.

This was not kept secret from me in the hiring process, but it is one thing to hear about it and a whole other thing to experience it firsthand. In fact, from the first meeting with the search team, I was told that Underwood was struggling with membership and meeting its budget and that a high priority for me in leadership was to try and turn those trends around. Specifically, they wanted to use their building in new ways to grow the church, reach out to the community, and increase their income. Though the worldwide Covid pandemic of 2020 and 2021 slowed down these efforts, they have been my primary leadership focus from day one.

I was not, however, trained in building management, market analysis, or real estate development, so I knew I needed some help to do this well. Thus, I introduced the church into a

partnership with the church consulting organization, Rooted Good,² specifically their program entitled The Oikos Accelerator. From the Rooted Good website, the Oikos accelerator is explained like this, “The Oikos Accelerator empowers congregations around the US to align money and mission by creatively using their buildings and property to further their mission and build financial resilience.”³ From my interviews with the leadership at Rooted Good, I learned that the Oikos Accelerator bases its work on design thinking principles. I also discovered that several other churches in the area were partnering with Rooted Good for the Oikos Accelerator during the same time as Underwood.

This study will examine Underwood and other local churches’ experience with the Oikos Accelerator. It will use design thinking principles as a lens to examine and evaluate the Oikos Accelerator in helping churches better use their buildings and property for the *Kingdom* of God. It will then explore how design thinking can help the church more broadly.

But first, we need to get a sense of how we got here.

The Postaberrant Time

There was a time in the life of the Church in the United States when pews were filled, Sunday School classes overflowed with children eager to learn about God and be shaped in the ways of the church, budgets were ever-growing, and entire communities were shaped and influenced by the beliefs and opinions of the church and its pastors. At least, this is the memory as it exists in the minds and hearts of many current church members. These same members look around their church today, and they see empty pews, unused classrooms, diminishing resources, and an overall lack of relevance in the community around them. This disparity causes grief, confusion, anger, and disillusionment. This is the

² “Tools, Training, & Experiences for Good,” RootedGood, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://rootedgood.org/>.

³ “The Oikos Accelerator | Make Good With RootedGood,” RootedGood, accessed February 3, 2022, <https://rootedgood.org/the-oikos-accelerator/>.

context in which many of us in church leadership attempt to do our ministry, and it's a problem. To start thinking about a way forward, we must look carefully at how we got here.

The first thing to be said is that our current time is not the weird time. Postwar America was an exclusively and strangely successful time for the church. Because of several factors, culture itself in the 1950s and 60s pushed people into churches. This is what author Gilbert Rendle, in his book, *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*, calls the "aberrant time":

A fifteen-year period of challenge and sacrifice through the Great Depression and World War II bonded the American people into a cohesive force built on a consensual national and global agenda. It was a time in which people "agreed to agree" and sublimated their differences in order to work together on a greater common agenda. It was particularly in this time of consensus and cohesion that the *American culture pushed people toward membership in congregations* and a legion of other membership organizations. The United States exited World War II as the only global economy not devastated by the war, and for a period it held its remarkable position of producing a full half of all global manufacturing and production. We were a unified people with resources at hand. *The widely shared story among many organizations was strength and growth.*⁴ (emphasis mine)

The numbers back him up, "In 1906 the population of the United States was 84,246,252; by 1956 it was estimated at 168,091,000. The rate of the increase in these 50 years was 99.5 percent. In that same period membership in religious bodies rose from 32,936,445 to 100,162,529, or 204 percent. *The rate of increase, therefore, in church membership was more than twice the growth in population*" (emphasis mine).⁵ In other words, at the beginning of the twentieth century, church membership in the US was under 40 percent, and by the end of World War 2, it was 60.

In his book, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace*, Robert S. Elwood gives us more detail:

In the Fifties, the Episcopal Church rose from 2.5 to 3.1 million members. Other denominations fared comparably: the Presbyterians went from 2.3 to 3.1 million, the Methodists from 8.9 to 9.8 million, the Southern Baptists from 7 to 9.4 million. In the Fifties, church membership

⁴ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 23.

⁵ Richard C. Wolf, "1900–1950 Survey: Religious Trends in the United States," ChristianityToday.com, accessed December 10, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1959/april-27/19001950-survey-religious-trends-in-united-states.html>.

nationwide grew at a faster rate than the national population, from 57 percent of the US population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1959.⁶

But it's not just church attendance and membership that boomed in the post-war era. So, too, did the US population. In 1900 the population of the United States was 76 million. By 1970 that number had ballooned to over 203 million.⁷ At the same time, the US economy was also booming:

As the Cold War unfolded in the decade and a half after World War II, the United States experienced phenomenal economic growth. The war brought the return of prosperity, and in the postwar period the United States consolidated its position as the world's richest country. Gross national product, a measure of all goods and services produced in the United States, jumped from about \$200 thousand-million in 1940 to \$300 thousand-million in 1950 to more than \$500 thousand-million in 1960. More and more Americans now considered themselves part of the middle class.⁸

So, to summarize, the church had a greater percentage of a larger population of US citizens, who we're all making more and more money. In short, it was a good time to be in the "business" of church:

Churches and schools were being greatly expanded to accommodate the growing population, and organized religion was in its heyday. On a typical Sunday morning in the period from 1955-58, almost half of all Americans were attending church – the highest percentage in US history. During the 1950s, nationwide church membership grew at a faster rate than the population, from 57 percent of the US population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1960.⁹

The church responded accordingly, building buildings, starting schools, and creating bureaucracies to serve the needs of the growing membership and put to good use the increased resources:

It was also a good time to build... \$935 million... went into new church construction across the nation in 1959, up from \$26 million in 1945 and from \$409 million in 1950. The high point was, in fact, 1959; new construction fell to \$358 million in 1960 as the calendar turned to a very different sort of decade for religion.¹⁰

⁶ Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (Rutgers University Press, 1997), 88.

⁷ Nicole Stoops and Series Censr, "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century," n.d., 11.

⁸ "The Postwar Economy: 1945-1960 < Postwar America < History 1994 < American History From Revolution To Reconstruction and Beyond," accessed December 10, 2021, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/outlines/history-1994/postwar-america/the-postwar-economy-1945-1960.php>.

⁹ "The 1950s - Powerful Years for Religion," USC News, June 15, 1997, <https://news.usc.edu/25835/The-1950s-Powerful-Years-for-Religion/>.

¹⁰ Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace*, 34.

To reiterate, churches in the US spent the equivalent of *9 billion* in today's dollars in church construction in 1959 *alone*.

Underwood Memorial Baptist Church followed a similar pattern when it spent the equivalent of 3.5 million in today's dollars to build their current church building across the street from their old one. The current building is a grand, beautiful stone structure in the center of a thriving suburb with a sanctuary that seats over 600 people. It houses seven Sunday School classrooms, two offices, a full kitchen, and a fellowship hall big enough to sit hundreds around tables to eat. Construction began in 1953 in response to the doubling of membership in the decade following the end of World War 2.¹¹

Unfortunately for the church as an institution, this trend did not last. By the early 1970s, the percentage of people attending church had already dropped back to its prewar levels.¹² But these lower percentages were smaller portions of a still very large, still very wealthy pie. So, the investments in buildings, seminaries, and denominational infrastructure remained high for the next few decades. My own denomination, American Baptist Churches, USA, went from having no paid staff on the national level in 1950 to building and filling a major office building in 1962.

All this investment in infrastructures and buildings lasted longer than it probably should have, and the church is now in what Rendle calls a "postaberrant" time.¹³ This is obvious by the steady decline in church attendance, church membership, church giving, the closing of churches, the downsizing of seminaries, and the shrinking of denominational infrastructure. Membership in mainline protestant churches (UMC, Disciples, PCUSA, Episcopal, ELCA, ABCUSA & UCC) declined nearly 50% between 1970 and 2018, from a high of 30 million in 1970 to below 16 million in 2018, even though the US population

¹¹ "Underwood History," Google Docs, accessed December 15, 2021, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GoKwEmEAYxQF2nWXbnzqoXq8K3CrFwYGyJvEVN2z0/edit?usp=drive_open&ouid=111512277002454806410&usp=embed_facebook.

¹² Gallup Inc, "In U.S., Four in 10 Report Attending Church in Last Week," Gallup.com, December 24, 2013, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx>.

¹³ Rendle, *Quietly Courageous*, 76.

has grown by more than 50% in that same time, from 205 million in 1970 to 327 in 2018. In 1970, fifteen percent of all US citizens were members of a mainline congregation. By 2018, that number had shrunk to less than five.

Though these numbers are alarming, it is important to say that the church is not dying. It is adapting (or attempting to adapt) to a new reality. The church is coming down from an institutional high in the 50's and 60's and coming to terms with a new reality. We can quickly and effectively lament what has been lost, but we need to move on to thinking about and planning for what's next. We are not the church of our grandparents. And even though some of our grandparents still attend and sustain our churches, we need to become a new thing to meet the challenges of a very new time. In other words, we need a plan. As Rendle so eloquently puts it, "It may be possible to grow effectively without a plan, but there is no way to shrink effectively without a plan."¹⁴ My hope for this study is to contribute to the church's conversation regarding that plan.

The postaberrant time: the reasons why

During this postaberrant time that the church finds itself in, it lives with the hangover from the aberrant time, without the cultural factors that caused it. Next, we will look at some of the cultural changes that have taken place in the transition from an aberrant time to a postaberrant time. These will illustrate the depth of the change in society and the change necessary in the church.

First, the West's culture has transitioned from a convergence culture to a divergent culture. Put succinctly, culture has moved from a time when people sought to find a shared identity to a time where people seek first the exploration and performance of their own unique identity.¹⁵ These changes are not

¹⁴ Rendle, 79.

¹⁵ Rendle, 38–39.

bad. They have increased autonomy for individuals in our society, particularly those who don't fit the traditional model of the white, straight, cis-gender American citizen. But they do pose a challenge for the American Church, which flourished most during a time when being part of the group was valued more than being an individual.

Second, people have lost faith in institutions more broadly, in part because of the radical and very public failings of well-known systems and institutions, including churches. In 2019, Frank Newport of the Gallup polling organization wrote the following,

68% of Americans had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the church or organized religion in 1975. As recently as 1985, organized religion was the most revered institution among the list of institutions Gallup tracks. Confidence fell below the majority level for the first time in 2002, and with some fluctuations along the way, confidence this year has reached a new low of 36%.¹⁶

In 1975, two-thirds of Americans held a high level of confidence in the church as an institution; by 2019 that had decreased to one in three. This means that in the last 50 years, a full one-third of Americans have lost trust in the church as an institution.

Third, the church is experiencing a deep sense of loss: the loss of members and dollars, but most importantly, the loss of influence, the loss of pride of place in American society. Robert P. Jones, in his book, *The End of White Christian America*, puts it this way, "More than anything else... the death of White Christian America has robbed its descendants of their security and their place."¹⁷

All of this amounts to something other than a problem to solve. It is, instead, a new condition that the church needs to learn to survive and thrive in:

Rather than a secular challenge or problem against which one might mount forces, the more accurate description is that leaders now face a landscape of losses— a condition depleted of advantages once provided to them by the culture. This is not a problem to be solved or a battle

¹⁶ Frank Newport, "Why Are Americans Losing Confidence in Organized Religion?," Gallup.com, July 16, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/260738/why-americans-losing-confidence-organized-religion.aspx>.

¹⁷ Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, Reprint edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 228.

to be mounted with the answers and resources at hand. This is now the new landscape— the new condition under which the institutions of the spirit must now live.¹⁸

In this changed condition of loss, I no longer think that grace is a sufficient theological grounding for my ministry leadership and why I am looking to develop a foundation of *hope* to live out my leadership. Yes, the church needs to be told that what we have done is good and that our mistakes are forgiven. But we also need to have hope that something new is possible. Telling this new story of hope is what I will turn to now.

The postaberrant time: telling a new story

The postaberrant time in the church can be likened to a new wandering in the wilderness. The past is gone, and there is no getting it back. The future is unknown and unknowable. Much of what we know from Egypt cannot come with us to the promised land; even some of our leaders, like Moses, will not make the whole trip. There will be urgency and impatience, as the journey will seem long even as the promised land will feel just around the next bend. And yet it is in the wilderness time itself that we will be formed into the church that can be faithful in the new land.

"So much of leadership now requires the shift from problem-solving to exploration— from fixing and improving things to learning new directions that can be seen with a changed mindset."¹⁹ Exploration and learning are the name of the game. Our churches need to be transformed into a million little laboratories all across the globe, experimenting courageously, failing fast, reflecting honestly, and sharing what we learn with one another. As leaders in this postaberrant time, pastors and church leaders need to model curiosity instead of expertise, courage over anxiety, and hope that the spirit of God will be with us no matter what we do.

¹⁸ Rendle, *Quietly Courageous*, 51.

¹⁹ Rendle, 216.

In this postaberrant time, the leader must do two things: tell the truth and paint a new picture of what is possible. "An honest picture of the current reality along with a real hope for a better future are the two sides of the most critical aspect of leadership in the post-aberrant time: the building of a new and better narrative for people to live."²⁰

In local churches, filled with grief, doubt, and anxiety because of their many losses, church leaders must find a way to tell the truth that does not heap insult onto injury but builds understanding and acceptance. Helping people understand the greater context and the reasons for the loss they have experienced should help as they learn that it is not *all* their fault. But also, our churches will need to be reminded of grace because some of the problems *are* our fault. Over the past few decades, some of our choices have not been faithful, generous, or courageous. Pretending that is not the case will not lead to growth. But neither will wallowing in guilt. Hence, the importance of grace. Grace allows us to learn from our mistakes while not being buried by them.

At the same time, grace is no longer enough. The church also needs a message of hope. We need hope that something genuinely NEW is possible, hope that the Spirit of God is really at work in the world making all things new and, most importantly, hope that God still makes some kind of sense, has not left us, and has not given up on the church. We need the story of the prodigal son coming home AND the story of the promised land calling us towards a new horizon. It is the thesis of this study that design thinking can be part of helping the church to find that new story and that one of the key leverage points for faithfulness in the church's future is finding creative uses for our buildings and property.

²⁰ Rendle, 220–21.

Part Two – Biblical and Theological Grounding

Introduction

This chapter will outline my thesis's biblical and theological grounding. In it, I hope to show a scriptural and theological imperative for local congregations to better determine and fulfill the needs of their communities. I will look to accomplish this by examining the prophetic motif of the "Messianic Banquet" in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. I will then apply that same lens to the practice of communion in the local congregation. I will then introduce how I believe these ideas point to design thinking as a valuable tool for the church to meet these aims, which I will develop in more detail in future chapters.

Biblical Grounding, The Messianic Banquet: All Are Invited to the Party

In this section, two important scriptures will be used to inform re-examination of the practices of the local church for further inspiration and instruction: from the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 25, and from the New Testament, Luke 14. Both scriptures will be animated by the prophetic expectation of the "Messianic Banquet."

Old Testament reading: Isaiah 25

6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
7 And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

the sheet that is spread over all nations;
8 he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6-8 NRSV)

The Bible is filled with hope and promise for a better future. Beautiful images and metaphors for a hoped-for future abound throughout. These images and metaphors exist not simply to fill our heads with dreams of a better day someday but also to instruct how we are to live our life today. We are to rehearse *now* the promised future that will come *then*. My hope with this project is to help the church do just that.

The quote from Isaiah above represents one of the richest examples of the repeated prophetic motif of the Messianic Banquet. The idea is that there will come a time when God will welcome all nations to "this mountain"(v. 6f), and they will come to pay their respects to the Lord. That the poor and the hungry will have their fill to eat and that even death itself will be no more is an image of peace as well as an image of victory.

Princeton Professor of Old Testament Literature, J. J. M. Roberts, offers us an alternative reading from the Septuagint for v.6b, "they will *drink joy*, they will drink wine, they will anoint themselves with perfume [emphasis mine]."²¹ This is the wording that the New Testament authors would have been most familiar with. I love the image of "drinking joy," It is a promise that will resonate with people today, to drink joy itself! Bringing that one image alone into the life of the church, particularly the practice of communion, could profoundly impact what the church has to offer its communities.

Isaiah 25:6-8 falls within a broader section of text often referred to as the Little Isaiah Apocalypse. There is little to no scholarly consensus on the date of the writing of this section of Isaiah:

²¹ J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 320.

It is, generally, though not universally, agreed that these four chapters are dependent on, but later than and not composed by, Isaiah of Jerusalem, who wrote in the late eighth and the very early seventh century BCE. There is, however, no real agreement on how much later a date is to be assigned to this material... What is certain is that the author never once mentions Babylon in his whole corpus... that suggests this composition was written prior to 597.²²

If Roberts is correct, then that would mean that the author is most likely writing from within Jerusalem, commenting on events leading up to the exile, though not on the exile itself.

Two times in this section, and once more just two verses later, the text refers to "this Mountain." Though the text never names the mountain, it is evident by the reference to "his people" in verse eight that the referred to mountain is, in fact, Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. And therefore, this banquet is not just any old party. Instead, it is "a covenant-type banquet on Yahweh's sacred dwelling place in which the people participate to acknowledge Yahweh's rule."²³

This is no ordinary banquet! Rich, oily foods well-seasoned with marrow, served with wine that has been filtered clear (v. 6). This is the feast of a king! And the promise is that all people, not just priests and kings, are invited to this royal feast. The poor, the refugee, and the needy also share in this feast (see also v. 4).

The image of God swallowing up death is striking, to be sure, but it is even more powerful with a bit of historical background. Again, Roberts helps us out:

In Canaanite myth death, personified as the God Mot, is described as having a ravenous appetite, and he swallows the storm god and God of fertility... Similar language is used for Sheol, a synonym for death in Isa 5:14: "Therefore Sheol opens her throat wide and gapes open her mouth without measure, and her (Jerusalem's) nobility and her multitude and her throng and those who exult in her go Down." Cf. also Prov 30:15-16. The shocking reversal in our passage is that instead of death swallowing up Yahweh as he swallowed up Baal, Yahweh turns the table on Mot and swallows him... Both verses are celebrating Yahweh's termination of death and the sorrow humans experience in connection with it.²⁴

²² Roberts, 306.

²³ Roberts, 322.

²⁴ Roberts, 322.

Our God is a God who triumphs over even death. This is a difficult idea to live into in the contemporary church, where death is all around us daily. We enter the sanctuary aware of the empty spaces in the pews where our fathers and grandmothers, friends, and even children used to sit. Their ghosts haunt us. And this sadness is increased because those seats remain empty with no one to take their place. And yet, if we could relearn how to celebrate a God who has "swallowed up death forever," it might go a long way towards reversing those trends.

Reading the text from a different context:

Victor Zinkurature, a Ugandan Catholic Priest who teaches in Kenya, explores how the prophetic judgments and hope can be interpreted in his African context:

Isaiah's prophecies of judgment and of hope have a powerful message for the people of Eastern Africa in their present problems and aspirations. In the first place, YHWH's severe judgments against the people of Judah and Jerusalem, particularly the leaders, should guide the church on how to respond to Africa's political instability, regional armed conflicts, social and economic oppression and the resultant problem of poverty.²⁵

And,

But Isaiah also had messages of hope for his people. Today we can already see the possibilities of rereading them as good news for Africa in the context of the many positive initiatives that the church and civil society are taking to remove the present oppressive conditions. There is now some political and economic cooperation between African states and regions to promote good governance and economic development. There are also many peace initiatives to end the widespread military conflicts in Africa. In all this, the church is actively involved in its prophetic role of proclaiming the word of God, condemning abuses, giving moral and spiritual guidance, and supporting the poor and underprivileged members of society.²⁶

²⁵ Daniel Patte, *Global Bible Commentary*, First Edition edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 193.

²⁶ Patte, 194.

For the church to succeed in throwing open the doors and letting the neighborhood in, it needs to recognize the message of hope for the whole world in the stories it reads. The church needs to see the word of correction within those same stories towards we who have lived our entire lives in the most powerful country on the planet. Hearing these stories retold by the voices of those *not* in the center of the world's power will bring new learning and fresh hope to our churches and our neighborhoods.

New Testament reading: Luke 14

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 16 Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. 17 At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' 19 Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' 20 Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' 22 And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' 23 Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'" (Luke 14:15-24)

In this text, the church can hear a rebuke and an invitation. The rebuke is two-fold. For those of us who are *on* the "guest list" of church and take it for granted, looking for any excuse not to show up or get involved or participate, there is a warning in this story that we may lose our spot. But for those of us who *create* the guest list in the first place (religious leaders), I think the rebuke is even harsher – that we get far too caught up in whether or not the people on our own "guest list" show up when there remains a hungry and lonely world all around us.

The invitation to us is to go back out on the streets, find the people who need to be invited, and invite them. Who are the people who need to be invited? That depends on our context. In the context of Underwood, it is likely the lonely who do not fit in with the community around them, the queer

community, the immigrant community, and the people of color who work in every shop on every corner but are rarely seen as genuine members of the community. As the church finds ways to invite them in, and they begin to respond, joining the party – the party will change. The customs, norms, priorities, languages, images, and sounds will change. If the church’s hospitality does not lead to its transformation, it is not genuine hospitality.

The people on the original guest list might not feel like there is room for them anymore. They might not be able to see themselves in this new diversity. It’s not that they will be unwelcome. It’s just that they will not be at the center of the party anymore. The text does not seem overly concerned if they stop showing up; perhaps we should not be either.

Professor of the history of religion at Harvard Divinity School, Francois Bovon, leans on the work of Fuchs (*trace de Dieu*, 35) and others in his commentary on Luke for the Hermeneia series. In it, he spends some time considering the host as a literary character and develops an idea that is useful for our task:

He (the host) was, indeed, anxious—the mention of this is certainly important—to fill his house. Success in this matter depended on something other than his past relationships of friendship. It was linked to his possible openness to new relationships. He ran the double risk of losing his friends and rubbing shoulders with marginal persons whose reactions would be unpredictable.²⁷

The church cannot get where it needs to go by doing the same things with the same “friends” it has had for the past seventy years. Gone are the times when old denominational networks are strong enough to sustain it. Disappearing are the days when the stay-at-home moms of the church will staff the nursery and cook the Sunday lunches. New patterns and relationships must be developed, and each will come with inherent risks. Individual churches will risk losing what denominational ties they still have.

²⁷ Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 366.

They will risk the loss of certain functions and rituals of the church community with nothing to take their place. And, more than anything, the church will risk offending the sensibilities of those who cannot get past, “we’ve never done it that way before.” Religious leaders will need to become comfortable with letting some people down if we hope to turn the corner.

Also useful for our task is the role and the activity of the servant in the story. Again, Bovon:

The text balances the outside represented by the town and the outside of the outside represented by the countryside with the inside of the house (v. 23) and the inside of the inside, the room offered to the guests (v. 22). Note the importance of the intermediary, the mediator, the one who establishes communication and draws the practical conclusions from it. *The servant had to “go out” three times in order to “bring in.”* The verbs indicating motion play a determinative role in the unfolding of the story (emphasis mine).²⁸

If Jesus is the host, it makes sense to associate the church with the character of the servant. No longer can the church stay comfortably inside its same four walls and count on people to come in. Church marketing and websites (though important) will not get many people to come to the party. The church will have to leave the building continuously and habitually.

Some more radical readers will question why the church needs to come back into the building at all, and I understand the instinct. My conviction is that there is still a need in this world for physical spaces for people to gather to celebrate, learn, and commune. The four walls of the church do not and should not be the *only* place where this gathering is happening. But I am not sure it makes sense to stop using them altogether. Whether the current “four walls” we have are the right “four walls” is something each congregation will need to decide for itself and a conversation I hope that this project will contribute to.

²⁸ Bovon, 366.

Reading the text from a different context:

Though this text undoubtedly has something to say to the church no matter its socioeconomic location, Dr. Paul John Isaak, from the University of Namibia, makes a compelling case for interpreting this text as being directed particularly towards the wealthy.

Jesus tells this parable to illustrate both the wrath and mercy of God. The closing verdict expresses the contempt of the host for those who had despised his invitation: I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner (14:24). Instead the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind (14:13) are the ones who are blessed and who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God (14:15). Jesus says the future is determined by our present response and the rich have excluded themselves.²⁹

If the church is honest with itself, it will admit that so many of the faces in the pews in so many of our churches do not reflect the faces outside of the churches because *we don't want them to*. Most churches and church members won't admit it. Still, the reality is that many church members do not wish our congregations to go from being primarily white to being majority-minority like many church neighborhoods have become. We do not want to struggle with the reality of the various languages spoken in the homes and shops around our churches. We do not want to be reminded of the poverty around us or the struggles that the young single parents are dealing with. For too many of us, the church has become one more place where we can deny our racism and prejudice by surrounding ourselves with people who look and act just like us. This is not the vision of the Messianic Banquet that we are intended to foreshadow in our churches week after week.

²⁹ Zondervan and John R. Stott and Rubert K. Aboagye-Mensah, *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo, 2 edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 1233.

Theological Grounding, Communion: Rehearsing the Messianic Banquet

Communion has a lot of meanings, and it is beyond this project's scope to discuss them all. But one meaning and opportunity that is surely present in communion is for the church to behave as a foretaste of the Messianic Banquet. This allusion is made rather explicit by Jesus in Luke's telling of the Last Supper: "He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until *it is fulfilled* in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 22:15&16 NRSV)

Communion is a place and moment where all are gathered, no one is above the rest, everyone is accepted, and the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ for all people is proclaimed in word and action. The preeminent Methodist scholar of liturgy, Larry Stookey, puts it like this, "The Eucharist is the feast of the whole church as it participates in and yet awaits the perfect reign of God. And what we expect to become, we seek to be now".³⁰ *What we expect to become, we seek to be now*, is an idea that the church needs to understand about its own identity if it is to discover afresh how to be a light to the world.

Stookey also sees the importance of reaching outside the church's normal "guest list" and welcoming people in, specifically to the celebration of the Eucharist. Referencing our same parable of Jesus in the book of Luke, he says the following:

Evangel means "good news." Surely there is no better news than this: God is with us and graciously draws us into the great banquet hall, where all may be sustained. Further, this good news, as it is represented in the eucharistic feast, is intended to reveal to us certain good news about God's intention for our world. The servant of the host in Jesus' story is commanded to bring to the banquet, "the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame"—that is, those usually overlooked or discriminated against. The intention is not that these should have one good evening to remember and then be sent back to life as it was before. This is a parable about the

³⁰ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church*, Later Printing edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 26.

kingdom of God, so that those who were the victims of society are vindicated. For them a new era is instituted, and wholeness is given as a right where inferiority had prevailed as an unquestioned custom.³¹

Stookey goes on to describe the church in this way:

The church has the potential to be a model of community for a fractured social order—one of the few models, it seems, and one with congregations literally in millions of places around the world. Thus positioned, the church has the potential to show society what community is and the power to make the world homesick for the community it has too readily surrendered—or has never known.³²

What Professor Stookey is laying out for the church in no uncertain terms is the very heart of what the church is meant to be: a place where *all* are welcome to the table, but especially those who otherwise find themselves un-invited. How often have I heard a church leader tell me they want to “reach young families” and I think, you know who else wants to do that? *Every other church* in town. Churches bend over backward to be attractive to the affluent, “normal,” usually white, idealized “young family,” with a mommy and a daddy, 2.5 children, a white picket fence, and a dog.

But these are not the people that the Bible tells the church to prioritize. Should they be welcome? Of course, they should, and they are, and they know it. Show me a church that spends more of its energy welcoming the people who otherwise would not feel welcome, and I’ll show you a church that looks more like the Messianic Banquet. (Not for nothing, but it’ll likely have more young families in it as well, as this vision is attractive to everyone).

Robert W. Canoy, dean, and professor of Christian Theology at the School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb, in his article, *Turning the Table: Luke’s Inclusive Invitation to Communion*, walks through the numerous instances in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus has a meal with people. And he lays out in detail

³¹ Stookey, 146.

³² Stookey, 151.

how each meal story serves to upend a social norm of insiders and outsiders. Canoy concludes with this striking summary:

When this table practice becomes the new norm, the shame/honor culture will have been subverted. Former patterns of exclusion will be overturned. Every exclusive practice under which first century society was officially governed—of shame/honor, haves and have-nots, honored guest and outsider, male and female, sick and healthy—will have come to an end.³³

For Canoy, this pattern is so well established in the Gospel of Luke that it must necessarily apply to the story of the last meal Jesus has with his disciples. In fact, he sees the Last Supper as the culmination of all the meal stories and stories of inclusion in the Gospel and concludes by drawing on the idea of the coming Messianic Banquet, joining it explicitly to communion,

The Eucharist is an anticipatory meal of the future day when all the nations will gather at the banquet of God. The “daily Bread” for which Jesus taught the disciples to pray (Luke 11:3; Matt6:11) may well be translated “bread for tomorrow” or “tomorrow’s bread today,” as in the eschatological bread of the Kingdom of God that sustains people beyond any physical bread. Each sharing of the meal now should be eaten in expectation of that coming day characterized by joy, peace, brotherhood, sisterhood and release. To the guest list must be added sinners, outcasts, lame, crippled, and particularly those who cannot repay in kind.³⁴

To this day, I have only ever seen *one* church that reflects this vision for Christian Community. Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in the tenderloin region of San Francisco is a historic downtown church, but it is so much more. Glide has become a beacon of hope and a center for reconciliation in its community. Every week the worship at Glide, which they call “celebration,” reflects the vision of the Messianic Banquet. The gathered community is half black and half white, half male and half female, half gay and half straight, half rich and half very poor. At least, that is how it feels when you are there. Of course, they don’t count, and they don’t measure, but when you are in a Glide worship

³³ Robert W. Canoy, “Turning the Table: Luke’s Inclusive Invitation to Communion,” *Review & Expositor* 116, no. 3 (August 1, 2019): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637319866848>.

³⁴ Canoy, 319.

service, you feel as if there is no majority, there is no minority, and no matter who you are, you are welcome, just as you are and without burden or prejudice.

A typical Glide celebration does not include communion. But it doesn't need to. Because the welcome, celebration, and "drinking joy" are present in everything they do. My hope for this project is to invite more churches to embrace the goal of becoming a foretaste of the Messianic Banquet that is possible for us every time we gather at church, whether we have communion or not.

Conclusion: Why Design Thinking to Solve This Problem?

Two conversations I have had over the past year have crystallized for me why I believe that design thinking is a helpful tool for solving this problem. The first was at a gathering of community organizers. A long-time pastor and organizer said something like the following, "we need to *be* with the people we hope to *serve*."³⁵ Another way I have heard this expressed by organizers and missiologists alike is that our goal is to work "with and among" not "to and for." So, as an example, instead of hosting a soup kitchen where folks come into the church, eat their meal, and then are escorted out, relatively unchanged by the experience, the church goes out to folks where they are, brings them a meal, has a conversation, and asks them what they need.

The second comes from a conversation I had was with a designer and consultant on church growth and church change. She casually said something like, "design thinking is just good mission."³⁶ Why would she say that? Because design thinking takes these same concepts of going out to where the people are, designing with them and not for them, and learning what they really need and then applies

³⁵ Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice Planning Meeting, May 17, 2022.

³⁶ Hopkins, Shannon, Rooted Good Consultation, April 29, 2022.

it to the design process. Basically, the business world has learned good mission practices in a time when the local church has largely forgotten them. It is past time we relearn.

Part Three – Literature Review: Design Thinking

Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to design thinking tools and insights and explore how those tools and insights can be applied to the church. In later chapters, we will see how these tools and insights can be applied to the specific question of church building and property as we use design thinking as a lens to examine and interpret the experience of the churches in the Oikos Accelerator program. But first, let's talk about what design thinking is.

Design thinking is a problem-solving approach with a unique set of qualities: it is human centered, possibility driven, option focused, and iterative. Human centered is always where we start—with real people, not demographic segments. Design thinking emphasizes the importance of deep exploration into the lives and problems of the people whose lives we want to improve before we start generating solutions... Design thinking is also possibility driven. We ask the question “What if anything were possible?” as we begin to create ideas. We focus on generating multiple options and avoid putting all our eggs in one particular solution basket... Finally, the process is iterative. It conducts cycles of real-world experiments to refine ideas, rather than running analyses using historical data. We don't expect to get it right the first time—we expect to iterate our way to success.³⁷

Over the last five decades, designers have been helping businesses innovate by applying the tools and strengths of the design process to other areas of business. At first, this began with straightforward design solutions to business problems like designing the first usable computer mouse for the home computer³⁸ or designing a better shopping cart.³⁹ Over the years, this “design thinking” process has been applied to subjects as diverse as developing a new warming blanket for premature

³⁷ Jeanne Liedtka, Randy Salzman, and Daisy Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good: Innovation in the Social Sector* (Columbia Business School Publishing, 2017), 6.

³⁸ “Creating the First Usable Mouse | Ideo.Com,” accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.ideo.com/case-study/creating-the-first-usable-mouse>.

³⁹ *ABC Nightline - IDEO Shopping Cart*, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M66ZU2PClCM>.

babies in impoverished areas to redesigning the Peruvian school system from the ground up.⁴⁰ All across the globe, in all different kinds of industries, design thinking principles are being used to find new solutions to “wicked problems.”

Wicked problems are problems with many interdependent factors making them seem impossible to solve. Because the factors are often incomplete, in flux, and difficult to define, solving wicked problems requires a deep understanding of the stakeholders involved, and an innovative approach provided by design thinking. Complex issues such as healthcare and education are examples of wicked problems.⁴¹

I contend that the problems facing the church now are the very definition of the “wicked problems” design thinking is meant to address.

There are many ways of describing the design thinking process. The following pulls insights from several of them. We will explore the teachings and tools of design thinking in five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. I will explain each stage and give examples of how they might be used in a church setting based on my own experiences as a church leader and the stories I have heard over the past two decades of working with other church leaders.

Empathize

“Don't wait for the proverbial apple to fall on your head. Go out in the world and seek experiences that will spark creative thinking.”⁴² — Chris Flink, Executive Director, Exploratorium.

Design thinking is also referred to as “human-centered design” due to its emphasis on basing the whole process on the needs, wants, and expectations of actual, particular, human beings.

Being human centered is at the core of our innovation process. Deep empathy for people makes our observations powerful sources of inspiration. We aim to understand why people do what

⁴⁰ “Designing a School System from the Ground Up | Ideo.Com,” accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.ideo.com/case-study/designing-a-school-system-from-the-ground-up>.

⁴¹ “What Are Wicked Problems?,” The Interaction Design Foundation, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/wicked-problems>.

⁴² “Hello Design Thinking | Gather,” accessed July 22, 2022, <https://hellodesignthinking.ideo.com/gather/gather-21>.

they currently do, with the goal of understanding what they might do in the future. Our first-person experiences help us form personal connections with the people for whom we're innovating.⁴³

One might think this would be a natural fit for the church, but unfortunately, that is often not the case. All too often, the local church has lost touch with the people it is trying to reach. Therefore, this first step of empathy is likely the *most important* and *most difficult* step for the church to adopt. Fortunately, it can be taught, tools can be learned, and lessons applied that can help the church get back in touch with its end user, people.

This first empathize step goes beyond general interviews, surveys, and data analysis (although all of those can be helpful tools) to genuine *empathy*. “As an early part of every design thinking process, empathy means spending time with people to understand their experiences.”⁴⁴ It is at once more complex than traditional market analysis in that it is necessary to spend time with real people in their real lives. But it is also easier in that it is not necessary to interview dozens and dozens of people or get a representative sample of a whole city or any of the other typical goals of research. Instead, the task is to have in-depth conversations in real-world settings with a handful of people who fit the demographics that the new initiative is attempting to serve.

In the *Field Guide to Human Centered Design* published by IDEO (the very center of the design thinking universe and the designers in the computer mouse and shopping cart examples above), the interview process is described this way,

Interviews really are the crux of the Inspiration phase. Human-centered design is about getting to the people you're designing for and hearing from them in their own words... you'll unlock all kinds of insights and understanding that you'll never get sitting behind your desk. Whenever possible, conduct your Interviews in the person's space. You can learn so much about a person's

⁴³ Tom Kelley and David Kelley, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, 1st edition (Currency, 2013), 21.

⁴⁴ Christopher R. Aho, “Faith by Design: Exploiting Intersections between Acts and Design Thinking to Cultivate the Conditions for Innovation in the Local Church as an Expression of Traditioned Innovation.” (Divinity School of Duke University, 2021), 39.

mindset, behavior, and lifestyle by talking with them where they live or work...What you hear is only one data point. Be sure to observe the person's body language and surroundings and see what you can learn from the context in which you're talking. Take pictures, provided you get permission first.⁴⁵

The field guide and other writings describe how to conduct these interviews and provide additional options, including workshops, observations, focus groups, and other tools.⁴⁶ Regardless of the method, the goal is the same, to gain empathy and understanding of a person's real needs and wants. The importance of this step for the design process cannot be overstated,

Studies show that greatest single reason for the failure of new designs of products and services is a lack of empathy within the design team of the perspectives of the stakeholders. Over 75% of new product initiatives fail in the market and lack of empathy is the number one reason that they fail.⁴⁷

The key in this stage is not to simply listen but to *observe*, to "listen with your eyes" to use the IDEO language. Observations can be enriched by looking for these five things:⁴⁸

Look for what people care about. Is their closet filled with business clothes, workout clothes, or clothes for going out on the town? Is their car clean or dirty? Do they spend their money on concerts, travel, or things for the house? Do they have art on their office walls, photos of family, or awards and diplomas? All these observations provide clues to what the person cares about most.

Look for patterns. People tell the same story more than once or multiple stories with the same theme. Someone might routinely check their watch for the time or their phone for incoming messages. Patterns reveal a person's values by demonstrating their subconscious habits and activities.

⁴⁵ Jeanne Liedtka and Tim Ogilvie, *The Designing for Growth Field Book: A Step-by-Step Project Guide* (Columbia Business School Publishing, 2019), 39.

⁴⁶ Robert Curedale, *Design Thinking Process & Methods 5th Edition*, 5th edition (Design Community College Inc., 2022), 246.

⁴⁷ Curedale, 246.

⁴⁸ "Hello Design Thinking | Gather."

Watch for adaptations and hacks. Watch a chef in a kitchen. Are they using the blade of their knife to crush a garlic clove? That's a hack. Watch a child playing with a toy. Does a ball become a friend to talk to? That's one, too. What unmet needs are people meeting with these clever adaptations? How might an innovation speak to those needs?

Observe body language. What gets people excited? Agitated? Bored? At ease? What makes people look the other way in discomfort or lean in with interest? What someone doesn't say is often communicated if one is observant enough to see it.

Notice the unexpected. What is surprising? What things look out of place or interesting? What generates more questions – pull on those threads and see where they lead.

Let me pass along a story to illustrate how this can work. A former IDEO designer told me about a significant experience he had when conducting an interview. A major American bank had hired IDEO to help them design a new product that would appeal to their middle and lower-income clients. So, the design team set up about a dozen in-home interviews with folks in that demographic.

One designer met a woman in her apartment and asked questions about how she used her checking account, what kinds of bills she pays, and what the experience was like for her. In an unplanned moment of inspiration, the designer asked to look at her checkbook, where he noticed something odd. Every check the woman wrote to pay a bill was a whole dollar amount. Now, once or twice, that would be odd, but not impossible, but every time – no way. So, the designer asked the woman to explain what was happening.

The woman shared that whatever amount the bill was, she always rounded up to the nearest dollar. That way, when the next bill came, she had a small credit at the top of the bill. Seeing that small credit at the top of her bill made her feel good, more confident that she could pay her bills, like she had a little leg up. She understood fully that the small amount would not make a big difference in the long

run. But it was about how it made her *feel*. The designer knew he had just tapped into something important, so with permission – and carefully as to protect her banking information – the designer took photos of the woman's checkbook to bring back to his design team.

The design team also recognized that the designer had uncovered something meaningful, which became a critical insight contributing to their future work. In the end, they developed a program that their customers could opt in to. This program automatically rounded up charges made on a customer's bank account and put that extra into a special savings account set up for that purpose. This then helped the bank's members get started on saving for a rainy day. This program quickly became one of the bank's most popular offerings, and versions of it continue to this day, including the ability to round purchases at retail stores to give to charity.

This story is insightful about the design thinking process in many ways. First, the design team would have never come to this insight by conducting a standard telephone or internet survey. They would have never come to this insight if the designer had stuck to a pre-written script. They would have never come to this insight if the designer had not been in this person's home. They would have never come to this insight if the designer had approached the woman with judgment or a lack of empathy. This insight was possible only through a one-on-one, in-person, open-ended interview where the designer was confident to follow their inspiration and regarded the subject with respect and empathy.

Second, the design team did not go on from this insight and immediately develop a replica of what the woman was doing. The goal is insight, not copying. The design team combined the insight that the designer had gained from this interaction with other insights they had gained from interactions with their end-users and created something that no one on the team, and no one person they interviewed, would have thought of on their own.

To imagine what this could look like in church leadership, let's think about the decision-making process involved in going to church on a Sunday morning. As a professional religious person, it has been a long time since I have been faced with making this decision. However, it is a decision most church members make every week. Using the design thinking tools, how might we gain insight into what that decision-making process is like for your average church attender?

One could do a telephone survey of all church members and see what issues rise to the top. This would be a helpful exercise, but we can probably guess what would come up. Some percentage of people would say, "I always go to church, unless I can't," which would reveal nothing, or "I want to come to church more, but we are just so busy," which again, wouldn't give one much to work with.

But let's imagine it in the design thinking way. What if a design team picked half a dozen members or families and met with them in their homes on Sunday mornings or Saturday nights? And what if they interviewed them while also carefully observing what was going on? What might they see? Would they see that the decision-making process starts on Saturday night, or is it made ten minutes before church starts? Would they see that the parents want to go but are tired of arguing with their kids about it and give up? Or the opposite? Would they see that the conversation is a point of tension between the husband and wife and is putting strain on their marriage? Would they find out that the family tends to be happier on Sundays when they don't come to church than on Sundays when they do?

These observations could lead to fascinating insights that could point a church towards interesting and radical changes to what it means to come together for church. I don't know what answers might come from this, but I am pretty sure they would be more interesting than adding an espresso machine to the narthex.

Do not be intimidated, dear reader. This does not have to be a massive undertaking. We don't need a consultant; we don't need a huge team. We need a couple of people who can listen, really listen

to people. We need to talk to people where they are. We need to observe, and we need to listen with empathy, without any judgment at all. Remember, "*for design thinkers... behaviors are never right or wrong, but they are always meaningful.*"⁴⁹

Define the Problem

It is tempting to think that one knows the problem they are trying to solve, but design thinking wants to go beyond that assumption. Take the earlier example of people deciding whether to come to church, a common way of thinking for churches was, "Something is wrong with our worship services. People don't want to come regularly. How do we fix that?" And then, a worldwide pandemic happens, shutting down all other activities in people's lives *and* forcing churches to become available on people's computers and suddenly attendance is up! Maybe churches have been trying to fix the wrong problem all along. Design thinking encourages us to test our assumptions through a process of defining the problem.

Going from insights gathered through empathetic listening to a well-defined problem or problems is the real art of the skilled designer. Probably, there is no way to get better at it other than to do it, but there is a process to be followed. The first thing that should be urged is not to rush this process. It is tempting to start talking about solutions too soon. "One of the biggest contributions of design thinking is to hold us in the problem space long enough to develop the kind of deeper insights into the problem that foster more creative ideas later on."⁵⁰ *If* solutions start to come up in the process, that's great! Set them aside to be picked up and worked with later. Work hard not to get consumed in discussions of the relative merits and challenges of the proposed solutions. That is not what this phase

⁴⁹ Tim Brown, *Change by Design, Revised and Updated: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, Revised, Updated ed. edition (Harper Business, 2019), 45.

⁵⁰ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, 255.

of the process is for; at this point, it would be counterproductive. "Debates about the definition of the problem tend to broaden the discussion and open up new perspectives. Debates about solutions, on the other hand, tend to narrow the discussion."⁵¹

Defining the problem has two main steps, generating insights and creating problem statements. As important as listening and observing with empathy is, it is not the point itself. The point is to draw powerful insights from what is observed. So, as in the "bank account" example above, the design team returns and shares, like a reporter, all that they heard, saw, and intuited. It is important at this phase that each interviewer shares, as best they can, the raw data that they uncovered *without* interpretation. This allows everyone on the team to gain insights from each other's experiences. After sharing the raw data, each interviewer should share their interpretation of what they have observed. They are the ones who are most likely to have powerful insights from their observations. So, each team member should be given the opportunity to wear both hats when the team meets together – reporter and interpreter.

Further, the goal is to gain *insights*, not *an* insight. The hope is to enter the next phase of the process with multiple powerful insights. Not all interesting observations lead to meaningful insights, and not all insights are earth-shattering. In *How to Try* (the only book I know of trying to apply design thinking to the church), Lorenzo Lebrija describes insights in this way,

An insight is an "Aha!" moment, but that does not mean that you must be on the lookout for earth-shattering, eureka moments. It's more subtle than that. What you are looking for is something that caught your interest... a good insight has three qualities: First, it informs. It's something you didn't know before and it's interesting. Second, a good insight inspires. The insight can motivate you to do something... Finally, a good insight is memorable. It sticks in your mind and is something you can easily share.⁵²

⁵¹ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, 262.

⁵² Lorenzo Lebrija, *How to Try: Design Thinking and Church Innovation* (Church Publishing, 2021), 420.

Going from observation to insight is a work of creativity and genius. It draws on the team's experience and intuitions. But it is essential that the insights are thoroughly grounded on what was observed. This is a moment where personal vendettas and preferences can easily wedge their way into the process, especially if anyone on the team did not participate thoroughly in the observation process or did not have a meaningful experience. The skilled facilitator needs to welcome all insights while continually drawing the conversation back to the observations that were made by the team.

Let's imagine an example of this that might come up in a church design team:

Observation: families with young children have difficulty convincing their children to attend church.

Proposed insight: we need better children's Sunday School programming.

This may be true, but that's a solution, not an insight, and it seems to have as much to do with the person's personal preference as it is an insight based on an observation.

Alternative insight: many children find church boring.

If that fits the data, then yes, that is an insight a team can work with. Better Sunday School programming might very well be part of the solution. But so might a shorter service, different music, or arts and crafts in the sanctuary. In this example, it is easy to see how jumping too quickly to a solution narrows the possible solutions the group might think up.

Armed with empathetic observations, some good stories, and a few powerful insights, the group is now ready to move to the next step of this stage – creating “How Might We” (HMW) statements.

Try rephrasing (the insights) as questions by adding "How might we" at the beginning... The goal is to find opportunities for design, so if your insights suggest several How Might We questions that's great. Now take a look at your How Might We question and ask yourself if it allows for a variety of solutions. If it doesn't, broaden it. Your How Might We should generate a number of possible answers and will become a launchpad for your Brainstorms. Finally, make sure that your How Might We's aren't too broad. It's a tricky process but a good How Might We should

give you both a narrow enough frame to let you know where to start your Brainstorm, but also enough breadth to give you room to explore wild ideas⁵³.

So, “children find church boring” becomes “how might we make church less boring to the children in our community?” Now *that* is an interesting question!

The 'How Might We' phrasing strength lies in each word. "How" is active and optimistic and implies that there are solutions to the problem, but that it will take effort to find them. "Might" is open-ended and flexible, imbuing the journey with a sense of experimentation, knowing that some ideas will work and some (most) won't, and that is okay. And "we" well, "we" ensures that *we* don't forget that the onus is on us. No one else is going to figure this out for us. It is up to us.⁵⁴

As the group begins to transform its insights into HMW statements, it may find that it can create multiple HMW statements from a single insight, which is great! The group might also find that one HMW can hold multiple insights, even better! In forming a HMW, the group might discover that the real problem is something different than the insight suggested, something deeper, something more essential to how things are done. This is all for good. Gathering insights is an explicit step of the design thinking process, but the truth is that insights can come throughout the design thinking process, and they should. Insights are what make change happen.

Let me share an example from my own ministry setting. After several months and many one-on-one interviews at my new church, I gained an insight: people did not want to serve on our current leadership board. They didn't see it as a worthwhile experience in terms of their own enjoyment or the group's impact on the church. And to be honest, I couldn't blame them. So, I changed tack. I went from asking myself how I could get new people on the leadership board to "how might we re-imagine

⁵³ IDEO.org, *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*, 1st edition (San Francisco, Calif.: IDEO.org / Design Kit, 2015), 85.

⁵⁴ “How Might We Improve the Health & Wealth of Cities?,” IDEO | Design Thinking, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://designthinking.ideo.com/blog/how-might-we-improve-the-health-wealth-of-cities>.

leadership of the church?" This way of framing the question led to some wonderful ideation, which we will explore in the next section.

In this second stage of the design thinking process, "define the problem" happens in two steps. First, observations are taken from the first step and scoured for powerful insights. Second, those powerful insights are turned into problems we can work with, or "How Might We" statements. The final step is to select a few HMW statements to take forward into the next step of the process, "Ideate." This is where it starts to get fun!

Ideate

Much like the "Define the Problem" stage, the Ideate stage also has two steps: divergence and convergence. These two steps are often illustrated by a less than sign followed by a greater than sign <> showing that, at first, thinking is to be as expansive as possible. Then, and only then, a group wants to start to narrow its options.

In the divergent thinking step, the goal is to generate *a lot* of ideas. "To develop one successful idea, professional designers often ideate more than one hundred and sometimes thousands of concepts."⁵⁵ Yes, hundreds, if not thousands, of ideas! Most of the time, a church group doing this kind of process will not be made up of professional designers working on this problem forty-plus hours a week. Instead, it will most often be a group of volunteers with little to no experience in design thinking, working in two-hour chunks of time at most once per week. So, coming up with a thousand different ideas for how to answer a How Might We is a little far-fetched. But it illustrates that at this point in the process, the group should be striving for quantity. The more, the better. And not just the more, the better, but the more out there, the moon shots, the seemingly impossible, the better. "Try to generate

⁵⁵ Curedale, *Design Thinking Process & Methods 5th Edition*, 453.

as many ideas as possible. At first, it is good to explore wild blue-sky directions. You can always pull the ideas back to reality and budgets as they are refined.”⁵⁶

The easiest and most well-known way to do divergent thinking is through brainstorming. Everyone is familiar with brainstorming. We have all been in a meeting where we were invited to "brainstorm" for as long as fifteen whole minutes, with little guidance and no training on how to do it well. This is not how design thinking understands a brainstorming session. Brainstorming is as important a step in the design thinking process as anything else, and it is to be done with intention, preferably following specific guidelines. There are rules to an effective brainstorming session. According to IDEO, the six main rules of a good brainstorming session are:⁵⁷

Defer Judgment. This is not the time for "we've never done it that way," or "we tried that once and..." or "what about taxes?" or "the neighbors aren't going to like that," or whatever fears and concerns exist in the group. There will be time to air those out and deal with them, *but now is not that time.*

Encourage Wild Ideas. Sometimes, the craziest-sounding ideas turn out to be the very solution that no one has ever thought of before. If the solution were obvious, someone likely would have thought of it already. Of course, most of the wild ideas will end up being discarded, but that's okay. Maybe one will be just the answer that is needed. Or, if not that, perhaps one of the crazy ideas will be the key to unlocking someone else's thinking of a more realistic, but still brand new, solution.

⁵⁶ Curedale, 445.

⁵⁷ "7 Simple Rules of Brainstorming," IDEO U, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://www.ideo.com/blogs/inspiration/7-simple-rules-of-brainstorming>.

Build on the Ideas of Others. It is against the rules to criticize an idea. It is very much NOT against the rules to add to one! When someone hears a great idea that makes them think of another idea, share it, even if it seems like stealing. No one gets credit for anything in the design thinking process. It is about the process and the team, not individual contributions – remember, the goal is to answer the question, "how might we." The improvisation maxim of "yes, and" is a good rule to follow here.⁵⁸

Stay Focused on the Topic. Deferring judgment and encouraging wild ideas may sound like anything goes, but that's not quite right. The group needs to stay on task. A little bit of divergence is good; it can lead to new creativity. When the conversation about worship becomes a story about the last concert I attended, that might foster some creative ideas. When it becomes a treatise on why Van Halen was way better before Sammy Hagar took over, that's probably a little too far afield to be useful. Skillful facilitators will need to trust their instincts on when and how far to allow the conversation to stray and when to bring it back.

One Conversation at a Time. There's energy in the room, and lots of creative ideas are flowing; that's great! And some side conversations and pockets of inspiration are bound to happen. Let them, but only for a short time. The goal is to keep everyone involved, focused on the same task, listening to and riffing off of everyone else's ideas. It's another tricky but important balance to maintain.

⁵⁸ "How to Say 'Yes, And,'" The Second City, accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.secondcity.com/how-to-say-yes-and/>.

Be Visual. Words are good, but pictures, images, magazine cut-outs, or props are even better. And even when words are used, it is ideal to put those words up on a board where people can see them. Use sticky notes, so the ideas can be moved around – this will become more important in the convergence phase. There are also powerful web tools that can help with this as well.

When working on the problem of church leadership that I mentioned above, I gathered a group of three church members, and we brainstormed answers to the following HMW: "How might we find a more dynamic model of leadership for the congregation that encourages participation, unleashes creativity, and builds enthusiasm for the ministries of the church?" I explained the rules of brainstorming. We used Stormboard and Zoom because we could not get together in person. We had a lot of fun. The three of us filled our Stormboard with over two dozen ideas in under thirty minutes. It wasn't the hundreds or thousands that designers shoot for, but for a small group, with limited time and a subject I wasn't sure people would be able to think outside of the box on, I was delighted.

When I think about why that particular brainstorming worked, I think it was in part because of the members of the group. We were diverse in life experience and experience with the church, creative thinkers who cared about the topic but weren't wedded to how things were. Part of it was because of the rules I laid out at the beginning, including explaining that we didn't have to figure out how to do any of these things; we were just brainstorming. In fact, I might add a rule for brainstorming in a church setting – just because you have an idea doesn't mean you are volunteering to make it happen! Lastly, I think we were successful because we had a strong HMW. I think putting the question in the HMW format worked how it was supposed to, but also that the wording of our particular HMW was broad enough to generate several solutions but also narrow enough to let us know where to start.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ IDEO.org, *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*, 85.

The second phase of the ideation stage is narrowing down all the ideas that were created to a more workable number. This is the convergence step in the two-step dance of idea generation laid out above. There are several ways to do the convergence process, but the simplest and most effective is "bundling."⁶⁰ Bundling puts ideas into groups and looks for patterns. For example, a group can look for different ideas that attempt to solve the same problem, different ideas that all happen at the same point in the problem evolution, different ideas that call on similar skills or people, etc. While bundling and grouping, it is important to look for parallels and similarities. What do the best ideas have in common? What do the groups of ideas have in common? What holds them all together?

If there are outliers, see if the group is okay with setting those aside for now. If they are not, then find out why – maybe it is not an outlier after all, or maybe it is, but it is such a good idea that it is worth holding onto, even on its own. As we worked through this process of bundling with the leadership brainstorming results, we found that the ideas fell into three roughly equal categories. There were ideas that had to do with restructuring the current leadership format, ideas that had to do with training and recruiting new leaders, and the outliers.

We then moved on to another classic winnowing strategy, value voting. The way value voting works is that each member of the group gets a certain number of votes, usually under five. The classic, in-person way of doing this is with colorful dot stickers. Everyone has their color, or they have written their initials on the dots. They can then vote on the idea they are most excited about, allowing them to vote for multiple ideas or to put more emphasis on one or two ideas that they are really excited about by putting multiple votes on that idea.

A warning: Do not start with value voting in the absence of other grouping strategies. Doing that just leads to a popularity contest without much insight and people voting for their own ideas. In the

⁶⁰ IDEO.org, 97.

conversations around grouping and themes, people gain an understanding of the ideas and begin to lose ownership of their own ideas as the ideas shift, morph, and combine. In fact, in my church leadership example, due to time and lack of experience, I moved us too quickly from grouping to value voting. If I were to do it over again, I would force us to winnow down and combine more and for longer before we ever got to value voting.

The instinct will be to winnow down to one nest of ideas that suggest just one solution that the group is going to move forward with. But this is to be resisted. Whenever possible, it is best to go forward with multiple options. By doing this, a group can avoid getting married to any one option. When a group becomes too wedded to a single idea, it will tend to stop hearing the critical feedback it needs to make the idea work. People see that the group is on its way toward a single solution, and they don't want to be too critical. Many initiatives fail because they never really should have begun in the first place – they just didn't hear all the warning signs along the way. Pursuing multiple options might sound like a more costly way to go, but if it allows a group to stop a bad idea sooner, then it is well worth the effort.

Prototype

Another two-step process is the prototype/iterate cycle. Though the shape of design thinking is hard to pin down, as we will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, often the process will circle back on to itself. The prototype step is very clearly a cycle. Step one is to create a prototype of the idea, play with it, test it, put it into people's hands, and get feedback. Step two is to iterate (make small changes) prototype again, test it out again, and make small changes again. This pattern repeats over and over again until the group feels confident that they have something viable.

Prototyping is probably the most difficult and foreign concept for the church to embrace. For one thing, things of the church are difficult to prototype. It is more difficult – though not impossible, and we will talk about that – to prototype an experience than it is to prototype a new toaster or phone app. But also, prototyping is not how established, historic institutions like the church tend to do things.

For example, just the other day, I was having a conversation with a professor in a major university (an institution similar in many ways to the American church – and similarly in need of design thinking to find a way forward in a challenging landscape) about prototyping. The professor mentioned that they did something similar in their work when they piloted a new class. I nodded my head and agreed. But in reality, no, a full pilot of a new university class is not what design thinkers have in mind when they say prototype; it is what they have in mind when they say test – which is still two steps away!

So, what is a prototype? It is a hands-on replica, a minimum viable product, a story told in comic cells on a blackboard, a room set up with foam core and masking tape, a customer experience experienced as a skit played out in a board room, to name a few examples. Prototypes are "playgrounds, not dress rehearsals."⁶¹ A prototype is any way to take the ideas that are on paper and in our heads and put them into the real world *without much investment*. Again, the more investment made in a solution, the more difficult it will be to change the idea or give it up altogether.

The genius of design thinking is to learn as much as possible, as fast as possible, with as little commitment and investment as possible. Not because we are cheap or lazy, but because the more ideas we can make the most real, with the least amount of investment, the more we will learn and the more chances we have to create something exceptional. Saso Kunitake, in his book *The Non-Designer's Guide to Design Thinking*, puts it this way, "Create prototypes quickly, and criticize constructively. This is the

⁶¹ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, 283.

process that actually creates the most added value. It should be a central philosophy of the design process, and in some projects you might want to start making prototypes from the very start.”⁶²

So how might one create a prototype in the world of the church? As I said, it is more difficult to prototype an experience than a product, but it is not impossible. "While it is easy to prototype a new toothbrush, prototyping in the social sector usually means designing experiences, which requires not physical objects but storyboards, user scenarios, experience journeys, animations, and concept illustrations. Prototyping elicits more accurate feedback by creating a more vivid experience of any new future.”⁶³

One popular prototyping method for experiences is the "customer journey." Listen to how the customer journey is described by Tim Brown, one of the fathers of design thinking:

This structure charts the stages through which an imagined customer passes from the beginning of a service experience to the end. The starting point may be imaginary, or it may come directly from observations of people purchasing an airline ticket or deciding whether or not to install solar panels on a roof. In either case, the value of describing a customer journey is that it clarifies where the customer and the service or brand interact. Every one of these "touchpoints" points to an opportunity to provide value to a firm's intended customers—or to derail them for good.⁶⁴

Let's think again about the earlier question regarding the decision-making process for the average churchgoer regarding whether they will go to church that week. After conducting interviews, doing observations, gaining insights, and coming up with HMW, a church group could put together a "customer journey" of different prototypical people in their congregation as they live, week after week, through their decision-making process. They could imagine the "journey" of a family of four, for whom the decision-making process probably starts in the middle of the week and is filled with obstacles until

⁶² Saso Kunitake, Hiroshi Ishii, and Akie Iriyama, *The Non-Designer's Guide to Design Thinking: What a Marketer Learned in Design School* (biotope publishing, 2017), 144.

⁶³ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, 283.

⁶⁴ Brown, *Change by Design, Revised and Updated*, 100.

Sunday morning. Or the 80-year-old church matron, for whom the assumption is that she will come to church every week, but her health and mobility bring new challenges all the time. Or the single 20-something whose decision to come includes how hard they worked all week or partied Saturday night and how many of life's chores they still needed to accomplish.

At each point along the journey, a church might find ways to touch these different people, encourage them, help them, or simply remind them about worship on Sunday morning. This shows how doing a journey map could be a much more effective way of thinking through a new ministry initiative than just going for it. And a journey map costs nothing!

Like all things in design thinking, the purpose of prototyping is to learn, to gain insight. Prototypes put flesh on an idea that has lived only in heads up to now. This putting flesh on the idea helps the group start to see what works and what doesn't. And then, they can iterate, repeat, make small changes, and try again and again, constantly improving and learning.

This time of iteration and prototyping is an excellent time to welcome others into the process. Invite potential users, invite stakeholders, invite the people who hold the purse strings, invite the skeptics, *and ask them for their input.*

In the most successful innovation projects, designers prototype early and often, leaving "emptiness"—room for others to contribute—in their early iterations. A prototype that leaves room for input invites stakeholders to complete it and helps them become invested in the idea. Prototypes that appear perfect may encourage users to say what they think we want to hear, and the last thing we want to encourage is the false positive as we sort out the nonstarters from the good ideas (remember the venture capitalists and the critical importance of figuring out which eight projects to *stop* investing in). It is the *false positives* that raise the costs—and risks—of innovation (emphasis mine).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, 284.

As I write this section, I sit in a little ice cream shop on Capitol Hill in Seattle, Washington. Across the street from me, they are actively building a skate park in a city-run park, and the most remarkable thing is happening. The builders are a motley group of engineers, carpenters, and skaters working to build the park together! After they build each new section, the skaters grab their boards and give it a test run. Then they talk about it, make adjustments, and continue building. This is the prototype/iteration cycle being played out in real time right in front of me, and it is awesome to watch!

Before we get to the final step (testing), I want to describe an example of a non-iterative process that I experienced. I was recently at a conference and was asked to come and test a great new web service that was about to be brought to market. It was clear from the representative that this thing was pretty much fully baked and what I was going to see was very close to what was going to be launched. This program had many different features, only one of which I thought would actually be useful. I gave that feedback but did not go into – and was not asked for – further detail. It was a group experience, and I think many of us shared concerns about the product's viability, but because the process was so far down the track, we were guarded in our response. No one wants to be the person that tells someone that their baby is ugly.

This was not a prototype; this was not something they were going to iterate from; they were not listening for feedback with empathy; they were not trying to learn more about me or my needs; this was a test. Doing a test (or a pilot to harken back to the conversation with my professor friend) is a good idea. But *not in place* of all the other tools. Doing a test will not tell us everything we want to learn from the design thinking process. It works much more effectively if it is done at the end of the process after completing all the other steps. That may be precisely what happened in this case. However, due to the product's lack of resonance with the people in the room and its almost immediate failure on launch, I have a feeling that it did not follow the other steps. We can do better.

Test

Testing is the final step. It is the pilot program, the dress rehearsal, the "preview service." It's the last thing you do before you go live. Testing is like prototyping and could be considered part of the same process. But in testing, we are creating a more polished prototype and testing it with our future end users. It is near the last thing we will do.

Though you've been getting feedback from the people you're designing for all along, a Live Prototype is one of the most powerful ways to test your solution in the marketplace. Until now, your prototypes have been rough, and they've done only enough to convey the idea you wanted to test. A Live Prototype, however, gives you a chance to stress test your solution in real world conditions. It can run from a few days to a few weeks, and is a chance to learn how your solution works in practice. Live Prototypes are all about understanding the feasibility and viability of your idea.⁶⁶

But we will *still* tweak, make changes and iterate after the test! If not, there is no point in doing one.

Iteration is the name of the game in human-centered design, and though your solution is now nearly ready to get out into the world, you need to Keep Iterating. Can you tweak your communication strategy, maybe you'll need to evolve your revenue plan, or perhaps your distribution plan needs a rethink? As soon as you get your solution out into the world, start to notice what could be better and assess how you can make it so. By continuing to iterate, soliciting feedback, and building those learnings back into your solution, you'll get further toward having a huge impact.⁶⁷

Now, finally, it's time to launch! A church group using the design thinking process has begun by being empathetic, so it knows what its end users need and want (even maybe in ways the end users themselves do not yet know). The group has turned that empathy into insights and those insights into problems to solve (HMW statements). They have brainstormed broadly, so they know that if they could come up with a solution, they've considered it. They have narrowed it down to the best few options.

⁶⁶ IDEO.org, *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*, 135.

⁶⁷ IDEO.org, 148.

They have prototyped, tested and iterated, and tested again. And now they are ready to launch. But they are *still* not done.

They still want feedback. They still want to learn. They still want to tweak. And they still want to see what new problems emerge. What new challenges might they want to address next? And so, they start the whole process over again. Design thinking is a never-ending way of living in the world. If it sounds daunting, it can be, but it is also a thrilling ride to be on.

Conclusion: what is the shape of design thinking?

Many people have tried to give a shape to design thinking. I have seen it imaged as a line,⁶⁸ staircase, steppingstones,⁶⁹ a circle,⁷⁰ or an infinity sign.⁷¹ These final two images are the most common and imply the same thing, that the process is supposed to be repeated. The most promising shape I have heard comes from Chris Aho, author of the 2021 dissertation for Duke Divinity School on design thinking and the church entitled *Faith by Design*.⁷² In a personal conversation with me, Chris described it as a spiral focusing ever closer to a solution. All these images offer something constructive to the understanding of design thinking. To my mind, none of the images entirely live up to reality, and all for the same reason. They are trying to force a shape upon something that does not have one, at least not in a church setting. I experience design thinking in more like tools in a toolbox or paints on a palette. For most of us, very rarely will we see a project from beginning to end following every step of the process.

⁶⁸ "What Is Design Thinking?," The Interaction Design Foundation, accessed February 3, 2022,

<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/design-thinking>.

⁶⁹ "Design Thinking Studio in Social Innovation," accessed July 27, 2022, <https://blogs.elon.edu/innovationstudio/>.

⁷⁰ World Leaders in Research-Based User Experience, "Design Thinking 101," Nielsen Norman Group, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/design-thinking/>.

⁷¹ "The Design Thinking Process - How Does It Work? - MAQE - Insights," MAQE (blog), accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.maqe.com/insight/the-design-thinking-process-how-does-it-work/>.

⁷² Aho, "Faith by Design: Exploiting Intersections between Acts and Design Thinking to Cultivate the Conditions for Innovation in the Local Church as an Expression of Traditioned Innovation."

And even if we could do so, it would surely never go in a straight line. We might begin with interviews, define the problem, realize we don't have enough information and go back to interviews. Or we might have what we think is a genuinely great idea and want to start prototyping right away, and not until we run into some unforeseen problems will we feel the need to do interviews. Or we might just need to get people to start thinking creatively and want to start with ideation and divergent thinking.

The master artisan will know which tool to pull out of the toolbox at what time and understand that every project or problem will run its own unique course. Trying to force a linear structure (circles and infinity signs are still linear when experienced in time) onto an organic process, *especially* in the church, seems to me to be a futile exercise.

In the end, design thinking contains eight steps, or tools, or really sets of tools, since each step has a collection of different tools within it. They go like this:

1. Empathize: interview/observe/listen.
2. Turn observations into insights.
3. Turn insights into "How Might We" statements.
4. Divergent thinking: Brainstorm.
5. Convergent thinking: Combine/Select.
6. Prototype.
7. Iterate.
8. Test.

Each of these steps is important. Each of these steps is critical for the design thinker to know and understand and experiment with. Each of these steps is an important color of paint for the design thinker to have readily available on their pallet. And every step taken, in whatever order, will give insight and learning to the design thinker, the design team, and whoever else is involved with the process.

Everything the church can do to increase its ability to learn about the world outside its doors is a net positive. Every challenge, project, or initiative will stubbornly insist on going down its own path, especially in the church. And the skillful design thinker within the church setting will have to learn how

to use each of these tools whenever they can best be brought to bear on a given project or problem. But the design thinking leader should use them freely, opportunistically, with creativity and intuition. In fact, the goal should be that these tools become not a program or process but a way of thinking and being that informs everything we do.

And we *can* do this. We don't have to get it perfect. We don't have to hire it out. We simply have to be willing to try to learn some new skills. Start with whatever part of the process makes the most sense to you. Try it out, learn from it, and see if it works in your setting. Then keep trying, experimenting, iterating, and looking for opportunities to apply these new tools to new problems.

In fact, just adding words like experiment, iterate, minimum viable product, and brainstorm into your daily language when working on church problems will start to affect people around you and the work you do together. So, start small, but for the love of God, start. The church is gasping for breath and needs the new air that design thinking is designed to bring.

Part Four – Contextual Analysis

Introduction

This section will introduce and provide information about the congregations involved in this study. Underwood Memorial Baptist Church, where I serve as pastor, will remain named. The other congregations' names and identifying details have been removed.

Underwood Memorial Baptist Church

The immediate context for this research will be Underwood Memorial Baptist Church. Underwood is a 175-year-old American Baptist congregation in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, just outside Milwaukee. Underwood has experienced a steep decline in attendance and giving over the past several decades and now regularly worships with round 25 adults. I am the solo pastor of Underwood and have been in the role since 2019. Underwood's remaining staff is made up of an administrator/bookkeeper who works under ten hours per week, church musicians paid on a per Sunday basis, and a custodian who volunteers their time. None of these positions are paid market value, yet the church runs a yearly deficit covered by the interest earned from past gifts.

A team of lay leaders called the Ministry Council is the formal leadership of the church. The Ministry Council comprises eight to ten adult volunteers, each with several years of experience in the church. Many Ministry Council members have been in their positions for more than ten years, not because they have wanted to be but because no one else in the congregation has been willing to step into the roles. The Ministry Council meets once per month in the evening for about ninety minutes. In most meetings, two or more people are absent.

Running parallel to the Ministry Council is the Oikos team. I assembled the Oikos team through personal invitations and an open invitation to the congregation for volunteers. It consists of four church members with varied histories in the church and me. The Oikos team is tasked with thinking about the future of Underwood, focusing on using the building and property in new ways to bless the community and support the congregation financially. The Oikos team is working through the Oikos Accelerator⁷³ process run by the church consulting company, Rooted Good⁷⁴.

As an American Baptist congregation, Underwood is affiliated with American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin and American Baptist Churches, USA. Underwood supports these entities and others financially, but at a relatively small amount. Underwood is relationally tied to these two entities, but those relationships are primarily maintained through pastoral leadership and one specific, older couple. Most of the congregation is not overly concerned about the church's connection to the denomination.

Underwood provides kitchen space to a small business. It also partners with a local homeless ministry to provide a meal four times per year. Underwood's connections with the surrounding community are limited outside of those two activities. This has been true for years due to declining membership but was made more the case during the Covid pandemic of 2020 & 2021.

The congregation's demographics are like many Euro-American mainline Protestant congregations in the United States. Underwood is primarily white/European, predominantly older, and largely middle class. However, many of Underwood's senior members have passed away recently or become homebound. Consequently, the median age of active members has decreased, and the representation of younger members and families with children has increased – even as their numbers overall have decreased.

⁷³ "The Oikos Accelerator | Make Good With RootedGood."

⁷⁴ "Tools, Training, & Experiences for Good."

Underwood is located in the heart of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a well-developed suburb of Milwaukee. Like many other suburbs of major cities, Wauwatosa is made up of single-family homes that have been around for decades. There are some developed multi-story housing units in parts of Wauwatosa, and more are being built all the time. Tosa (as the locals call it) has a well-developed downtown with shops and restaurants.

Like many other suburbs of major cities in the US, Wauwatosa has a deep history of racism. Tosa was designed primarily by and for white folks moving out of the city, and decisions were made intentionally in the past to keep Tosa almost uniformly white and upper middle class. This legacy lives on in some significant policies and attitudes in the city. The Oikos team at Underwood has identified this as an area worth addressing in the church's future work with the community.

Wauwatosa is an extremely well-churched area, saturated even. There is a large Methodist church, two Lutheran churches, a major Catholic church with an active school, a Lithuanian church, and a Greek Orthodox church, all within a 2-mile radius. However, I have seen no evidence of these churches working together on anything or even being in community with one another. This, too, was negatively affected by the pandemic.

Underwood began in 1845. Even for churches, that is a long history. Underwood began when it separated from another church over the issue of slavery and was an active part of the underground railroad. This history has left a mark on the culture of the church. Underwood was an early adopter of welcoming the queer community in the church, one of the first in the area, and its previous pastor was a young lesbian.

Underwood is a predominantly volunteer-run organization used to working without pastoral leadership. They have chosen to go several months without pastoral leadership on multiple occasions. This reliance on volunteerism is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, people are highly

involved and do not overly rely on paid staff to do everything. On the other hand, they are largely burnt out and stuck in their ways, with very little energy or openness to thinking of new solutions to old, long-standing problems. This is especially true in the current leadership. It's ironic, on Sunday mornings there is a "you can't screw up church" mentality, but in leadership, that spirit is replaced with a "we've never done it that way before" energy.

Financially, Underwood is, as a congregation, resource-rich, and cash-flow-poor. The church has nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in various endowments and investments, yet it runs a budget deficit of around \$50,000 annually. The church is sitting on a piece of property worth at least one million dollars and a building valued at over 3 million, yet it sits largely empty ninety percent of the time.

There is awareness in the congregation that the status quo is not sustainable but what that means for the future is very hard to say. There is some energy around utilizing the building in new and creative ways to reach the community and gain revenue. There is some openness to ideas of a complete redevelopment of the building, turning it into something completely new. And even some conversations about selling the property and relocating somewhere cheaper have begun to be heard. This makes Underwood a unique congregation to lead at this moment because the future is wide open, and it makes for fertile soil for a study such as this.

Other Churches in the Study

First Church

First Church is an established Presbyterian Church in a medium-sized commuter city near Madison, Wisconsin. Though First Church was established in 1845, it moved into its current building in

the suburbs in 2011. First Church worships with around 35 people in a sanctuary that can hold two hundred, and the newly constructed building sits on ten acres of grassy, undeveloped land.

First Church has an annual budget around \$100,000, of which 30-40% is spent on the building and property, including a mortgage. They currently make around \$10,000 renting out space to an area music school. They have no other outside sources of income and no other significant partnerships with the community. Financial concerns are a dominant part of the life of the congregation and a big part of why they joined the Oikos Accelerator project.

What makes First Church's experience unique in this study is that they have been going through a pastoral search while also going through the Oikos Accelerator program. Their pastor left near the beginning of the process, and they ran a pastoral search during this study which ultimately failed. They have recently restarted the search process. Also unique to First Church, the Oikos process in the church has been lay-led instead of clergy lead. First church essentially paused its work in the Oikos process due to anxiety surrounding the pastor search. The role of anxiety in this process is a theme we will return to.

Second Church

Second Church is an established Lutheran church in a suburb of Madison, Wisconsin. It worships with around 85 people per Sunday and has an operating budget of around \$400,000 annually. Second Church's building and property are large and in relatively good shape. The sanctuary can hold about 350 people for worship, and there are other large gathering spaces in the church. The church has several classrooms and offices and sits on multiple acres of land, much of which lies unused.

Second Church is in a season of deep financial anxiety. They owe money on their building due to a million-dollar renovation to add gathering spaces undertaken in the late 2000s and spend nearly half

of their annual income on building expenses. The building is well used by the community with several groups coming in to use the space for meetings and other activities, as well as an active food pantry that is a large part of the congregation's identity. At the beginning of the Oikos process, none of these partners contributed financially to the congregation in significant amounts.

Second Church is located in a growing suburb of Madison, with development going up all around them. Their property is the largest green space for several blocks, and there are housing units all around the church. Even so, the congregation is, like most churches across the country, facing a decline in worship attendance, financial resources, and volunteers as their members age.

Not unlike First Church, Second Church also paused their work part way through the Oikos process. For Second Church, it was due to a spike in anxiety over the financial future of the congregation. During the interview process, the leader shared that this all came to a head during the team working through the Spent⁷⁵ tool in the Oikos Accelerator curriculum. The Spent tool is an online game that engages a group of people in imagining what life is like for someone living paycheck to paycheck. The goal is to increase awareness and sensitivity among the team members to what it is like to live without financial margin and potentially inspire the team to think of ways the church can help. It did not have the desired effect at Second Church.

The pastor, and leader of the Oikos process at Second Church, was conscientious of including members of the church's leadership in all of the activities of the Oikos team, a worthwhile approach that had provided some good conversations in the past but backfired in this case. The financial secretary of the congregation was invited to join the Oikos team in undertaking the Spent activity, and his response was not positive: "Why are we wasting time thinking about what it is like to be poor when we can't pay our own bills!" This anxiety spread through the team like wildfire. Before the pastor could put out the

⁷⁵ "SPENT," accessed November 21, 2022, <https://playspent.org/flash/Share.php>.

fire, the Oikos process was put on hold as the congregation's leadership crafted a strategic plan for facing the short-term financial crises. What is most unfortunate about this situation is that providing medium to long-term solutions to economic struggles in a congregation is precisely what the Oikos Accelerator is designed to do. And yet, as often happens in times of high anxiety, the longer-term planning and problem-solving was jettisoned in the pursuit of quicker, easier solutions.

Third Church

Third Church is a historic Lutheran church with a long history in a mixed-use neighborhood not far from the center of Madison, Wisconsin. Third church is *big*. Whereas the sanctuary is not the largest of the churches in our study, seating around 300 people, the building is by far the largest, with multiple large fellowship halls, two dozen classrooms of various sizes, and two parking lots with more than 100 parking spots a piece. All in a part of the city where space, parking, and real estate are at an extreme premium.

Third church is very similar to the other churches in our study in that it has seen its worship attendance, financial resources, and volunteer involvement all decrease steadily over the past several decades. It currently worships with around 30 people and has an annual budget of about \$300,000, roughly a quarter of which is spent on building maintenance. Third church balances its budget annually using funds from its endowments.

Third church is unique among the churches in our study in that it came into the Oikos process already in partnerships with several renters. However, these agreements were entered into without careful consideration of missional alignment or reasonable compensation for the congregation. Third Church is also unique in that the surrounding community was coming to them, looking to use their building and property in various ways.

Because of these factors, Third Church entered the Oikos process not to *generate* partnerships but to help them carefully think through how best to *enter* them. Over the course of the process, Third Church has begun a partnership with another congregation to meet in their building, has entered into a lease agreement with a local music hall to use their parking lots, and has begun to renegotiate their current rental contracts. This work has already increased their income by 25k per year, with the potential of doing much more.

Fourth Church

Fourth Church is unique in that it is a collaboration of two historic congregations, one Lutheran and one Moravian. The Lutheran and Moravian churches had already come together when they started the Oikos project. Combined, Fourth Church worships with around 60 people, enough to make their current home sanctuary feel, not full, but not empty either. Fourth Church lost members from both of the historic congregations in the merger but has already gained new members to replace close to what they lost.

Fourth Church's total budget is about \$300,000 annually, which supports one building and two full-time clergy. This is subsidized through grant money and the sale of one of the historic congregations' buildings.

The leaders of Fourth Church entered the Oikos process with a vision for doing something for the community with the building and property they now shared. Through the process, they gained clarity on that vision and worked with the members from both historic congregations to reach a consensus on the project. By the end of their time in the study, they had held a congregational vote approving, with only one no vote, the redevelopment of their current building and property. The details of the redevelopment are still being fleshed out. The goal is to create a community center for the local

neighborhood, including gathering space, affordable housing, offices for area nonprofits, and worship space for the joined congregation.

Conclusion

These five congregations provided this study with a diverse set of experiences to draw from. Even though the churches share many aspects in common: demographics, financial situation, and reason for being in the Oikos Accelerator program, they are all in various places in the process. First, Second, and Underwood churches were just beginning their exploration when the study started. Fourth Church was through most of the process and was already making significant changes, and Third Church was somewhere in the middle.

This diversity of situations allows us to explore the different places on the journey of change (see below). It also allows us to see examples of the various risks and opportunities inherent in different phases of the process. Each congregation has its own unique story and experience, and each leader has provided this study with diverse insight drawn from their experience.

Part Five – Research Design and Procedures

Introduction

In this chapter, I will walk through the process undertaken in this study. Extra materials will be included at the end of the paper. I will begin by describing the Oikos Accelerator that each of the churches in the study went through. I will then describe the process I undertook to research the churches and outline some initial findings before looking more in-depth at some important themes and learnings in the following chapter.

The Oikos Accelerator

The Oikos Accelerator is a curated online learning process created for churches by the church consulting organization Rooted Good.⁷⁶ On the Rooted Good website, the Oikos Accelerator is described as “a catalyst that empowers congregations to align money and mission by exploring how to creatively use their church buildings and property to further their mission and build financial resilience.”⁷⁷ Each church going through the Oikos Accelerator assembles a team of leaders in the congregation to go through the material together. These teams varied in size from three to five. Four out of the five teams were led by clergy, with one team led by a lay person.

The Oikos Accelerator is organized around ten learning modules, each with multiple lessons to be undertaken individually as well as exercises to be explored together as a team. Some activities are designed to be done with the church as a whole. Much of the learning is experiential, utilizing activities,

⁷⁶ “Tools, Training, & Experiences for Good.”

⁷⁷ “The Oikos Accelerator | Make Good With RootedGood.”

exercises, and games. Examples include an opportunity to put oneself in the shoes of someone living on minimum wage, a scavenger hunt of sorts around the church's neighborhood, and a board game designed to teach the principles of design thinking to a large group of people.

The Oikos accelerator process culminated in a trip to San Antonio, Texas. All five participating churches sent at least one participant to San Antonio (most sent three). In San Antonio, Rooted Good coordinated a three-day conference – although the word “conference” gives the wrong impression. Also gathered in San Antonio were representatives from about a dozen other churches from across the country who were all actively participating in the Oikos Accelerator process.

For three days, we toured, met with, heard from, and interviewed churches and ministries in the San Antonio area doing new and innovative things with their buildings and property. These churches all found different ways to use their building and property to bless their communities and strengthen their financial outlook. A few examples were a root beer float truck that taught young people entrepreneurship skills, a church chapel that used its weddings as an opportunity to provide skill training and small business incubation to young women, and a sustainable farm that provided catering and classes in sustainable cooking.

The San Antonio trip was, far and away, the most impactful part of the Oikos Accelerator for every church in the study. It even impacted people who could not go on the trip by hearing the stories about it. We will explore in more detail its effectiveness in the next chapter.

The Questions and Process

For this study, I interviewed the leaders of all five churches mentioned above. In addition, I interviewed the members of the Oikos Accelerator team at Underwood. I also had an outside colleague

do a simple interview with three members of Underwood that were not on the Oikos team. All of these interviews were performed twice, six months apart, first in April of 2022 and then again in October of that same year. The questions mainly remained the same for both interviews. Interview questions are included at the end of this paper.

I analyzed the data by looking at how interviewees' answers changed from April to October. I was interested in how those six months of working through the Oikos Accelerator program affected the churches. I then took the changes in the answers between April and October, removed identifying details, and looked for patterns.

Through this process, some patterns emerged that speak to the challenges inherent in taking a church through this kind of change. In addition, through the interviews, we can see some possible strengths and weaknesses of using design thinking in a church context, specifically for the challenge of rethinking a church's use of its building and property. And lastly, we can get a sense of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Oikos Accelerator program, in particular.

Some themes and patterns

The following themes and patterns emerged in my research. In the next chapter, I will explore the themes most relevant to this study.

San Antonio

As stated above, the trip to San Antonio came up several times as the most impactful part of the program. We will explore the elements that made this part of the process so effective in the next chapter.

Anxiety

Going through the Oikos Accelerator process both unearthed some anxiety already present in the churches and, at times, generated new anxieties. Surprisingly, it tended to increase the anxiety level of the congregation and the leader the further they got into the process. Two churches paused the program due to increased anxiety, as described above. We will look more in-depth at the role of anxiety in change as we explore the emotional journey of change in the next chapter.

Building and property as asset and liability

This process confronted the interviewees with the ways in which the building and property are both an asset and a liability. Church members are often unaware, it turns out, about both the possibilities inherent in the space and the potential problems—this process unearthed both for the people involved.

Community focus

Many interviewees went through a shift in priorities between the two sets of interviews. They started the process primarily concerned with utilizing the building to further the life of the congregation through increased revenue and attendance. They came away from this process with a much greater focus on being a blessing to their communities. This, too, we will explore in more depth in the following chapter.

Concrete Examples

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned being helped by concrete examples. Whether it was from the examples in the learning module, from talking to one of the Rooted Good staff, from reading *We Aren't Broke: Uncovering Hidden Resources for Mission and Ministry*⁷⁸ by Mark Elsdon, or from

⁷⁸ Mark Elsdon and Craig Dykstra, *We Aren't Broke: Uncovering Hidden Resources for Mission and Ministry* (Eerdmans, 2021).

participating in the trip to San Antonio, it was hearing stories of concrete examples that was most helpful. We will explore the importance of storytelling in the next chapter.

Redevelopment

Several respondents mentioned that their mind was opened throughout the process to what was possible. Often this came in the form of redevelopment of the property. As was explored in Part 1, many of our churches were built during a different time to serve different needs due to different contexts. In some cases, the only way to correct that is to redevelop the building and property into something new. This is often some form of affordable housing, but examples include everything from a community center to an indoor playground.

A surprising learning from our work at Underwood was that the idea of redevelopment actually feels more threatening and less realistic to some than simply selling the property. Selling feels like a more immediate solution, is easier to imagine, and feels more like maintaining the status quo than repurposing the building and property to be something *new*. It turns out that the instinct to survive/maintain as a community is stronger than the attachment to a certain building and place. This took me by surprise.

More/Less optimistic

The interviewees were asked in two different ways how optimistic they were. The first invited them to answer with a number from one to ten. The second asked them to comment on whether their level of optimism had gone up or down. A surprising finding was that the answers did not line up in most cases. Several participants said they were *more* optimistic than before, but then gave a *lower* number in the second interview than they did in the first. I will explore this further in the next chapter.

Partners

A primary learning for everyone involved was that this was not a problem that any of our churches are prepared to solve on our own. And the good news is, we don't have to. Most, if not all, of the examples we came across throughout the process began with a church partnership. Churches that were looking to redevelop started by working with a developer, churches that were interested in reaching their community in a new way partnered with an area entrepreneur, and churches that were interested in providing housing partnered with the city.

Churches tend to feel that they are in this work alone, that they alone can fix this problem, and that they can only accomplish what they can accomplish through current resources and volunteer levels. For most of our churches, the options of what can be done with current resources and volunteer levels are small and getting smaller. So, the importance of working with partners to accomplish the church's goals cannot be overstated.

Low attendance/participation

Not surprisingly, a repeated concern of people in the study was decreased attendance in their churches. This concern about numbers went beyond simply the number of people in the pews on Sunday morning. There was also a longing for more people participating in the life of the church. More people to share the work. More people participating in the activities of the church. Nostalgia and a longing for a past reality were evident in these concerns. But also, a sense that with so few people, a sense of community was lost. "We don't feel like a community," one person said to me, "just a gathering of individuals." What was interesting about this pattern is that it was more visible in the lay participants than clergy.

Leader's meeting

All five churches that participated in this study are in southern Wisconsin. As a result, they had the added benefit of meeting together as leaders regularly throughout the process. This provided opportunities to share, support, and learn from one another. It came up repeatedly in interviews as one of the program's strengths. In fact, Rooted Good is bringing that learning into the program and will create regional cohorts for churches in the program going forward. This is an excellent example of the iterative process at work!

Rentals

One solution for many churches facing these problems will be opening up their church to renters, and this potential solution came up in every church in this study. In some cases, this was done haphazardly, charging far below market value and without attention to missional alignment. And in some cases, it was done rather well, with consideration of mission, appropriate compensation, as well as proper consideration of taxes and insurance liabilities.

Conclusion

The five congregations in the study were all coming into the Oikos Accelerator process in different places. They all made different levels of progress over the six months of the study. This diversity made it somewhat challenging to compare their answers to one another. However, patterns did emerge.

Furthermore, the different church's different levels of progress provided the opportunity to explore the different stages of the change journey. This was not something I planned on exploring when

I began this study, and it is not classically considered a part of the design thinking tool kit. And yet it was too evident of a pattern and too explanatory of a tool to leave out. It will be fleshed out in what follows.

Part Six – Summary & Significance

Introduction

In this chapter, we will explore in greater depth selected findings and patterns in the research highlighted above. Specifically, we will examine how the results do and do not map neatly onto the design thinking principles outlined in chapter three. As a reminder, the primary focus of design thinking is to be *human-centered*, *possibility-driven*, and *iterative*⁷⁹. We will explore how those elements do and do not show up in the research by looking at four themes that came up repeatedly in the research: a shift to community focus, storytelling, the change journey, and the trip to San Antonio.

Themes

San Antonio

Far and away, the most impactful element of the Oikos Accelerator program, according to the research, was the trip to San Antonio. The trip was mentioned by everyone who went, as well as several people who only heard about it secondhand. It will be helpful for our purposes to describe in some detail what happened in San Antonio. In this description, it will be obvious how the trip was, from start to finish, *human-centered* and *possibility-driven*.

Around 50 participants arrived on a Friday evening and met in the lobby of a hotel along the famous Riverwalk in downtown San Antonio. People came from various church contexts across the

⁷⁹ Liedtka, Salzman, and Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, 6.

country, including all the members of this study. In addition to the Oikos study participants were the Rooted Good staff, a local community organizer, two documentarians, and four content providers for the weekend. Unlike other similar events, the organizers and content providers participated in the entire weekend alongside the content consumers. This participation allowed for conversations and networking to happen throughout the weekend. At least one important partnership was initiated during a conversation between formal learning moments.

All participants were ushered onto a charter bus that would become a mobile home base for the weekend. The first location was a downtown Nazarene church. As the bus pulled up, it looked like we were showing up for a party! Tables were set with colorful tablecloths and candles lit, appetizers and drinks set up to peruse, and multicolored Papel Picado banners streamed from tree to tree.

Seating was assigned, with members from various churches at each table and at least one member of the Rooted Good team or content provider at each table. A multi-course meal was provided by an area ministry of a cooperative farm that was both a model of sustainable farming and a training center for sustainable cooking. The evening included obligatory orientation and introductory remarks. However, its primary objective was the opportunity for everyone involved to engage in conversation with people doing similar work, with similar questions and similar challenges.

Whereas the noise level on the bus trip to dinner was polite conversation, after this first event, it was a buzz of storytelling, laughing, and commiserating. That buzz of conversation on the bus remained throughout the weekend, and it wouldn't be surprising to hear that some folks had their most important insights in those conversations on the bus between formal learning moments. In fact, this

came up in the interviews, “It was just interesting to see kind of the variety of things that people are doing...both from the participants and from the places we visited in San Antonio.”⁸⁰

The next day, the first stop was a church in a situation similar to the churches in the program. It was a large church with a large piece of property surrounded by neighbors that never darkened the door of the church. That church had decided to turn over a large percentage of its property to partner organizations while continuing to serve the needs of its members in their traditional worship space. A ministry that provides summer youth education to the surrounding neighborhood has redeveloped one large piece of its property. Another smaller portion of the property was redeveloped to be the home to an area church-plant better positioned to reach the surrounding neighborhood.

The next stop was a downtown church with lunch provided by a church-founded food co-op. After lunch was a panel discussion from churches who had done this kind of work, developers who had worked with them, and someone from city planning who talked about the partnerships they had made with churches in San Antonio. Here, we heard the following amazing quote, “If we utilized all of the church property in the city, we would have more than enough space to solve housing.” This was quoted back to me multiple times in my research.

Next was a bus tour of San Antonio, where we saw churches just starting to imagine what they could do with their property and churches with vast resources of land who were not yet interested in partnering with the city. This tour ended with a piece of property donated by a church and turned into supportive housing for folks coming out of mental institutions. The day concluded with a treat from the already mentioned root beer float truck.

⁸⁰ Second interview with leader from “Third Church,” October 10, 2022, Question #5.

The final day took place at the largest church on the tour. The day began with breakfast provided by a food truck that had taken up residence in one of the church's parking lots. This partnership has grown and will eventually blossom as the church turns one of its parking lots into a public park with green space and a food truck lot. This is also the church that is turning its chapel into a training space to help single women get into the wedding industry.

We heard from the associate pastor who led these new community efforts. She talked about the effect on their community and their church that these efforts are having. New people were engaging in new ways because they saw the church as an active part of the neighborhood for the first time in a long time.

Using design thinking as a lens, it is not difficult to see why this was such an effective trip for the participants. First, it was imminently *human-centered*. Every story featured real people and their lived experiences. Participants were rarely presented with facts and figures or made to listen to theory or theology. Instead, the weekend was filled with stories about how real churches had transformed themselves and become relevant ministries in their communities. Participants heard from the actual people doing the work. They listened, saw, observed, and asked questions. They spent the weekend thinking and dreaming together, comparing notes, and wrestling over what they had experienced. The whole experience was decidedly *human*.

Second, San Antonio was all about increasing and showing *possibilities*. Repeatedly in the research, the San Antonio trip shows up as opening people's eyes to what was possible. Who would have thought of a root beer float truck that trains young people to be entrepreneurs? One interviewee put it this way,

The challenge we have always been saying is... we were looking for what other people were doing, right? And I think as we...earlier on, that was a bit of a struggle. And I think that that's

been very helpful. That was, again, what San Antonio offered was a view of that, what others are doing and, and helping that process.⁸¹

Most churches have been doing the same few activities for so long that it is hard for them to imagine doing anything else. Showing people vivid examples of what was possible was arguably the most impactful element of the Oikos Accelerator program. San Antonio was the pre-eminent example of this, but what showed up in the research was that the whole Oikos Accelerator program was at its best when it was introducing people to concrete examples of what was possible in real human lives. In other words, it was at its best when it was *human-centered* and *possibilities-driven*.

Storytelling

In addition, San Antonio was successful because the whole trip was a masterclass in *storytelling*. Storytelling was not explored in detail in chapter three, but it is an essential aspect of the design thinking process. In almost every situation where one finds themselves doing design thinking, one will need, at some point, to communicate their ideas with others. It is hard to imagine a design thinking process that does not need to get others on board with the design at some point. For most design thinking processes, getting others involved begins on day one and continues throughout. This is certainly true of any design thinking process that one might do in a church setting. It doesn't do anyone any good to do all the work of design thinking if you can't get others to buy in. Without getting others on board, the best ideas in the world will never see the light of day. And storytelling is the design thinking way to get others on board. Tim Brown explains the importance of storytelling this way,

Many notions have been proposed to explain what differentiates human beings from other species: bipedal locomotion, tool use, language, symbolic systems. Our ability to tell stories also sets us apart... Mostly we rely on stories to put our ideas into context and give them meaning. It

⁸¹ Second interview with leader from "First Church," October 11, 2022, Question #4.

should be no surprise, then, that the human capacity for storytelling plays an important role in the intrinsically human-centered approach to problem solving, design thinking.⁸²

Effective storytelling opens people's minds in a way that facts and figures never will. Every good preacher knows this!

Change is difficult in any organization. But this is especially true in the church. All change constitutes a loss of some kind. All change threatens power structures and comfortable habits. And though, from the outside, it is easy to look at most churches and see that what they are doing is not achieving their goals, on the inside, the church is working exactly as it is designed to work. A church is the way it is because the people who make it that way are comfortable with it the way it is. They will often say they want things to be different, and part of them does, but when pushed, they are often unwilling to change their actions to make change happen. Their minds must be open to new possibilities. Storytelling is the most powerful tool to make that happen.

One powerful story shared in San Antonio, which came up in my research, was a story that began with a church and a food truck. The church was beginning its journey of reaching out to its community in new ways. They met a young woman who wanted to provide a gathering space for the community by way of a food truck coffee shop and wondered if she could use the church's parking lot to park her truck. The church agreed (what percentage of churches would have balked at this idea or dithered so long that the opportunity passed them by?). This allowed members of the church and its leaders to interface with their neighbors regularly. What they learned from these relationships became the foundation of their redevelopment plans.

This story exemplifies all three of the design thinking principles. It was *possibility-driven* in that the church was open to the *possibility* of partnering with the food truck. It was *human-centered* in that

⁸² Brown, *Change by Design, Revised and Updated*, 137.

the ideas for moving forward came from honest conversations with real people who lived in the church's neighborhood. And it was *iterative* in that it started with small changes, learned from them, and then planned bigger ones. Now, we could have heard a lecture on design thinking principles. That would have been interesting and way easier. But I doubt very much that it would have affected the people in my study as much as hearing this story.

One recommendation for anyone entering the Oikos Accelerator process or any design thinking process in the church is to tell stories early and often. By the time you are ready to make a recommendation to the congregation, they should already be tired of hearing about it. Change is difficult for everyone and imagining a different future has become increasingly difficult in the church. Storytelling is the best tool to open that box.

Change Journey

The research highlighted a surprising trend. As people got further in the process, their optimism about their churches' future decreased, but they didn't recognize it. In fact, they reported feeling more optimistic, even as they gave a smaller percentage chance of success. Asked to think further about this dichotomy, they would answer something like the leader of Second Church who shared that they felt more optimistic in that they could now see possibilities that they couldn't see before but, at the same time, less optimistic because they could also see the challenges that they couldn't see before.⁸³

⁸³ Second interview with leader from "Second Church," November 22, 2022, Question #15.

If we look at the traditional emotional journey of change graph, it is not difficult to chart where the pastor of Second Church is when making those remarks.⁸⁴



It is apparent from the research that the congregational leaders entering the Oikos Accelerator process are near the *accepting* phase in the journey, at the bottom. When interviewed the first time, most were near the beginning of the process and would answer questions about why they had begun the process with phrases like, *the congregation is in decline, at a tipping point*,⁸⁵ but also, *Oikos gives us a process to explore the possibilities*.⁸⁶ You can see how these answers fit at the bottom of the curve toward acceptance but are already working their way up to exploration.

⁸⁴ Adrian Copley, "The Emotional Journey of Change," accessed November 22, 2022, <https://www.thecsce.com/resources/insights/articles/emotional-journey-of-change>.

⁸⁵ First interview with leader from "Second Church," April 25, 2022, Question #3.

⁸⁶ First interview with leader from "Third Church," April 11, 2022, Question #3.

When I interviewed the church leaders again six months later, their answers changed. I heard how the process, “Really opened me up the possibility...also made me realize how much work it would be.”⁸⁷ This shows their progress up the graph's right-hand side as they entered the *seeing possibilities* phase.

The places in the journey with the greatest anxiety and most significant risk are on the way down and on the way up. A certain peace exists in the current stability that disappears violently on the way down. A certain amount of peace returns at the acceptance phase, where many of the first interviews happened, and leaders answered with things like, “I release, and I let go.”⁸⁸ And then the anxiety increases again on the way up, and people answered with things like,

Roadblocks, any roadblocks scares me. The word, the word “no” scares me... Like I can hear actually somebody just say no, they don't want a cigarette and be like, they just said, we can't put this up on the property.⁸⁹

Though the anxiety on the way up tends to be at least as high as the anxiety on the way down, it has more hope in it, and more energy.

There is a warning implicit in all of this: people are at different places on this journey. The interviews showed that church leaders were often one to two steps ahead of their Oikos teams and three to four steps ahead of their congregations. This was most visible in the interviews with Underwood members who were not on the Oikos team. When asked how optimistic they were about the future of the church, one answered as low as three during the first interview,⁹⁰ which increased only to a six by the second interview.⁹¹ Each of the members of Underwood interviewed for this study were focused on seeing more people in the pews, showing that their imagination was still limited by trying to

⁸⁷ Interview with Underwood Leader 3, April 30, 2022, Question #3.

⁸⁸ First interview with leader from “Second Church.” Question #15.

⁸⁹ Second interview with the leaders from “Fourth Church,” April 21, 2022, Question #17.

⁹⁰ First interview with Underwood member 1, April 2022, Question #1.

⁹¹ Second interview with Underwood member 1, October 2022, Question #1.

fix what we were currently doing – a sort of denial of the reality that was before them. We can surmise that we would find similar results if we surveyed members of the other Oikos churches who were not on their Oikos teams.

As was explored in chapter four, two of the church's Oikos Accelerator processes stalled out during the study due to this dichotomy. The anxiety of the congregation members who were just starting their journey down the slope overpowered the expectations and hope of the leaders who were on the way up. Consequently, the process of *seeing possibilities* and *positive future planning* was interrupted.

This points to a warning to anyone doing this work in the church and a potential place for improvement in the Oikos Accelerator process. More attention could be paid to bringing the church along on the journey. Or, if not along for the journey, more tools could be provided for what comes next, the storytelling that needs to be done with the congregation to get them where the leader and the team already are. It does little good to have a team of three to five church members excited to make changes if they cannot effectively communicate their ideas with the rest of the congregation.

Shift to a focus on community

Almost every layperson interviewed who was part of the Oikos process talked about going through a mental shift. They entered the process with hopes, as one participant from Underwood put it in their first interview, to “make our church more sustainable and hopefully more financially viable.”⁹² And by the end of the process, their motivations had changed rather dramatically. Six months later, that same lay leader answered the same question like this, “I think the goal has expanded in terms of

⁹² First interview with Underwood leader 3, April 30, 2022, Question #1.

understanding that it can and should be more than that... that we can accomplish some other things...in terms of community impact.”⁹³ Another lay leader explained the change this way, “This idea around how we use our space with the lens towards revenue and mission... and really being mission focused.”⁹⁴

It is not a big surprise that this shift showed up when interviewing lay leadership in a way that it didn’t when interviewing pastoral leaders. Every pastoral leader in this study went through seminary or something equivalent. A major focus of most seminary educations is talking about why the church exists and that it does not exist solely for itself. The church exists to be on mission to the world, specifically to its local community. Different seminaries will explain that mission differently, but it is hard to imagine going through any seminary process and thinking that the church exists primarily for itself.

Your average church member has had no such experience. In fact, almost everything a church does is designed around meeting the needs of its members. Sunday school teaches the children of the members, worship meets the spiritual needs and cultural preferences of its members, pastoral care meets the supportive needs of the members, and so on. Pastors might preach, even regularly, that the church exists for the people outside it. But almost everything else the church does sends the opposite message.

A question that has been nagging at me throughout this study is whether or not design thinking tools can be used in a church to help it re-discover its mission. Or does that work need to be done ahead of time? This remains an open question for me. On the one hand, I do not see how the tools of design thinking naturally fit into a process of discerning mission or how they would motivate a congregation to look beyond themselves if they did not already have that priority. On the other hand, almost every layperson I interviewed had their mind opened to the church being more missional by the Oikos process,

⁹³ Second interview with Underwood leader 3, April 30, 2022, Question #1.

⁹⁴ Second interview with leader from “First Church.” Question #4.

which, as we have seen, is heavily influenced by design thinking principles. So, was it the design principles that opened people's minds to be more missional? Or was it the specific content that the Oikos Accelerator process used, especially during the trip to San Antonio, that did it? This is a question worthy of further study.

Recommendations

What follows will be recommendations for improving the Oikos Accelerator project based on the study. In making these recommendations, I hope not only to help improve that program specifically but to highlight important areas of need for future similar endeavors. My further hope is that any church that is beginning to rethink the use of its building and property will find these recommendations helpful. And finally, I hope that further study might be done on how design thinking tools can be utilized in the church more broadly.

Concrete examples sooner

Multiple laypeople in the study expressed having difficulty getting their heads around what the Oikos Accelerator project was aiming for initially. The more literal, facts and figures-oriented members of the Underwood Oikos team had trouble engaging in exercises like Spent and Mission Possible near the beginning of the process. It wasn't until they read through the more concrete examples in, *We*

*Aren't Broke*⁹⁵ that they could engage more fully. So, my first recommendation is to bring in some concrete examples right from the jump. This problem also implies my second recommendation.

More training and preparation for team leaders

As it is, the team leader heads into the process with as much (or as little) information as the rest of the team. It would be better if the leader could meet face-to-face with someone familiar with the whole process before it begins. Either a member of the Rooted Good staff or, perhaps even better, an alumnus of the program. This way, the team leader could gain a sense of the end at the beginning and could provide better leadership to their team and their church. During this orientation, it would be helpful to walk through the steps of the program and get a sense of their role in the process and the amount of time that should be set aside for each. For example, the problem selection step is one of the more important activities in the process, yet it is squished into an already very full session. With a little forewarning, I would have separated that particular part of the conversation and saved it for another day.

Strengthen the iterative

As has been mentioned several times so far, the essential elements of the design thinking process are *human-centered*, *possibility-driven*, and *iterative*. The Oikos Accelerator program does a good job of keeping the work human-centered and opening people's minds to new possibilities. Where it is lacking, according to the study, is in the area of being iterative. Nowhere in the research did evidence emerge that a leadership team had embraced the idea of an iterative approach to change.

⁹⁵ Elsdon and Dykstra, *We Aren't Broke*.

Churches are in desperate conditions. They come into the Oikos Accelerator looking for *a* solution to their problems. But finding *a* solution to the myriad of problems that face the church is not possible. Also, finding *a* solution to the problems facing the church is less than what design thinking promises. Design thinking offers churches a new way of thinking about *all* the problems that they face. Essential in that new way of thinking is the principle of iteration. See chapter three for more about the principle of iteration.

Alumni network

One thing that became very apparent during these interviews was how much people doing this work needed one another. Every team leader in this study is part of the Madison cohort of Oikos churches, and everyone mentioned the cohort as being very important for their work together. In addition, each person who went down to San Antonio mentioned the importance of hearing from other people doing this work: "I'm ahead of the curve, but that's just because I've been more exposed to it."⁹⁶

Church work can be very isolating, and it can easily start to feel like we are the only ones facing the problems that we are facing and that somehow it is our fault and our responsibility to solve them alone. And that just isn't the case. We explored in the first chapter all the factors that go into the church's current predicament in the US. They are near universal and largely out of the control of the individual church. Continuing those conversations could be very life-giving for church leaders.

So, what I am suggesting is an Oikos Accelerator alumni network. Something as simple as a Facebook group or list serve would probably suffice. A place for members who have gone through the process to connect with others on the journey. It could be a place to compare notes, ask questions, ask

⁹⁶ Second interview with leader from "First Church." Question #11.

for resources, and share stories. This would help keep things both human-centered and possibility driven. And it would be fun.

Further Questions for Study

The limited nature of a study like this raises more questions than it answers. What follows are some ideas for further study.

What else might the design thinking process be used for in the church?

The Oikos Accelerator program demonstrates, rather convincingly, that design thinking principles can be used to help churches face the problems associated with inhabiting a building and property that is too big for their needs and too much for them to maintain. But this raises a question, what other problems might design thinking principles help a church to face? Two churches in this study essentially stalled out of the Oikos Process partway through because of other issues. One of them was due to budget concerns – which the Oikos Accelerator program is designed to help with if they had just stuck with it. But the other was due to being in the middle of a pastoral search. So that raises the question, how might design thinking be used in a pastoral search?

The first step a church goes through when starting a search is a careful self-inspection of who the church is and what the church wants in its next pastor. Could a church follow some of the empathy steps from chapter three? Truly observing their members instead of just handing out a survey? What might that produce? What if instead of surveying the whole church, they did targeted, observational, empathetic interviews with members of the congregation that matched the demographics that they most wanted to grow? What if they did it with people outside of the congregation? Could a pastoral

search become more human-centered? Having been through several, I have to think so. At the very least, it is worth studying further.

Could a pastoral search be more *possibilities-driven*? Could the church go through a brainstorming process for what they want in their next pastor? Could they go through a brainstorming process for their whole staff configuration? I know of a church that, instead of hiring one full-time pastor, hired two part-time pastors, who both had other part-time jobs. Somebody certainly did some outside-the-box thinking to come up with that solution.

It is hard to imagine how a search process could be more iterative. Would an incoming pastor agree to a one-year trial? Could a church have four different three-month interims for one year and then see what they liked and disliked about each? Could a church hire multiple pastors assuming one would stick around and one would move on at some point?

Some of these ideas are more realistic than others. Still, the point is that the essential elements of design thinking (*human-centered, possibility-driven, and iterative*) could be used in more situations than we have covered in this study. I would love to see these principles taught to every seminarian, lay leader, deacon's board, and working clergy looking for continuing education credits. Our churches need to become centers of religious innovation instead of the relics of cultural baggage that they, far too often, have become. I think design thinking is the best tool to get us there.

The question of mission

However, there is one crucial issue in the church that I am not at all sure if design thinking can help with. From what I have observed over two decades of studying churches, connecting with pastors, and keeping up with trends and data, many churches have a mission problem. Specifically, I am talking

about progressive, mainline, Euro-American churches in the United States, although the problem is likely broader than that.

Many, if not most, American churches have a mission problem. Though they will have a mission statement written on their website and bulletin, they do not live as a community on a mission. And, if you look at what they prioritize, their actual mission is quite obviously survival at any cost. I am not yet confident that design thinking can help us out of this particular problem.

However, I am heartened by interviews with lay members of Underwood, who, without exception, began at least to focus more on the church's mission in the community than they did on the church's survival. I don't know if it was the design thinking elements, per se, that brought about this change or if it was the actual subject and examples used in the Oikos Accelerator program. Was the participants' increased focus on mission a natural byproduct of the design thinking elements themselves? Did becoming more *human-centered* and *possibility-focused* make room for the spirit to make a change in their hearts? Or was something specific about the Oikos Accelerator curriculum that awakened this in them?

I would love to see a study looking into this further. Perhaps a different set of curricula that taught the elements of design thinking but applied them not to building and property but explicitly to helping the church find its mission. I wonder what might be found. As urgent as I think the issue of church building and property is right now, the issue of church mission is even more so.

Conclusion

I have several thoughts as I reflect on the past twelve months and think about all that I have learned and been exposed to during this study. First, there are things that I wish I had done differently. I wish I had been able to interview lay people in churches other than just at Underwood. I wish I could have interviewed more of the participants in San Antonio about their experience. And I wish I had allowed myself to make changes to the interview questions between rounds one and two, although that would have made analyzing the data considerably more challenging.

Beyond my regrets, I think about what I have learned. Beyond what is explored above, I have learned that churches have more in common than they think and that no matter how many times you talk about something, you never know what will make it click for someone. I have learned that as pastor, I don't always have a broad sense of what my church members feel, even in a small church. And I have learned that leaders need each other – more than that, they are desperate for each other. Not every clergy colloquium is helpful, but a collection of church leaders in similar places on the change journey is like oxygen in the face of suffocating isolation.

But mostly, I have learned that no program or set of skills, as helpful and essential as they are, is a substitute for the hard work of relational pastoral leadership. Design thinking can give us the skills to create change in our organizations. And I think the principles in design thinking are an essential and necessary tool for the church to embrace as it faces its current predicament. But nothing will replace the relational work of being a pastoral leader. The one-on-one conversations at the coffee shop or around the kitchen table, the little moments of small talk after service, the timely phone calls and texts checking in on folks – these are the things that will create the bases of trust that will allow the difficult work of change to take place.

This was communicated most eloquently by the leaders of Fourth Church, the church in this study furthest along the change process.

I would also say I've probably never worked this hard... it's a different kind of pastoral care. It's different grief... we're like, what the hell just hit us? It was like bricks smashing us. So that was hard. But overall, I think we're ready to move forward.⁹⁷

"Like bricks smashing us" – if that doesn't make you want to jump into change leadership! This work is not for the faint of heart. This is why we need each other and all the tools we can get.

⁹⁷ First interview with the leaders from "Fourth Church," April 20, 2022, Question #14.

In summary

"How can design thinking tools help congregations that want to utilize their building and property in new ways to further the Kingdom of God?"

Design thinking can help congregations think of new solutions and new ways to use their building and property that are *human-centered* based on the actual needs of the people their congregation wants to serve; it can bring up solutions that are *possibility-driven*, not hemmed in by the usual ways of doing things but are as innovative as a coffee shop food truck in the parking lot or an indoor playground in the sanctuary; and that are well-tested, *iterative*, and proven effective before much is sacrificed to make them happen. Whether design thinking is the best tool to help a congregation recapture its mission focus and work towards the *Kingdom of God* and become a foretaste of the messianic banquet? That is a question I am not sure this study was set up to answer, even if, in the end, it might just be the most important one.

Bibliography

- IDEO U. "7 Simple Rules of Brainstorming." Accessed June 14, 2021. <https://www.ideo.com/blogs/inspiration/7-simple-rules-of-brainstorming>.
- ABC Nightline - IDEO Shopping Cart*, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M66ZU2PC1cM>.
- Aho, Christopher R. "Faith by Design: Exploiting Intersections between Acts and Design Thinking to Cultivate the Conditions for Innovation in the Local Church as an Expression of Traditioned Innovation." Divinity School of Duke University, 2021.
- Bovon, Francois. *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*. Edited by Helmut Koester. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Brown, Tim. *Change by Design, Revised and Updated: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*. Revised, Updated ed. edition. Harper Business, 2019.
- Canoy, Robert W. "Turning the Table: Luke's Inclusive Invitation to Communion." *Review & Expositor* 116, no. 3 (August 1, 2019): 305–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637319866848>.
- "Creating the First Usable Mouse | Ideo.Com." Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.ideo.com/case-study/creating-the-first-usable-mouse>.
- Cropley, Adrian. "The Emotional Journey of Change." Accessed November 22, 2022. <https://www.thecsce.com/resources/insights/articles/emotional-journey-of-change>.
- Curedale, Robert. *Design Thinking Process & Methods 5th Edition*. 5th edition. Design Community College Inc., 2022.
- Dam, Rikke Friis, and Teo Yu Siang. "What Is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?" The Interaction Design Foundation. Accessed February 3, 2022. <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular>.
- "Design Thinking Studio in Social Innovation." Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://blogs.elon.edu/innovationstudio/>.
- "Designing a School System from the Ground Up | Ideo.Com." Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.ideo.com/case-study/designing-a-school-system-from-the-ground-up>.
- Ellwood, Robert S. *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict*. Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Elsdon, Mark, and Craig Dykstra. *We Aren't Broke: Uncovering Hidden Resources for Mission and Ministry*. Eerdmans, 2021.
- Experience, World Leaders in Research-Based User. "Design Thinking 101." Nielsen Norman Group. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/design-thinking/>.

- “Hello Design Thinking | Gather.” Accessed July 22, 2022.
<https://hellodesignthinking.ideo.com/gather/gather-21>.
- Hopkins, Shannon. Rooted Good Consultation, April 29, 2022.
- IDEO | Design Thinking. “How Might We Improve the Health & Wealth of Cities?” Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://designthinking.ideo.com/blog/how-might-we-improve-the-health-wealth-of-cities>.
- The Second City. “How to Say ‘Yes, And.’” Accessed October 21, 2022.
<https://www.secondcity.com/how-to-say-yes-and/>.
- IDEO.org. *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*. 1st edition. San Francisco, Calif.: IDEO.org / Design Kit, 2015.
- Inc, Gallup. “In U.S., Four in 10 Report Attending Church in Last Week.” Gallup.com, December 24, 2013.
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx>.
- Interview with Underwood Leader 3, April 30, 2022.
- Jones, Robert P. *The End of White Christian America*. Reprint edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Kelley, Tom, and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. 1st edition. Currency, 2013.
- Kunitake, Saso, Hiroshi Ishii, and Akie Iriyama. *The Non-Designer’s Guide to Design Thinking: What a Marketer Learned in Design School*. biotope publishing, 2017.
- Lebrija, Lorenzo. *How to Try: Design Thinking and Church Innovation*. Church Publishing, 2021.
- Liedtka, Jeanne, and Tim Ogilvie. *The Designing for Growth Field Book: A Step-by-Step Project Guide*. Columbia Business School Publishing, 2019.
- Liedtka, Jeanne, Randy Salzman, and Daisy Azer. *Design Thinking for the Greater Good: Innovation in the Social Sector*. Columbia Business School Publishing, 2017.
- Newport, Frank. “Why Are Americans Losing Confidence in Organized Religion?” Gallup.com, July 16, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/260738/why-americans-losing-confidence-organized-religion.aspx>.
- Patte, Daniel. *Global Bible Commentary*. First Edition edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.
- Rendle, Gilbert R. *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018.
- Roberts, J. J. M. *First Isaiah*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.
- “SPENT.” Accessed November 21, 2022. <https://playspent.org/flash/Share.php>.
- Stookey, Laurence Hull. *Eucharist: Christ’s Feast with the Church*. Later Printing edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

- Stoops, Nicole, and Series Censr. "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century," n.d., 222.
- USC News. "The 1950s - Powerful Years for Religion," June 15, 1997. <https://news.usc.edu/25835/The-1950s-Powerful-Years-for-Religion/>.
- MAQE. "The Design Thinking Process - How Does It Work? - MAQE - Insights." Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.maqe.com/insight/the-design-thinking-process-how-does-it-work/>.
- RootedGood. "The Oikos Accelerator | Make Good With RootedGood." Accessed February 3, 2022. <https://rootedgood.org/the-oikos-accelerator/>.
- "The Postwar Economy: 1945-1960 < Postwar America < History 1994 < American History From Revolution To Reconstruction and Beyond." Accessed December 10, 2021. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/outlines/history-1994/postwar-america/the-postwar-economy-1945-1960.php>.
- RootedGood. "Tools, Training, & Experiences for Good." Accessed February 28, 2022. <https://rootedgood.org/>.
- Google Docs. "Underwood History." Accessed December 15, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GoKwEmEAYxQF2nWXbnzqoXq8K3CrFwYGyJvEVN2z0/edit?usp=drive_open&oid=111512277002454806410&usp=embed_facebook.
- The Interaction Design Foundation. "What Are Wicked Problems?" Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/wicked-problems>.
- The Interaction Design Foundation. "What Is Design Thinking?" Accessed February 3, 2022. <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/design-thinking>.
- Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice Planning Meeting, May 17, 2022.
- Wolf, Richard C. "1900–1950 Survey: Religious Trends in the United States." ChristianityToday.com. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1959/april-27/19001950-survey-religious-trends-in-united-states.html>.
- Zondervan, and John R. Stott and Rubert K. Aboagye-Mensah. *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*. Edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. 2 edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Academic, 2010.

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaires

Church Leaders First Interview

Introduction

- Thanks for being willing to sit down to this interview with me.
 - My goal is to measure the effect of doing the Oikos project in your congregation, so we will do this interview today and then a slightly shorter one in about 6 months. And then my job will be to look at your answers and see how things have changed.
 - Today's interview should last about an hour. Is that ok?
 - There are just under 30 questions, and I will try to remember to say the question number to help me when it comes to looking at the transcript.
 - Feel free to take as long as you need with each question, it's ok if we don't get to them all.
 - And just to confirm, you are ok with me recording this, correct?
 - Any questions for me, before we begin?
1. Great, how about you start by telling me how things have been going since we last met as a group?

Questions regarding the Oikos project

2. What is the last phase of the Oikos project you completed?
3. What were your goals for starting the Oikos process?
4. What insights have you gained so far and through which activities?
5. How have the activities gone?
 - a. Skills Deck
 - b. I Spy
 - c. Spent
 - d. Problem Selection – what did you choose?
 - e. Mapping your space
 - f. Mission Possible
 - g. Anything I am missing?
6. Did you add any activities? How did those go?
7. What other adaptations to the Oikos process have you made along the way and why?
8. What has been the most helpful thing you have done as part of this process?
9. How are you/your team/your church feeling about the process so far?
10. What has gone smoothly and what has slowed the process down?
11. Are you sensing a difference between yourselves and your team? And if so, what?
12. How is your team functioning? What challenges have you found as a team?
13. In what ways have you or your team been in conversation with the rest of the congregation?

Questions about attitudes towards the future of the church and the use of the building

14. How are you/your team/ your church feeling about the future of your church?
15. At this moment, where do you hope your church to be in 5-10 years?
 - a. How optimistic are you that you will be there?
 - b. Has that changed since you began this process?
16. What (if any) new partnerships or networking has your church entered into since beginning this project.
17. What concerns/fears do you have about the building or are hearing about the building?
18. Are there ways that people are starting to talk differently about the building?
19. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have been **considered** as a result of this work?
20. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have **begun** as a result of this work?
21. How have your/your team/your church's attitude towards the church building changed as a process of doing this work?
22. Do you hear resistance to imagination and if so, what is the shape of it?
 - a. (if necessary) for example - fear of how much work an initiative will be.

Additional Questions

23. Do I have a permission slip from you?
24. Are you ok with me sharing your answers with Rooted Good, knowing that I will remove your name and the name of the church.

Questions to get a background on the church

Now I am going to ask you some demographic questions, these answers can be shorter:

25. Approximately what is your churches weekly attendance?
26. Approximately what is your average annual budget?
 - a. Does the churches budget balance most years?
 - b. How much are financial concerns a part of the life of the church?
 - c. Are financial concerns part of the reason you are doing the Oikos Accelerator?
27. Tell me about the church building and property, number of seats in the sanctuary, classrooms, number of parking spaces, office space, etc.
 - d. Other than Sunday morning tell me about all the ways that you can think of that your church building is used during the week.
28. Roughly what percentage of your annual budget goes to building upkeep and maintenance?
 - e. Does your congregation own the building?
 - f. Do you owe significant money on the building?
29. Tell me about the make up of your Oikos team?
 - g. Are they opinion shapers in the congregation?
30. How long have you been a leader in this congregation?
31. What is the neighborhood around your church property like? (urban, rural, suburban, etc.)
32. Are you able to send me the interview permission form I sent you? (feel free to fill it out electronically)

Church Leaders Second Interview

Introduction

- Thanks for being willing to sit down to this interview with me.
 - My goal is to measure the effect of doing the Oikos project in your congregation over the past several months, so it is important to me that you are honest, that you tell me how things are, as they are now, so I can compare them with how they were the last time we talked. It is ok if not much has changed, it is ok if a lot has changed. We are all in different phases of this process and it is all good data for my research.
 - The name of your congregation, as well as your name(s) will be scrubbed from the transcript so feel free to be honest.
 - Today's interview should last about an hour. Is that ok?
 - There are just under 30 questions, and I will try to remember to say the question number to help me when it comes to looking at the transcript.
 - Feel free to take as long as you need with each question, it's ok if we don't get to them all.
 - Some questions ask you to answer specifically "since the last time we talked" but don't get caught up in that. If you repeat something from last time, it is no big deal.
 - And just to confirm, you are ok with me recording this, correct?
 - Any questions for me, before we begin?
1. Great, how about you start by telling me how things have been going since we last met as a group?

Questions regarding the Oikos project

2. What is the last phase of the Oikos project you completed?
3. What were your goals for starting the Oikos process?
4. What are the main insights that you have gained so far?
5. How have the activities gone?
 - a. Skills Deck
 - b. I Spy
 - c. Spent
 - d. Problem Selection – what did you choose?
 - e. Mapping your space
 - f. Mission Possible
 - g. San Antonio
 - h. Anything I am missing?
6. Did you add any activities? How did those go?
7. What other adaptations to the Oikos process have you made along the way and why?
8. What has been the most helpful thing you have done as part of this process?
9. How are you/your team/your church feeling about the process so far?
10. What has gone smoothly and what has slowed the process down?
11. Are you sensing a difference between yourselves and your team? And if so, what?
12. How is your team functioning? What challenges have you found as a team?

13. In what ways have you or your team been in conversation with the rest of the congregation?

Questions about attitudes towards the future of the church and the use of the building

14. How are you/your team/ your church feeling about the future of your church?
15. At this moment, where do you hope your church to be in 5-10 years?
 - a. How optimistic are you that you will be there?
 - b. Has that changed since you began this process?
16. What (if any) new partnerships or networking has your church entered into since the last time we spoke (or the beginning of this project, whichever is easier to remember).
17. What concerns/fears do you have about the building or are hearing about the building?
18. Are there ways that people are starting to talk differently about the building?
19. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have been **considered** as a result of this work, since the last time we talked?
20. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have **begun** as a result of this work, since the last time we talked?
21. How have your/your team/your church's attitude towards the church building changed as a process of doing this work, since the last time we talked?
22. Do you hear resistance to imagination and if so, what is the shape of it?
 - a. (if necessary) for example - fear of how much work an initiative will be.

Questions to get a background on the church

Now I am going to ask you some demographic questions, these answers can be shorter:

23. Has there been any noticeable change to attendance since the last time we talked?
24. Any noticeable change to your budget? Either income, or expenses?
25. Made any changes to the building and property?
26. Any changes to your Oikos team?
27. Any significant changes to the neighborhood around your church?
28. Any increase in rental income since we spoke?
29. Can you send me any documents to help me get a feel for your church? Or is your website the best place for me to look?
30. Do I have a permission slip from you?
31. Are you ok with me sharing your answers with Rooted Good, knowing that I will remove your name and the name of the church.

Underwood Oikos Team First Interview

Introduction

- Thanks for being willing to sit down to this interview with me.
- My goal is to measure the effect of doing the Oikos project in our congregation, so we will do this interview today and then again in 6 months. And then my job will be to look at your answers and see how things have changed.
- Today's interview should last about 30 minutes. Is that ok?
- There are about 15 questions, and I will try to remember to say the question number to help me when it comes to looking at the transcript.
- Feel free to take as long as you need with each question, it's ok if we don't get to them all.
- In the paper, it will be explicit that I am talking about Underwood, but I won't use your name for anything.
- And just to confirm, you are ok with me recording this, correct?
- Any questions for me, before we begin?

Questions regarding the Oikos project

1. What were your goals for starting the Oikos process?
2. What insights have you gained so far and through which activities?
3. How do you think the following activities have gone?
 - a. Skills Deck
 - b. I Spy
 - c. Spent
 - d. Problem Selection
 - e. Mission Possible
 - f. Anything I am missing?
 - g. The book?
4. What has been the most helpful thing we have done as part of this process?
5. How are you feeling about the process so far?
6. What has gone smoothly and what has slowed the process down?
7. How do you think the team functioning?
8. Do you feel the congregation is up to date with what we are doing?

Questions about attitudes towards the future of the church and the use of the building

9. How are you feeling about the future of your church?
10. At this moment, where do you hope your church to be in 5-10 years?
 - a. How optimistic are you that you will be there?
 - b. Has that changed since you began this process?
11. What concerns/fears do you have about the building or are hearing about the building?
12. Are there ways that people are starting to talk differently about the building and property?

13. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have been **considered** as a result of this work?
14. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have **begun** as a result of this work?
15. How have your/your team/your church's attitude towards the church building changed as a process of doing this work?
16. Do you hear resistance to imagination and if so, what is the shape of it?

Underwood Oikos Team Second Interview

Introduction

- Thanks for being willing to sit down to this interview with me.
- My goal is to measure the effect of doing the Oikos project in our congregation, so I will compare your answers today with the ones you gave last time.
- Today's interview should last about 30 minutes. Is that ok?
- There are about 15 questions, and I will try to remember to say the question number to help me when it comes to looking at the transcript.
- Feel free to take as long as you need with each question, it's ok if we don't get to them all.
- In the paper, it will be explicit that I am talking about Underwood, but I won't use your name for anything.
- And just to confirm, you are ok with me recording this, correct?
- Any questions for me, before we begin?

Questions regarding the Oikos project

1. What were your goals for starting the Oikos process? Have those changed?
2. What insights have you gained so far and through which activities?
3. What do you think we have learned as a group from the following activities?
 - a. Skills Deck
 - b. I Spy
 - c. Spent
 - d. Problem Selection
 - e. Mission Possible
 - f. Mapping our space
 - g. Thinking about demand
 - h. San Antonio Trip
 - i. Reading the book
 - j. Anything I am missing?
4. What has been the most helpful thing we have done as part of this process?
5. How are you feeling about the process so far?
6. What has gone smoothly and what has slowed the process down?
7. How do you think the team is functioning?

8. Do you feel the congregation is up to date with what we are doing?

Questions about attitudes towards the future of the church and the use of the building

9. How are you feeling about the future of Underwood?
10. At this moment, where do you hope Underwood will be in 5-10 years?
 - a. How optimistic are you that you will be there?
 - b. Has that changed since you began this process?
11. What concerns/fears do you have about the building or are hearing about the building?
12. Are there ways that people are starting to talk differently about the building and property?
13. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have been **considered** as a result of this work?
14. What (if any) new initiatives for the use of your building and property have **begun** as a result of this work?
15. How have your/your team/your church's attitude towards the church building changed as a process of doing this work?
16. Do you hear resistance to imagination and if so, what is the shape of it?

Underwood Non-Leader Interview

Introduction

These questions are aimed to measure the effect of the Oikos program at Underwood. So I will ask them of you now and then again in about six months. I will send the transcript of both of our conversations to Jason, but your name will be removed. He will then look to see what has or hasn't changed over the six months. It is important for Jason's research that you be as honest as possible in answering these questions. There are only about five questions, so take as long as you need to answer each one.

Do you have any questions for me?

Just to get it on tape, do you mind if this is recorded?

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how optimistic are you feeling about the future of Underwood right now?
 - a. What, primarily, would you say is making you feel this way?
2. How would you like to see the church be different in 5 to 10 years?
3. Again, on a scale of 1 - 10, how confident are you that the church will get there?
 - a. What goes into that assessment?
4. Do you see the church's building and property as primarily an asset or primarily a liability?

- a. What makes you say that?
5. What do you know about the Oikos Accelerator program that pastor Jason and some other church members are doing?