

TRANSITION TO A COMMUNAL PARADIGM OF YOUTH MINISTRY AT CHRIST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, JACKSON, MS

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BY
WES INGRAM
G10189274
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Introduction

The U.S., and all of Western Civilization, is in the midst of a shift to a postmodern and post-Christian society. So monumental are these social changes that some scholars are comparing it to the foundational changes the Western World experienced in the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world five-hundred plus years ago.¹ For families, the changes associated with postmodernity have created a toxic atmosphere resulting in stressed and broken families, and for adolescents these societal shifts have resulted in a culture of systemic abandonment by the very institutions that were created to nurture them.² The Church has been sent into the world with the mission to make disciples, including youth and families, but the societal shifts have created a ministry context that the American church has struggled to adjust to, choosing instead to hold on to structures and ministry paradigms rooted in Christendom and/or modernity. In light of these societal changes, this paper is concerned with looking at Christ United Methodist Church's (CUMC) the overall paradigm of youth ministry.³

The thesis of this paper is that the societal changes and values associated with Christendom, modernity and postmodernity all converge in a unique way onto CUMC and its ministry context. Beginning with Emperor Constantine in third Century A.D., the Western church has struggled with its identity and mission, identifying more with Christendom and Western culture than with Jesus Christ as Lord, and consequentially, because of this struggle with its identity, each major societal shift, from Constantine through postmodernity, has affected its understanding of what its mission is to be within

¹ Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World : The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 2.

² David Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). Chap Clark, *Hurt : Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, Youth, Family, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

³ I will use "Church" to indicate the catholic and apostolic Church, and "church" to refer to the church in the West, U.S., and/or Christ United Methodist Church. I will use CUMC for Christ United Methodist Church.

that society. This confusion of identity and mission has severely affected the American church's and CUMC's approach and ability to effectively evangelize, disciple, and integrate youth, who, as a subculture, have been hurt by societal changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, into the congregational life of the church. Lastly, in order for CUMC, to have a transformational ministry to youth, it starts, not with the youth, but with the adult congregation embracing its communal identity in the Lordship of Jesus and His gospel as His holy ekklesia and missional people and, out of this, embracing a renewed understanding of Youth Ministry as part of the missional calling of our church.

Since “the church relates constantly and dynamically both to the gospel and to its contextual reality,” I will first briefly discuss theological foundations in order to define “the gospel” that is proclaimed to our “contextual reality.”⁴ Secondly, in order to understand our ministry context, I will briefly examine the historical roots of the philosophical and cultural changes in our society and the impact these have had on the U.S. church, our families and on adolescents. Lastly we will look at Christ United Methodist Church in Jackson, MS, and the implications for its youth ministry and new questions for our congregation that arise in light of our discussion.

Section One: Theological Foundation

The understanding of God as Trinity, one God in three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, existing in a self-giving holy love relationship, is the base theological foundation of this paper. The Triune God of the Bible exists in communal relationship with self-giving love as His very essence or nature, and out of God's nature of holy self-giving love He created the world. Moreover, because God exists as a love relationship, He did not create the world because of a relational void, but because

⁴ Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998). 18.

He desired to. With respect to humans, because all humanity has been created in the image of God (Gen 1:21-22), we, at our core, are relational, meaning we were not created to be alone, but were created to commune with God as His people with the mission of multiplication and exercising dominion over creation.⁵ It is out of this Trinitarian relational framework that the rebellion of mankind, or sin, is ultimately understood not merely as the failure to comply with a rule or rules, but as a relational (and communal) turning away from God resulting in a schismatic, broken relationship with our Creator, with each other as a human community, and with the whole of creation.

Furthermore, it is also out of a Trinitarian framework that we understand the gospel and salvation, not in individualistic terms, but as being restored to God in and through the community of God. It is the Trinitarian framework that allows us to understand the self-giving nature of God as one who, beginning with Abraham and Israel, entered into His creation to restore it relationally to Himself by gracefully electing and sending a people to be His incarnational body in the world, and ultimately in the incarnation, death and resurrection of the sent Son, Jesus Christ, as the elect fulfilment of Israel's purpose and mission and the atoning representative of humanity.⁶ Lastly, it is the Trinitarian framework that helps us understand that the Son who was sent by the Father, proclaiming the kingdom of God, sends the church in the power of the Holy Spirit into the world with the communal mission to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God and to make disciples.

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis : Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 139. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this paper are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus : Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 174-197.

The writers of the Nicene Creed described the Church as the one holy (called out) catholic (universal) and apostolic (historical) Church.⁷ As the Church, we are a holy nation, present in culture, but distinct from culture (1Pet 1:9). The Church is the ekklesia of God; the people who have been “called out” and “called together” by God for the worship of God.⁸ Our identity as the ekklesia of God is rooted in God's call to Abraham to leave his people and father's household and promise to make him “into a great nation” (Gen 12:1-2), in God's call and promise to his people Israel to be His “kingdom of priests,” a “holy nation” and “a light for the Gentiles” (Exod 19:5-6; Isa 42:6, 49:6), and ultimately in Jesus Christ, who, as the Son of God, was the fulfillment of Israel's purpose and mission.⁹ Lastly as God's ekklesia, our communal identity is understood and sustained in our communal worship of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Secondly, as the Church, our identity as God's ekklesia and our mission to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God and to make disciples are “intimately intertwined” and cannot be separated, for it was Jesus, in whom our identity is hidden (Col 3:3), who sent His ekklesia into the world as the representation of the in-breaking kingdom of God with the mission to make disciples (Mat 28:18-20).¹⁰ So, in sum, we are a holy nation, a community, with a kingdom mission to go out into all the world, incarnating the gospel in a particular culture with the mission to make disciples, thereby bringing more people into the ekklesia of God.

Lastly, our identity as the ekklesia of God with a kingdom mission to make disciples means that ministry to adolescents, or youth ministry, is not a department or sub-ministry of the church, but is an integral part of the missional call of the church to a particular subculture in our rapidly changing

⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 1st ed., Systematic Theology (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 270.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Wright, 174-197.

¹⁰ Oden, 270.

society. The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy contains the account of Moses instructing Israel, out of their love for God, to be diligent in obeying the “commands, decrees and laws” that He had given them (Deu 6:1-5). In the same breath Moses then states,

Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deu 6:6-9)

This was a communal and familial calling, as the people of God, to raise their children and grandchildren to love God, follow his decrees, and, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:21-23, teach them the history of God's redeeming acts; i.e. part of the mission of Israel, as a holy nation and light of the world, was to communally raise children to be fully engaged Israelites who loved God, obey the laws and remembered God's salvific acts. In light of this communal calling of Israel to teach their children, coupled with New Testament teaching of Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of Israel, we can read Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19-20 as a fulfillment of God's instruction to Israel, through Moses, to teach their children God's commands. Jesus' commissioning was to make disciples of all nations, assimilating the new disciples into the ekklesia of God by “teaching them to obey everything” Jesus had taught them (Mat 28:20). As the ekklesia of God in the twenty-first century, our mission is the same, to go and make disciples, and with respect to youth, this calling does not change. In summary, youth ministry, therefore, is a vital part of the missional calling of the church within any and every culture to go and make disciples of youth, fully assimilating them, systemically and relationally, into the congregational life of the church.¹¹

¹¹ Clark, 189.

Section Two: Ministry Context

English missionary and theologian Leslie Newbigin labeled modern Western culture, “the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.”¹² Newbigin’s sentiment describes the current ministry context for CUMC in Jackson, MS, which, as mentioned above, is a complex mix of Christendom, modern and postmodern influences.

Christ United Methodist Church

Founded in 1961, Christ United Methodist Church, is a majority white megachurch set in Jackson’s wealthiest zip code (39211) with a membership that is considered primarily upper middle and upper income, but the church is atypical of most United Methodist Churches (UMC) in that a large portion of its membership is from a non-UMC background, and whose growth in the last decade was primarily non-UMC transfers.¹³ The demographics in the area around the church has been in transition over the past two decades with the black population steadily rising, while the white population, still majority, has decreased.¹⁴ Also, over the past decade a growing percentage of its membership has moved out of the 39211 zip code into the adjacent affluent suburbs, and a majority of the families with youth send their children to one of several local private schools in the metro area, though a growing number who have made the move to the suburbs are sending their children to the high performing suburban public schools.¹⁵

¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 20.

¹³ Shelby Systems, Church Membership Demographics (Jackson, MS). "Christ United Methodist Church", www.christunitedjxn.org/history.

¹⁴ Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, "Demographic Analysis for Identifying New Church Locations," January, 2009. Percept Group, Inc, "Ministry Area Profile 2004 Compass Report," 2004.

¹⁵ Membership demographics from a Shelby Systems report run on May 21, 2010, by the author's administrative assistant Rhonda Berry.

With respect to the recent history of the church, the past decade has seen the church go through a complete building move within the same zip code, the retirement of a long-term pastor, and a litany of church crises that resulted in loss of membership and an overall feeling of instability in the church. In the summer of 2009, Rev. David Brownlee became the church's fourth senior pastor in the past ten years, and under his leadership the entire congregation has begun a three year visioning process to discern God's missional call for the church in this ministry context.¹⁶

To get a grasp of the complexity of CUMC's ministry context, it is pertinent to take a brief look at three major societal shifts in Western culture and the church, all of which have deeply impacted CUMC's communal identity as well as its ministry context.

The Western Church

Following His Resurrection on Easter morning, Jesus, with the authority given Him by His Heavenly Father, commissioned His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mat 28:19-20a). Moreover, we read in Acts 1:7-8 that these same disciples were instructed by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized by the Holy Spirit, which took place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The remainder of Acts and the New Testament is the story of the Spirit-led Church expanding out from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and into the mighty Roman Empire, living out (and/or struggling to live out) the Great Commission in what was, at times, a very hostile environment. Central to life of the early church, as evidenced by the letters of Paul in the New Testament, was the proclamation that Jesus is Lord and not Caesar, and not

¹⁶ The author has been a CUMC member since 1991 and on staff in a full-time position since 2000, so all references in this paper to church history from the past two decades are based, in part, on the personal experience of the author.

just Lord of the Church, but Lord of the entire world.¹⁷ However, the belief in Jesus as Lord did not discount the legitimate place of government, but it did mean that government's role was subservient to the church, the elect body representing the inbreaking Kingdom of God. In *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*, Rodney Clapp, using quotes from theologian John Howard Yoder, states it this way:

[before the advent of Christendom] the church saw the state as having a preservative function. It was 'to Serve God by encouraging the good and restraining evil, i.e., to serve peace to preserve the social cohesion in which the leaven of the gospel can build the church' and render the present age more tolerable. 'All this made the state important, but hardly central. The church considered itself, not the state, to be carrying the meaning of history.'¹⁸

Though certainly imperfect and wrought with internal struggles, the early Church did understand that its very identity and calling to mission was "hidden" in the person of Christ (Col 3:13), and it was this commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the belief that He, and not the state, was their source of identity and mission that began to change during Christendom.

Leading up to Christendom

Christendom, which officially began with the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in AD 800, is, as stated by theologian Craig Carter, "the concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in the adherence to Christian faith."¹⁹ Carter then points out that the "essence" of Christendom is the idea that "Western Civilization is Christian" where "the state and the

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2003), 233.

¹⁸ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People : The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 25; John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution; Essays on Christian Pacifism*, Christian Peace Shelf Series, 3 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1972), 72-73.

¹⁹ Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture : A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 14.

church have different roles to play, but, since membership in both is coterminous, both can be seen as aspects of one unified reality – Christendom.”²⁰ While Christendom brought with it stability and an overarching morality to the West, the result of Christendom was ultimately a church that found its identity and purpose in the state, thereby undermining its identity as God's ekklesia with the mission to go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus and make disciples. This process began with, what is referred to as, the Constantinian Shift.

Constantinian Shift: Identity in the Roman Empire

This important shift in the history of the church/state relationship began in 200 AD, but took almost 200 years to grow to become a full reality.²¹ While it was the Emperor Theodosius I in 380 who officially made Christianity the state religion, it was the Emperor Constantine who laid the ground work for the future Christian Europe through the passage of the Edict of Milan in 312 AD, making Christianity a legal religion and essentially the “religious sponsor” of the Roman Empire.²² With this event, termed the Constantinian Shift, the church began to increasingly derive its significance through association with the identity and purposes of the state, whereas, before, the early church drew its understanding of who it was (identity) and purpose (mission) from the Person of Jesus Christ.²³ This shift ultimately meant that the ontological distinction that existed between the church as the missional people of God and the state was blurred. It also meant, therefore, to be Roman was to be Christian, and, as Clapp points out, the church no longer had to ask the question, “How can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?,” but “How can we adjust the church’s

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ John Howard Yoder and Michael G. Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), 57.

²² Clapp, 213.

²³ Ibid., 25.

expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?”²⁴ However, while “the line between the church and the world was blurred” though “not entirely rubbed out,” with Constantine, the shift to Christendom and Western Culture as we know it had begun.²⁵

Christendom and Christian Culture: Identity in Holy Roman Empire

As stated above, in AD 800 Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor creating the Holy Roman Empire and Christian culture. Concerning this alliance, church historian Mark Noll states, “For the next 800 years and more, the politics, learning, social organization, art, music, economics, and law of Europe would be ‘Christian’ – not necessarily in the sense of fully incorporating norms of the gospel, but because the fate of the Western church centered in Rome had been so decisively linked with the new ‘Roman’ emperor.”²⁶ Noll then states, “Charlemagne took the notion of church-state cooperation, which was a legacy from the days of Constantine, and by fixing it to Europe bequeathed ‘Christendom’ to succeeding generations.”²⁷ With the advent of the Holy Roman Empire, whereas before to be Roman was to be Christian, now, in general, to be European was to be Christian. Furthermore, with the church’s identity now fully aligned with the Empire, the church’s purpose is now that of the state, and the church’s call to make disciples is virtually eliminated, as Carter states, “The church cannot evangelize the world when the world is already officially Christian.”²⁸ However, despite the detrimental aspects of the church-state cooperation and Christian Culture, Clapp makes the observation that during the Middle Ages the church “retained some sense of distinctness between the church and the world,” e.g. higher moral standards for clergy than laity, but

²⁴ Ibid., 26.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points : Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 121.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Carter, 21.

even this distinction would change with the Renaissance (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries) and Reformation (early-sixteenth century).²⁹

Reformation: Identity and State Churches

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation, who were deeply influenced by the Renaissance movement's emphasis on the individual, which manifested itself in their emphasizing "the importance of individual responsibility in relationship to one's personal salvation," led a "desperately needed call to return to our foundational story, the story of Israel and Jesus found in the Bible."³⁰ While the movement did bring about needed change to return to the authority of the Bible and faith, the leaders of the movement decided "in favor of political conservatism" and did not challenge the "Constantinian settlement."³¹ The Reformers looked past the foundations of Constantinianism and went after the Roman Catholic Church, breaking away from the "overarching, transnational church hierarchy" and aligning with the local, territorial states, i.e. Elector of Saxony and Milord of Zurich.³² This new alignment meant the Protestant Church, while freed from the shackles of the Holy Roman Empire, were now ontologically tied to the various European territorial states, and, consequently, this meant that the identity of the common man was tied to these state churches; therefore to be German, French, Dutch, etc. was to be Christian. With respect to the reformers decision, John Howard Yoder makes the following profound observation:

...the conviction that the center of the meaning of history is in the work of the Church, which had been central in the pre-Constantinian Church and remained half-alive in the Middle Ages, is now expressly rejected. The prince is not only a Christian, not only a prominent Christian; he is now the bishop... The Church confesses in deed and sometimes in word that not she, but the State, has the last word and incarnates the ultimate values of God's work in the world.

²⁹ Clapp, 26-27.

³⁰ Ibid., 27; Guder and Barrett, 20-21.

³¹ Clapp, 25.

³² Ibid., 28.

What is called 'Church' is an administrative branch of the State on the same level with the Army or Post Office. Church discipline is applied by the civil courts and police.³³

This result is not what the leaders of the Reformation intended. While the Reformers were trying to restore a renewed, united and visible church, they, in tying the church to the local territorial states and rulers, opened the floodgates of political and cultural autonomy that splintered the church into state churches under the controlling authority of ruling kings, and by aligning the church (sacred realm) with territorial rulers (secular realm), the Reformation inadvertently helped create modern secularism.³⁴

The impact on the Western church

English Missionary and theologian Lesslie Newbigin observes that:

“As heirs of the Christendom experiment. . . we who belong to the Western world live in societies that have been shaped by more than a thousand years during which the barbarous and savage tribes of Europe were brought slowly and with many setbacks, into a community conceived as the *corpus Christianum*, a single society in which the whole of public and private life was to be controlled by the Christian revelation.”³⁵

This thousand year societal shift that resulted in Christendom has profoundly impacted the missional identity of the Western church, including CUMC.

The most stark impact of this historical move on the Western church was that the church was no longer holy in the sense of being the *ekklesia*, “[for] the two visible realities, church and world, were fused,” meaning the church took on the culture’s purposes and mission.³⁶ This meant that with citizenship came compulsory baptism and the Christian label, undermining evangelism and the biblical teaching of costly discipleship (Luk 9:23-24) for, as mentioned above, “The church cannot

³³ Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 60.

³⁴ Clapp, 28.

³⁵ Newbigin, 101.

³⁶ Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 57.

evangelize the world when the world is already officially Christian.”³⁷ Also, since every citizen in the culture was, by default Christian, a culture of church as a place one goes to developed, as did the tendency of the church to assume, within its home culture, that people will come to it.³⁸ Similarly, in a Christian culture where presumably everyone was Christian, the role of clergy became that of a “professional class” who were given the task of performing the institution’s “authoritative activities.”³⁹ With this in mind, it is understandable why the doctrine of the “invisibility of ‘the true church’” was developed during this period as a way to distinguish true believers from false believers.⁴⁰

With respect to the mission of the church, it was in Christian culture that the concept of “missions” as an activity of the church outside of its home culture and not as its *raison d’être* developed.⁴¹ Likewise, because culture and church were intricately united, missions became, not proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God and making disciples, but “shaping the Christian communities” that were “birthed in the image of the church of western European culture.”⁴² Lastly, and possibly most tragic, in Christian culture the state’s official engagements, including war and imperial and economic expansion, were seen and understood to be the church’s engagements and mission as well, and it was the church’s sponsoring of the state’s greed and violence which, in part, led to the intellectual and cultural revolt against Christendom.⁴³

Even though, as a result of Christendom, the Western church lost its focus on Jesus Christ as the source of its identity and mission, this does not mean that God did not move in the hearts and minds of Christians throughout Western History. Jesus is, after-all, Lord of all, seated at the right hand

³⁷ Carter, 16-21.

³⁸ Guder and Barrett, 80.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 57-58.

⁴¹ Guder and Barrett, 4.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Carter, 19-21.

of the Father, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come,” meaning that Jesus still carries the meaning of and guides history (Eph. 1:21). Examples of how God worked through Christendom are that, despite compulsory baptism, people did authentically respond to the gospel and a new sense of social stability and an overarching morality arose in the West, replacing the barbarous paganism of northern European tribes.⁴⁴ Similarly, out of a response to the Christianity of Christian culture, Spirit led missional movements rose up within the institutional structures that sought to proclaim and incarnate the gospel in culture, e.g. the Benedictine movement (cir. sixth century) and Methodist renewal in England (cir. Seventeenth century).⁴⁵ However, despite these and other positive results, it is the impact of the negatives of Christian culture that are the main concern today in the increasingly post-Christian culture of the West and in CUMC’s ministry context.

The American Church's Ministry Context

As late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Christendom was still deeply ingrained into the social and political fabric of Europe. However, the same Renaissance emphasis on the individual and personal freedom, which helped fuel the Protestant Reformation, also “prepared the way” for Western Civilization’s next major movement, the Enlightenment and the transition to Modernity, both of which are ingrained in the America’s psyche.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 58.

⁴⁵ Noll, 83-106, 221-244; Yoder and Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, 63.

⁴⁶ Guder and Barrett, 20.

Modernity: A New Gospel; Constructed Identity and Privatized Faith

No matter what part of the United States a person lives in, he/she lives in a society that is thoroughly modern, typified by urban and suburban lifestyles, an increasingly hurried pace of life, an “economy shaped and driven by technology and its advances,” increasingly specialized professional roles, “bureaucratic organizations run by rules and policies,” constant change in the realm of pop culture, a subjective morality, an increasing sense of aloneness and a “hunger for some overarching story to give meaning and structure to life.”⁴⁷ The impact of modern culture, which Lesslie Newbigin calls the most pervasive culture in the world, has been felt in every facet of not only the West, but the entire world, and while certainly the modern world's technological advancements in communications, medicine, transportation, etc. have greatly benefited humanity, modernity has also brought with it a dark side that is continuing to leave a wake of destruction in its path.⁴⁸ Concerning the dark side of modernity Theologian Thomas Oden states:

The philosophical center of modernity is no dark secret. It is narcissistic hedonism that assumes that moral value is reducible to now feelings and sensory experience. It views human existence essentially as spiritless body, sex as orgasm, psychology as amoral data gathering, and politics as the manipulation of power. It systematically ignores the human capacity of self-transcendence, moral reasoning, covenant commitment, and self-sacrificial agape.⁴⁹

This is U.S. culture, and again, it is one that is leaving a wake of personal destruction, particularly among families and adolescence. It is in this type of situation that the church has been called and equipped to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus, but the church continues to reflect modern culture, thus losing its saltiness in a world that is desperately searching for another story (Mat 5:13).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Newbigin.

⁴⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity-- What? : Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1990), 31.

The Story of Modernity

Modernity, Western culture's "struggle to create society on the basis of objective scientific truth and the construct of the autonomous self," was built upon the Enlightenment's concept of "the individual over established authority,"⁵⁰ The Enlightenment movement was a cultural "revolt against the autocracy of the premodern world," which "eventually overturned medieval forms of government, religion, science, art, and education," and completely altered European society and thoroughly impacted American society.⁵¹

The philosophers and intellectuals who made up the Enlightenment sought more personal freedom for European society by freeing it from the "constraints of established monarchies and religious hierarchies as well as an alternative to the claims of truth grounded in historical tradition and biblical teaching."⁵² In order to reach the goal of personal freedom for individuals and a new social order for the West, they "proposed a counterprinciple" to the established authorities of Christendom, the state church and the monarchy.⁵³ This counterprinciple was that "one's personal identity and destiny should be the self-construction of a rational, autonomous individual, and consequently, these thinkers based truth, not on the church or revelation, but on human reason."⁵⁴ With these counterprinciples the Enlightenment thinkers had completed the transition of Western Culture, at least philosophically, from an identity found in the medieval state-church bond to an individual rational person constructing his own identity, i.e. they had constructed a new understanding of what it meant to be human based on reason, autonomy and a new ordering of society. This was a new god and a new gospel.

⁵⁰ Guder and Barrett, 25.

⁵¹ Elkind, 17; Guder and Barrett, 20-21.

⁵² Guder and Barrett, 20-21.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Truth, Identity and Community

One of the main goals for Enlightenment thinkers was to find an alternative to the concept of truth as embedded within a communal tradition or revelation. Their solution was the notion of truth as discoverable through the use of rational method by an objective observer, and over time “the newly developing scientific method” would be used to cancel out the belief in a God who created and involves Himself in the affairs of mankind.⁵⁵ In doing this they were crafting a Modern society where nature was ultimate reality, science was the gospel, and the scientist was “the priest” who could “unlock... the secrets of nature.”⁵⁶

Similarly, the Enlightenment thinkers sought to free the identity of rational individuals from a communal identity in the church and state with the end goal of formulating “a new basis for individual identity as the key to increasing personal freedom,” and the basis for this new “modern self” was the “self contained individual capable of discerning truth and constructing knowledge.”⁵⁷ With final authority now residing in the mind of the rational person and his ability to discern truth through rational method, the church was no longer needed to discern truth and was thus further pushed aside, with faith being ascribed to the world of private belief.⁵⁸

Finally, as a way to undercut the authority of the European monarchs, the Enlightenment thinkers put forth an “alternative to the rule of such sovereigns... in the form of social contract theory,” which was the Enlightenment thinker’s way to organize society and still preserve the autonomous self.⁵⁹ These thinkers held that “rational, autonomous persons had natural rights, and by entering into a social contract” citizens could “affirm” their rights and the government would maintain

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20-21.

⁵⁶ Newbigin, 24-25.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, Geneva SZ: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications, 1989).

⁵⁹ Guder and Barrett, 24.

the institutions in order to “protect” them.⁶⁰ Furthermore, one of the core natural rights was happiness, which, with the Enlightenment, was now the political system’s goal for its citizens.⁶¹

Ultimately, for the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the belief that “freely choosing, autonomous individuals, deciding out of rational self-interest to enter into a social contract in order to construct a progressive society” became the ideological foundation for modernity.⁶² This truly was a new god (nature and science), a new gospel (reason), and a new way of being human (social contract). It was this optimistic belief in progress that fueled Modernity and which has certainly affected every nation in our world, including the missional context of CUMC.⁶³

The American Version of Modernity

The United States was constitutionally born when Enlightenment thought was at its peak (mid- to late eighteenth century), which, in part, is why scholars refer to the U.S. as an “Enlightenment project.”⁶⁴ With Enlightenment ideas as its foundation, the unique situation, including the timing of its birth and the vast resources at its disposal, “fostered the myth in this country that social progress and managed institutional development were relatively easy to accomplish.”⁶⁵ Also, the “United States’ version of the modern project” was strongly influenced “by a belief that the early English Puritan settlers transplanted to this country that God had directly intervened to create a particular people in this place at this time.”⁶⁶ This belief has strongly influenced the national identity of this country, but, while religious in roots, “this sense of destiny quickly took on a broader secular interpretation that has

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture*.

⁶² Guder and Barrett, 25.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

continued to commingle with its religious counterpart throughout the decades,” i.e. from a functional Christendom to civil religion, which will be discussed below.⁶⁷ Myths like these helped form the identity and “common story” of a nation, and sharing this “common story was assumed to be rooted in the constitutional commitment that all could experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁶⁸ However, the “common story” of American modernity has all but disappeared in the last few decades as society has become more fragmented as it has become more complex.⁶⁹ This landscape of “widespread fragmentation” is the ministry context that the American church and CUMC have been placed. It is a ministry context inhabited by persons who have been deeply formed by the Enlightenment’s understanding of personhood; i.e. the Modern Self.

The Modern Self

The foundational ideas of reason and the autonomous, rational self, on which the modernist thinkers built society, found their way into every institution and social structure of Western society, including the church, and as Guder notes, “the identity for persons and their institutions, including Christians and churches, is rooted in the conception and structure” of “the modern self.”⁷⁰ This new way of understanding what it means to be human includes being a citizen with rights and freedoms, being a consumer, having constructed roles and identities, being a product of technique and being a person of feeling, intuition and desire. This understanding of personhood, or who “I am,” is part of the dark side of modernity that is so counter to the truth of Trinitarian personhood and the core of which has affected the identity of the church, family, and adolescence.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 33-34.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 25.

“I am” an American: Self as Citizen with Rights

The first key impact of modernity is the necessity for the individual to find his or her identity not in Jesus, a faith community, family, ethnicity, etc, but in the nation-state, for it is the nation-state that guarantees autonomous citizens personal rights and freedom in exchange for their primary allegiance (think pledge of allegiance).⁷¹ In his book, Foolishness to the Greeks, Lesslie Newbigin expands this thought:

The nation-state replaces the holy church and the holy empire as the centerpiece in the post-Enlightenment ordering of society. Upon it devolves the duty of providing the means for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . . If - for modern Western people - nature has taken the place of God as the ultimate reality with which we have to deal, the nation-state has taken the place of God as the source to which we look for happiness, health and welfare.⁷²

A definite tension arises here with respect to “modernity's protection of a citizen's rights and freedoms and its demands on a citizen's allegiance and civil responsibilities.”⁷³

“I am” What I Have: Self as Consumer

Possibly the most observable aspect of the modern self, and one that is inseparable from the pursuit of happiness, is American consumerism and its “I am what I have” rationale.⁷⁴ The modern self as consumer has its roots in the economic philosophy of capitalism, which, “arose as one of the shaping institutions of modernity and has steadily become the organizing principle of the economics of the modern world.”⁷⁵ The economic changes that took place as a result of a growing capitalistic economy resulted in major societal changes as masses of people “migrated from the basically self-

⁷¹ Ibid., 26.

⁷² Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture*, 26-27. Earlier in his argument Newbigin states that the pursuit of happiness was originally intended to be a “public happiness,” but this eventually became an individual happiness.

⁷³ Guder and Barrett, 26.

⁷⁴ Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (El Cajon, CA, Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties; Zondervan, 2007), 317-319.

⁷⁵ Guder and Barrett, 27.

sufficient economic unit of the family toward an expanding array of wage-earning jobs in the factories and commerce of growing towns.”⁷⁶ American urban centers swelled, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with rural American families and European immigrants looking for factory jobs created by mass production.⁷⁷

Today, capitalism has become truly global and has entered the “consumer capitalism” stage, which requires greater and greater amounts of consumption, needed or not, in order for the economy to continue to grow.⁷⁸ While the overall quality of life has increased for Americans, the results of consumer capitalism is that individual consumers are, in Guder’s words, “both pawn and player in this economic game: pawn because each person is object of the push to consume, and player because each person depends on the jobs of the marketplace that drive the culture of consumption.”⁷⁹ As American citizens it is our right and duty to consume goods and services.

“I am” What I Do: Self as Constructed Roles and Identities

Scripture makes is clear that our identity as believers is a communal identity in Christ as the holy people of God (Col 3:12-17; Eph 2:19-22), but as a result of modernity most people today understand their identity as rooted in achievements, performances, social status etc. – “what they do rather than their character or their personal qualities.”⁸⁰ Darrell Guder, referencing Yale sociologist Charles Perrow, makes the observation that our tendency to understand our identity this way is closely tied to the formation of the modern bureaucracy.⁸¹ Guder states:

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 53-92.

⁷⁹ Guder and Barrett, 27-28.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁸¹ Ibid. Charles Perrow, *Complex Organizations; a Critical Essay*, Scott, Foresman Introduction to Modern Society Series (Glenview, Ill.,: Scott, 1972).

The capitalist economy required the formation and management of large-scale organizations. While large organizations have existed throughout history, what was unique in the late nineteenth century was the effort to bring a rational, scientific design to them. Positions became job descriptions with detailed responsibilities and defined limits of power; policy manuals standardized procedures; authority, delegation, and decision making were structured vertically, from top to bottom, using a host of middle managers.⁸²

Furthermore, because of this scientific approach to organization, which resulted in the development of techniques of managing human behavior, individuals in the modern world find themselves maneuvering through one large-scale organization after another, all of which play a role in shaping the individual's identity.⁸³ For modern persons this naturally causes tension between the individuality of the person and the organization's roles and goals.⁸⁴

“I am” Made: Self as Product of Technique

The twentieth century saw enormous growth in “science-based technology” that applied techniques in order to manipulate society and the natural world (this has continued on into the twenty first century), which has resulted in a climate of constant technological change that has shaped the modern self.⁸⁵ This climate of constant change has led to the development of the three myths that have become “deeply embedded” in our modern society, especially when combined with the before mentioned consumerist identity. Guder states the following concerning these myths:

One is that the new is somehow better and must necessarily replace the old once it is introduced. Another is that what is efficient is more desirable and must necessarily replace what is only workable. A third is that there is a technique solution to every problem, and science can address any and every problem we encounter if we just work at it with enough intelligence, or long enough: “We can do it, if we will.”⁸⁶

⁸² Guder and Barrett, 28.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 29.

While Guder acknowledges that in many ways we have become accustomed to the constant change, it is the pressure to keep up with the constant change coupled with our obsession with individual expression that causes tension in modern people.⁸⁷ Again, similar to self as consumer, it is hard for individuals to balance the reality that at times they seem to be manipulated by the technological innovations, but at other times they appear to be in control as “the supremely capable master of the social and natural worlds.”⁸⁸

“I am” what I Feel: Modern Self of Feeling, Intuition, and Desire

A quick glance at the previous four facets of the modern self will reveal that each one stems from the cold reality of modernity’s “tendency toward a planned, rationalized, bureaucratized, technicized and commodity-driven world;” i.e. the modern self is molded, shaped and manipulated as a result of science, method and organizations.⁸⁹ Yet, because enlightened moderns are also individualistic, this creates an ongoing tension which resulted in the historical countermovements of romanticism (nineteenth century) and modernism (twentieth century).⁹⁰ Guder states:

The twentieth-century movement of modernism attempted to capture in the arts and literature the side of the human spirit that is emotive, affective, intuitive, and experiential. The world of modernity increasingly produced what Max Weber (1864-1920) called the cage effect, where life is lived amid institutional structures produced by human values, but these structures no longer provide a place for these values... The human spirit, the movement believed, could not be contained within the construction of the modern self as an autonomous individual making rational choices. The result was a search to find meaning by exploring feeling, experience, and desire.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Today these sentiments can be seen in rock concerts, dance clubs, extreme sports, and other types of experiential and emotional based social gatherings where “experience becomes the main text” and verbal content and cognitive meaning function only as subtexts.⁹² Again, modernity pushes us to live rational lives, yet the tension arises when the cold realities of modern institutions do not provide the outlet for the emotive side of the modern person.

In summary, the Enlightenment project's aim was establishing a new way of understanding personhood and society. The leaders of the movement, in revolt against the hierarchical church-state structures of pre-modern society, turned to rationality, reason, and science as the savior of society, giving birth to modernity and its individualism and unabashed optimism in human progress. However, modernity has created many lines of unresolved tension for individuals, as well as new capacities for human destruction, and it is precisely these unresolved tensions of modernity that have been driving our society's “reversioning of truth, self, and society.”⁹³ While there is not a consensus whether we are in late modernity or postmodernity, what is apparent is that our society's “postmodern condition” is a reality that makes up “some of the greatest challenges” churches face “as they seek to witness faithfully to Jesus Christ by announcing and demonstrating the reign of God in their appointed place.”⁹⁴

Postmodernity

As mentioned before, some scholars have made the claim that the transition that Western society is currently experiencing is comparable to the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world, yet one unique aspect is that in our current transition we're experiencing is characterized by

⁹² Ibid., 30.

⁹³ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

“widespread fragmentation and perhaps even disintegration that appears to be affecting all dimensions of Western culture.”⁹⁵ Concerning this transition Guder states, “No fully descriptive word has emerged for what the culture is becoming. We only have a word [postmodern] that indicates what it appears to be moving away from. What is clear, however, is that significant changes are afoot that are transforming the way we understand truth, self, and society.”⁹⁶ What can be said is that culture is changing in ways that are both challenging and promising for the American church's missional calling, and particularly its missional calling to adolescents.

In his book Ties that Stress, Sociologist David Elkind states that the postmodernity “arose not so much as a revolt against the beliefs of modernity as a set of attitudes designed to correct and modify modern ideas that had been perverted or had proved to be overly broad or overly narrow.”⁹⁷ Elkind, who relies on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault for his understanding of postmodernity, states the following:

Postmodernism is... first and foremost a critical attitude toward the values and beliefs of modernity, including such cherished notions of rationality and individual freedom. Foucault and his followers claim that both truth and the human subject that knows truth are cultural productions, not universal constants. Their emphasis is on the embeddedness of all human knowledge in a social, historical and linguistic context.⁹⁸

Put another way, the gist of the postmodern critique of modernity's epistemology is the denial of the unbiased, “disinterested knower” that can “stand beyond history and human society” as a way to obtain a universal knowledge, for “we can never lift ourselves out of the framework within which we speak, live, and work,” but while this is the philosophical critique of postmodernity, the existential

⁹⁵ Allen, 2. Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism : Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4.

⁹⁶ Guder and Barrett, 38.

⁹⁷ Elkind, 20.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

reality for persons living in Western culture is best seen in characteristics of the postmodern condition.⁹⁹

Characteristics of the Postmodern Condition

Darrell Guder lists the following as typical of the human experience in postmodernity; “Endless choices made available by technology, loss of shared experiences, meanings conveyed as surfaces and images, transient relationships, plurality of approaches to sexual expression and experience, increasingly two-tiered economy with many dead-end jobs, personal spirituality without the necessity of organized religion, random violence and clashes between cultures, and feelings of anger or resentment because somebody's left us with a mess.”¹⁰⁰ He then points to our postmodern condition as a result of major changes in three key areas of Enlightenment thinking; truth, self and society.¹⁰¹

Relative Truth

As mentioned above, what has become very evident is that it is impossible for someone to stand outside of their cultural context to discover truth. On this Guder states:

We now acknowledge that everyone works with basic assumptions about reality. This has shifted the focus from epistemology, the question of how we discover truth, to hermeneutics, the question of what assumptions one brings to the pursuit of truth. This move recognizes that all persons live within particular contexts. Therefore they possess specific cultural perspectives that are historically conditioned and shape the way they understand, see, and experience life. This tends to relativize every point of view.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid., 20. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 131.

¹⁰⁰ Guder and Barrett, 37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰² Ibid.

With this being said, it is a misnomer of postmodernity that truth is thoroughly relativistic. It is simply a recognition that truth is not discoverable and known by an objective, rational observer.¹⁰³ With respect to the church, this is an opportunity to return to the roots of our communal faith in the belief that God revealed Himself to a people, Israel, and to be, as the only viable “hermeneutic of the gospel,” a community of who believes it and lives by it.¹⁰⁴

Decentered Self

As mentioned above, the Enlightenment thinkers “sought to promote individual personal freedom” for a person based on “the premise that the individual is rational and autonomous.”¹⁰⁵ However, the violence of the twentieth century revealed the dark side of this belief, e.g. the rise of Nazi Germany, which, in part, led to a “collapse of confidence in the modern self.”¹⁰⁶ Guder observes that this collapse of confidence, “coincided with new developments in the social sciences” which “shifted the focus away from an individual making rational choices” to a social/environmental explanation.¹⁰⁷ Guder then makes an observation that has huge implications for the church’s missional call in this culture:

This decentering of the modern self has left many adrift in the world without clear bearings or a satisfactory direction. This situation poses the pressing problem of reconceptualizing the nature of personhood in terms that hold together individuality and community. Postmodernity is searching for an individuality beyond the empty construct of Western individualism and for a community greater than the social forces that influence it.¹⁰⁸

For the American church, the understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, who is unity in diversity, holds significant implications given our culture’s reconceptualization of personhood and community.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

¹⁰⁵ Guder and Barrett, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 42.

Pluralist Society

The phenomenon of globalization has led to an explosion of “immigration and migration . . . from all parts of the globe,” meaning society has become very diverse with more people having direct contact with other cultures, religions, and traditions other than their own.¹⁰⁹ In addition to this, the growth of entertainment and communication technologies, e.g. internet, e-mail, social networking, gaming, mobile phones, ipods, etc., have contributed to persons having less face-to-face experiences as well as creating an entirely new way of sharing community, i.e. electronic community.¹¹⁰ Guder notes that within our postmodern context and its move away from modernity's individualism the “function of community” is changing. He states:

The context of modernity, with its philosophy of individualism and personal freedom, assumed that persons shared some sense of communal identity. This condition no longer exists for most people as a primary framework for understanding life. The structures that previously shaped such community have eroded. With this erosion, persons find themselves very alone. In this context, individualism is not so much a choice people make as a condition forced upon them.¹¹¹

Included in this forced individualism are the shifts that have taken place in the family system, as

Guder states:

The form of community fostered through the extended family during earlier modernity gradually declined in importance as people moved into urban areas and social mobility accelerated in a capitalist economy. Even the nuclear family that replaced the extended family as a basic social unit has undergone significant change, with rising divorce rates, increases in the number of single-parent households, the prevalence of two-income families, busy lifestyles, and diverse definitions of what constitutes a family.¹¹²

What is evident in our multi-cultural society is that “new forms of community, shaped largely by media and consumer choices, are displacing many of the former structures of community,” but the one major drawback to these new forms is a deficiency in face-to-face contact which has created a

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 43.

¹¹² Ibid.

yearning for real community.¹¹³ Again, for CUMC, the understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, who is unity in diversity, holds significant implications given culture's longing for community. However, the church “is often trapped in the identities formed under the notions of modernity and the social structures pervasive in an earlier era,” which, tragically, has failed to connect with many of the younger generations in the past few decades.¹¹⁴

In summary, the postmodern condition has created a very challenging ministry context for the American church, including CUMC. These societal shifts have resulted in an increasingly diverse population with no sense of historical or cultural metanarrative, and also a deep yearning for community and spirituality.¹¹⁵ Moreover, American society continues to be a very sensual and hedonistic culture, and postmodern persons, who live in this sensual cultural with no historical or moral footing, tend to make decisions based on the emotions and feelings in the moment or with no thought for future consequences.¹¹⁶ It is in this society that the church has been called to mission, yet the American church’s identity is, at times, still entrenched in modernity’s mindset.

The Church in the United States: The Rest of the Story

The church in the West has always “lived in a symbiotic relationship” with Western Christendom, so along with its unique start as an “Enlightenment Project,” the story of the United States is both “deeply enmeshed with the story of modernity” as well as the story of Christendom.¹¹⁷ When the framers signed the U.S. Constitution in 1776, the church and state were officially disestablished, but an informal “functional Christendom” relationship remained, meaning various

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 43-44.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

churches and denominations contributed to the formation of an overarching American culture that “bore the deep imprint of Christian values, language, and expectations regarding moral behaviors.”¹¹⁸ However, in a period of two hundred years the country went from a “functional Christendom,” to a Judeo-Christian Heritage, to the emergence of a Deistic type American “civil religion,” and finally to the 1960’s Cultural Revolution and the marginalization of the church in society.¹¹⁹ Space does not allow for a deep look at this change, but a short look at the decade of the 1960’s is needed.

During the decade of the 1960’s a “host of interrelated movements... swept through society” that dramatically transformed U.S. society and resulted in the marginalization of the church.¹²⁰ These movements, which included the civil rights movement, feminist movement, sexual revolution, ecology movement, black power movement, among others, all had as their common fiber a revolt against the standards of U.S. society up until that time, including the influence of the church.¹²¹ Because of this, “the relationship of churches to society went through significant changes,” most notably, “was the collapse or substantial erosion of much of the church culture that had been built up over a period of two hundred years.”¹²² The idea of “shared public morals” was replaced with individualistic decisions based on private judgement and pleasure, and, maybe most significant, “people no longer assumed that the church had anything relevant to say on matters beyond personal faith.”¹²³ For most of U.S. society, “moral truth had been relativized, and society became individualized,” thus completing the full disestablishment of the U.S. church from a functional

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Christendom, to a Deistic civil religion, and an increasingly post-Christian society.¹²⁴ All of these shifts coalesce in a unique way for CUMC in Jackson, MS.

Specific Developments Impacting CUMC

CUMC finds itself in the increasingly complex ministry context of the Deep South, where a Christian culture is still very influential, but where the postmodern condition with its sensuality and changing morals, is a growing influence. With a general understanding of societal changes in Western and American culture, the next task is a look at the parallel developments in the American church that have particularly impacted CUMC in Jackson, MS. These specific developments are the lingering Christian culture, the corporate, bureaucratic denominational structure, the voluntary society and megachurch, the parachurch movement and the youth ministry movement.

Lingering Christian Culture¹²⁵

Mississippi, has had a long tradition of Christian culture, dating back to even before the Civil War when the Confederacy declared themselves a “Christian nation,” and many of the characteristics of Christendom mentioned above are still exhibited in the ministry context of CUMC.¹²⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports, “The South, by a wide margin, has the heaviest concentration of members of evangelical Protestant churches.”¹²⁷ Also, approximately ninety one percent of Mississippians claim some form of church affiliation (the national average is approximately

¹²⁴ Ibid., 54-55.

¹²⁵ Some of the following includes personal observations of the author who has lived in MS for thirty three years and who worked at CUMC in ministry part time from August 1995 to 1999 and full-time from 2000 to today.

¹²⁶ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South : A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.

¹²⁷ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. and Pew Research Center., *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008* (Washington D C: Pew Research Center, 2008).

seventy-eight percent), and moreover, Mississippi has the highest percentage of people in the U.S. who say their faith is very important (eighty-one percent).¹²⁸ However, the same report stated that only sixty percent regularly attend a religious meeting and only thirty-five percent say their religion is the one true faith.¹²⁹ Moreover, in Mississippi, being a member in a local congregation is culturally assumed, and with church attendance and importance of faith at such a high mark, it is clear that there is an overarching assumption that to be a Mississippian is to be a Christian. Yet, in light of the statistics on church participation and the truth of Christianity, it is also clear that this is Christendom's remnant, and like Christendom, the question of who the true believers are as compared to the "cultural Christians" is frequently raised.

Likewise, with the culture of Mississippi and Jackson being saturated with a cultural Christianity, the same Christendom impact on ecclesiology, discipleship, evangelism, and missiology apply. In the Christian culture of Jackson, church continues, overall in both language and action, to be understood as a place one goes to, and, as a result, the "come to us" mentality of evangelism continues to be prevalent. Similarly, as in Christendom, mission continues to be seen as an activity that the church does in the inner city or in another country, and the historical connection between the white evangelical church and the state/city's racist and segregationist past still shows in the majority of churches being divided along racial lines.¹³⁰ Moreover, with CUMC being a conservative church, there is an underlying assumption that part of the mission of the church is politically tied to conservative politics. Lastly, since CUMC's membership is made up of upper middle class families

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. The "U.S. Religious Landscape" methodology did not separate religions in the questions concerning attendance and the view on whether or not their religion was the one true faith, but since Mississippi has such a low percentage (less than eight percent) of non-Christian respondents I did not feel it changed the Christian culture atmosphere.

¹³⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith : Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

with financial means, coupled with the consumer minded materialistic U.S. culture, then tendency to assume that the values and materialism of American's upper middle class are one and the same with the Christian faith, is a very strong tendency.¹³¹ CUMC as a church does show characteristics of all these elements of Christian culture, making a call to costly biblical discipleship a difficult endeavor.

Corporate, Bureaucratic Denominational Structure

As a United Methodist Church, CUMC participates in the UMC's connectional ecclesiastical structure which is a project of modernity's focus on bureaucratic organizational structures. As a type of denomination, "Corporate Denominations" came into being in early years of the twentieth century and were/are characterized by a diversity of boards, committees and staff arranged in a modern hierarchal management structure, and for church members this resulted in an identity that merged their Christian identity and denominational loyalty.¹³² This is a description of the United Methodist Church.¹³³

This structure functioned well in a church culture, but in a postmodern culture the mission of the church has tended to be denominational survival.¹³⁴ As part of the UMC, CUMC is entrenched in the corporate structure with a large portion of its membership who hold denominational loyalty as a high priority, though, over the past ten years only twenty five percent of CUMC's new members have been UMC transfers, indicating that denominational loyalty may be declining.¹³⁵ Lastly, the modern bureaucratic structure of the UMC has influenced the departmentalization of the various CUMC

¹³¹ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 216-238; Mueller.

¹³² Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 65-66.

¹³³ UMC Structure and Organization,

http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.1720697/k.734E/Structure__Organization__Organization.htm

¹³⁴ Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 65-66.

¹³⁵ This number comes from a Shelby Systems report run on May 21, 2010 by my administrative assistant Rhonda Berry.

ministries, e.g. Children's department, Youth department, Music department, etc., which the church continues to struggle with.

Voluntary Society and Megachurch

The “voluntary society” is an organization where people voluntarily come together for a common reason.¹³⁶ In the past, geographical, denominational, ethnic, etc. commonalities were the reasons people came together as a church, however, due to the high mobility of today's individuals, coupled with their individualist consumer mindset, the tendency is for the church to be a voluntary society of people who see the church as a “*vendor of religious services and goods*” that the staff provides for members.¹³⁷ Similarly, since this is done in a culture of competition with other local churches, the church employees modern marketing techniques as a way to draw people to the church, as well as keep existing members.¹³⁸ This is particularly descriptive of megachurches, and although CUMC is entrenched in the United Methodist structure, as a five thousand member megachurch, it has been influenced by the consumerist mindset as it attempts to minister in a highly competitive church culture.¹³⁹ As an example of this “*vendor of religious goods and services*” and consumerist tendency, it is noted that in the 1980's and 1990's CUMC was the place to be due to the quality children's and youth programs the church offered, which fuel rapid growth, but during this past decade other “consumer options” came available in the suburbs which have drained some of CUMC's families.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 146-147.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 43, 84; Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.

¹³⁹ Dave Marshall, Personal Interview, by Wes Ingram, December 12, 2008, History of Christ Umc Youth Ministry. Jackson. Systems.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Parachurch Organizations

With respect to youth in particular, competition with the parachurch organization, Young Life, is also a ministry reality for CUMC. Parachurch organizations are Christian organizations that “exist for a specific religious activity or function” and often pick up “a ministry that is underdeveloped within congregations or neglected in denominational programs.”¹⁴¹ Young Life, which was founded to reach teens who were not being reached by local churches, is the main parachurch ministry in Jackson, and given the competitive nature of the ministry context, Young Life and CUMC, along with other local churches, often find themselves in a competitive relationship in ministry to area youth, most of whom are active members of CUMC or other local churches.¹⁴² This has contributed to the consumer mindset of area teens, and a tense relationship between local churches and Young Life.

The Youth Ministry Movement

The last historical movement that has had an influence on the ministry context of CUMC is the youth ministry movement of the twentieth century. Young Life founder Jim Rayburn has been credited with pioneering the relational model of youth ministry when he founded Young Life in 1941.¹⁴³ Before Young Life, ministry to adolescents was typically some form of Christian pietism and/or education, but as youth culture grew, evangelical groups began to hold large rallies across the country while mainline protestant churches formed fellowship groups, e.g. Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) groups, cir. 1941, as the main way to minister to youth and build denominational loyalty, although this format was abandoned in the 1960s in order to “integrate youth in the total

¹⁴¹ Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 74-75.

¹⁴² Chap Clark, Class Notes, by Wes Ingram, November 2009, Class Notes: Youth, Family and Culture Cohort. Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

mission of the church.”¹⁴⁴ However, for mainline protestant churches in that decade, like the UMC, integrating “youth into the mission of the church” typically meant focusing on the membership youth’s denominational loyalty and social issues rather than a biblical understanding of the gospel.¹⁴⁵

It was Rayburn and Young Life who pioneered the relational model of youth ministry, consisting of “earning the right to be heard” relationship building and club meetings, where youth would play games, sing and hear a gospel message.¹⁴⁶ This model hit a nerve with youth and grew rapidly, and, out of a motivation to stop losing youth to the various parachurch organizations, local churches essentially attached the parachurch structure and programming onto the existing church structure, creating the “one-eared Mickey Mouse” structure.¹⁴⁷ In this model the church “had the best of both worlds – an attractive, relationally sensitive, culturally relevant program for their own students; and a mechanism to keep them involved in their church.”¹⁴⁸ While CUMC was a little late in hiring its first full time youth minister (1985), the church did mimic this model. The church’s youth ministry quickly became a very vibrant part of the church, as it is today, though the model brought with it some negatives which will be addressed in the last section.

These parallel developments in the U.S. church flowed out of societal change and have influenced and impacted the local congregation of CUMC, and with the expressed task of looking at the church’s youth ministry, the next step in the understanding of CUMC youth ministry context is an understanding of adolescence.

¹⁴⁴ Mark Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, Youth, Family, and Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 200-210. Kenda Creasy Dean, "The New Rhetoric of Youth Ministry," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 2, no. 2 (November 2003): 9.

¹⁴⁵ Senter, 201-202.

¹⁴⁶ Class Notes, by Ingram, Youth, Family and Culture Cohort.

¹⁴⁷ Stuart Cummings-Bond, "The One-Eared Mickey Mouse," *Youth Worker* (1989): 76-78.

¹⁴⁸ Chap Clark, ed. Mark Senter, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church : Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2001), 83.

Section Three: Youth and Youth Ministry

With the understanding of the ministry context for CUMC's youth ministry, it is now pertinent to understand exactly who "youth" are. This involves an understanding of the stage of life called adolescence, as well as the reality of adolescents in today's late modern society.

Who are "Youth"

The word "youth" is somewhat of a nebulous term that, for most of the world, means anyone who is not an adult, even up to midthirties, and likewise, the equally nebulous term "adolescence," from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning "to grow up," is typically used interchangeably with "youth."¹⁴⁹ The way we use the terms today is much different from the way they were used prior to the twentieth century, e.g. through the Middle Ages terms "youth" and "adolescence" were used to refer to those "young people who had reached puberty but had not achieved full adult social rights."¹⁵⁰ The key difference here is that "young people" then were more akin to, what today we might refer to as, young adults who were not children or teens but were entering the adult phase of life.¹⁵¹ Likewise, as Senter notes, in nineteenth century America, "youth" were persons who could be "gainfully employed" but not "self-employed" or ready for marriage, and the passage to adulthood came when a boy or girl could physically "work like a man [woman]."¹⁵² This began to change, however, towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Beginning with Stanley Hall's work, Adolescence, in 1904, the term adolescence came to mean "late childhood," and by the 1920's "the emerging youth subculture" was here to stay as a

¹⁴⁹ Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, 27.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties/Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 44.

¹⁵² Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, 27-28.

fixture of American society.¹⁵³ It was not until 1960, however, that adolescence was considered a “legitimate phase of the life span” between childhood and adulthood, but even then youth were considered adults upon high school graduation.¹⁵⁴ However, today, due to the societal shifts discussed above, adolescence has lengthened, so much so that people up to 25 or older may be considered “youth.”¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in general, youth are persons who are in the adolescent life stage, and in light of the stated missional youth ministry task a better understanding of this stage of life is needed, including the span, goal, and characteristics of the adolescence stage of life.

The Span of Adolescence

It is widely recognized that the span of adolescence is widening. Adolescence roughly begins with the onset of puberty (biology) and ends when the adults in society recognize that the person is ready to take on the role of adult (culture).¹⁵⁶ Since the beginning and ending of adolescence, which varies greatly from person to person, directly impacts the CUMC’s youth ministry, it will be beneficial to expound on the span of adolescence.

Beginning in Biology

Puberty, which is the physiological process of a child becoming an adult, is “the oft-cited beginning point of adolescence.”¹⁵⁷ For girls the onset of puberty has been steadily dropping over the past one hundred plus years, dropping from approximately fourteen in 1900 to as early as eleven today, and while the start of puberty for boys is much more difficult to determine, it typically begins as

¹⁵³ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 44.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44, 52.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵⁶ John W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

¹⁵⁷ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 45.

early as thirteen.¹⁵⁸ Though it is debatable as to when “the exact physiological changes of puberty begin,” it is an observable fact that the onset of puberty is beginning at a younger age, and given that adolescence is tied to puberty, this means the “psychological process of adolescence is beginning earlier as well.”¹⁵⁹ Chap Clark expounds on this idea:

It is interesting to note that these developmental shifts have taken place in both the physiology impacting adolescence and in the psychosocial factors that influence adolescence at the same time... The timing of and entrance into adolescence, then, is marked by a physiological (having to do with functioning of the body) event (puberty) but is generally described and discussed as a psychological (having to do with mind and behavior) as well as sociological (having to do with relationships and human interaction) event. This is why the developmental aspect of adolescence is often referred to [as] a psychosocial phenomenon.¹⁶⁰

This observation concerning the biological starting point of adolescence, the holistic nature of the changes that begin to take place simultaneously during adolescence, and the fact that the age when this happens is dropping, has significant ramifications for the philosophical and structural starting point of youth ministry.

Ending in Culture

While adolescent begins in biology with the onset of puberty, it is the culture's use of markers, including rites of passages, training, etc., that distinguishes between the roles of childhood and adulthood. Markers are “external signs of our progress” in life that “proclaim our movement toward maturity,” and serve as passages to “new responsibilities and new restraints, as well as new freedoms.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, the markers “must be social as well as personal,” because no matter how “personally gratifying the attainment of certain markers is, such attainments mean much more when

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 45-52.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 45-46.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶¹ David Elkind, *All Grown up and No Place to Go : Teenagers in Crisis*, Rev. ed. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 111-112.

they are accompanied by social recognition.”¹⁶² However, having said this, “across the centuries and cultures it has been far easier to demarcate the line between a child and an adult than between an adolescent and an adult,” as evidenced by our culture's lack of markers.¹⁶³

Today in contemporary society “the only real marker available to youth growing up in Western and urbanized societies is the process of adolescence itself,” which has no clear ending point.¹⁶⁴ Even the age restricted privileges, e.g. getting a driver's license, voting and buying tobacco and alcohol, are not considered sufficient to end “the adolescent journey” by most developmental theorists.¹⁶⁵ This lack of true cultural markers that “proclaim our movement” from adolescence to adulthood is a major issue for American culture as “the adolescent journey continues to stretch into what centuries of human culture have considered the adult years.”¹⁶⁶ Likewise, this is also of concern for churches whose calling to youth ministry involves assimilating youth into the adult responsibilities of congregational life.

The Goal of Adolescence

The “primary and basic” goal of the adolescence can be summed up in the word “individuation,” which means “becoming one's own person.”¹⁶⁷ In Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, Chap Clark, combining the thought of several scholars, provides a description of adolescence individuation:

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 46-47.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid; James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit : Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 286.

A standard definition of adolescence comes down to ‘two main components - separateness and self-assertion.’ Other scholars add to this drive for uniqueness (‘separateness’) and quest for personal autonomy (‘self-assertion’) a desire to move toward the discovery of community, belonging, and interdependence. Adolescence, then, is a psychosocial, independent search for a unique identity or separateness, with the end goals being a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming, and a realized commitment to live with others in community.¹⁶⁸

Put in more simplistic terms, Clark summarizes the tasks of individuation: “The task of discovering identity... Who am I?; The task of accepting responsibility for one's life, or achieving autonomy... Do I matter?; The task of reconnecting in appropriate ways to others in community... How do I relate to others?”¹⁶⁹

It is important to note that individuation is the transition from the “role” of child to the “role” of adult, and that the goal is not individualism, e.g. movement away from family and community, but is a transition to the adult role found in communal interdependence.¹⁷⁰ It is also important to note that the adolescent process of individuation is now understood to happen in three distinct stages, early, mid and late adolescence. The following is a very brief overview of these stages.

Early Adolescence: 11/12 to 13/14 Years of Age

During a person's first decade or so of life his identity is firmly grounded in family relationship, meaning his parents and extended family must provide protection and nurturing, helping the child grow independent in a healthy way.¹⁷¹ In doing so, the child will develop a healthy “sense of security and self-confidence” to enter into the early adolescence phase of individuation and identity formation, which typically occurs at eleven or twelve years of age.¹⁷² During early adolescence a

¹⁶⁸ Clark, 28.

¹⁶⁹ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 54-55.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷² Ibid.

youth, who is still a concrete thinker, is beginning to ask the questions of identity for the first time, and though his/her identity is “still firmly fixed within the context of the family system,” he/she will begin to try on “new identities.”¹⁷³ In this stage “the family is still the foundation of loyalty and support” for a youth, and he/she is more concerned with stable, safe and supportive familial relationships than with “leaving parents behind in the search for meaningful peer relationships.”¹⁷⁴

Mid-Adolescence: 13/14 to 18/19 Years of Age

Mid-Adolescence is a new stage of adolescent development that researchers began noticing in the 1980's, and by the 1990's it had “emerged as a distinct phase” of development.¹⁷⁵ Mid-Adolescence resulted from the lengthening of the adolescent process and is typified by both newfound freedoms, but also a “sense of isolation and vulnerability.”¹⁷⁶ Clark notes that many of the “newfound freedoms that accompany midadolescence were originally designed for late adolescence,” e.g. the freedom to drive, and a “mid-adolescent, in contrast to a late adolescent, retains the residue of self-centered childhood and may not have the developmental acumen to” handle many of the crucial new freedoms.¹⁷⁷ Likewise, Clark notes two other crucial characteristics that flow out of a mid-adolescent's self-centeredness. One is that mid-adolescents tend to understand the future in terms of “what's in it for me?,” meaning that “appeals to the future may be motivating factors” for some, but for most it is ignored as “one more adult mantra.”¹⁷⁸ Second is the tendency for mid-adolescents to compartmentalize their newly developed ability for abstract thought, meaning that most lacked the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 56.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 53-57.

¹⁷⁵ Clark, 35.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 50.

¹⁷⁸ Clark, 35.

ability to “integrate the many layers of their lives with any sense of abstract cohesion.”¹⁷⁹ It is this reality that Clark refers to as “ego-centric abstraction.”¹⁸⁰

In light of these realities, the role of the mid-adolescent's family plays a crucial role. During mid-adolescence a youth has grown to the point where familial support is “seldom claimed... as a significant point of security,” but this does not mean family support is not important.¹⁸¹ On the contrary, during the mid-adolescence a youth needs family support, “especially a father's blessing, affirmation, and attachment,” but this is typically “sought out from a safe relational and sociological distance.”¹⁸² Likewise, it is during this stage that youth become more social, seeking to discover who they are in relation to peers, and during this stage of individuation a mid-adolescent needs to know that her family is available if she wants or needs them.¹⁸³ Lastly, research shows that healthy parental attachment will enable a youth to “more quickly and confidently” complete the process of adolescence and become a confident adult.¹⁸⁴

Late Adolescence: 18/19 to mid 20's Years of Age

Clark makes the observation that in today's world “late adolescence is an almost developmentally unnecessary but still dominant phase of the adolescent process.”¹⁸⁵ A typical older adolescent is potentially ready to be a responsible contributor to his community, but older adolescents are, as Clark states:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Class Notes, by Ingram, Youth, Family and Culture Cohort.

¹⁸¹ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 56-57.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

...often held back by systemic and environmental factors - parents who empower sloth and financial dependency, and educational system that treats the undergraduate curriculum as barely adequate preparation for graduate school, and media and advertising industries that make a far larger profit by appealing to the young to stay young... it just seems too easy to stay a kid and float until one has no choice but to grow up.¹⁸⁶

Most late adolescents are ready to make the leap into responsible adulthood, but our culture, which tends to “deify youth and youthful irresponsibility,” proves to be a strong influence.¹⁸⁷

While this has been a very brief overview of adolescence, it is this understanding of adolescence as a time where a person's identity and communal interdependence is formed, that has significant ramifications for CUMC's call to missional youth ministry. However, though social factors were alluded to above, the reason that adolescence even exists needs to be addressed.

Why this new stage of life?

Adolescence as a separate phase of life between childhood and adulthood is a recent sociological phenomenon, and for this reason it is widely recognized by scholars to be an “invention of society.”¹⁸⁸ The sociological factors that contributed to the emergence of adolescences include the passing of child labor and compulsory education laws, the post World War II baby boom, and the progressive loss of “social capital.”¹⁸⁹

By the 1930's child labor laws had been around in some form for several decades, but it was in 1938 during the Great Depression when President Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act that marked the moment “when adolescents were no longer part of the American workforce.”¹⁹⁰ In a

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁸⁹ Class Notes, by Ingram, Youth, Family and Culture Cohort.

¹⁹⁰ Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, 31.

closely related matter, compulsory attendance laws were passed at different times during the first two decades of the twentieth century. On these two laws Mark Senter states:

The combination of child labor laws and compulsory school attendance further defined adolescence. Public high schools became the gathering place for youth. It was expected that most people ages fourteen through seventeen would no longer have the option to live independently or set out to seek their fortunes. Nor would they contribute to the economic viability of the family. Adolescence became a period of dependence and postponed dreams.¹⁹¹

While the labor laws and compulsory education contributed to adolescence being seen as a separate stage of life, it was the post-World War II baby boom, which saw teenagers as a percentage of the total population jump to “an all-time high of 52 percent,” thus demanding the targeted attention from advertisers and marketers, that contributed to the growth of the youth subculture both numerically and culturally.¹⁹² However, though these factors led to adolescence and an American “teenage culture,” the primary cause of the today's adolescent reality is the progressive loss of “social capital.”

Today's Adolescents: Abandoned¹⁹³

“Social Capital” is the sociological term given to the social networks, or community, that gives a person his/her sense of identity and purpose.¹⁹⁴ For adolescents, social capital provided by a loving, supportive adult community, including family, church, school, etc., is essential for healthy identity formation and a sense of purpose, and for adolescents growing up in the 1950's and 1960's, American society was “still orderly, especially compared to today's standards,” with the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 249-309.

¹⁹² Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure* (El Cajon, CA; Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties Academic; Zondervan, 2004), 173.

¹⁹³ Both David Elkind and Chap Clark, throughout *Ties that Stress and Hurt* respectively, stress that they are using broad strokes to describe culture change and are not suggesting that every family and adolescent has fully experienced the results of their research.

¹⁹⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

various “adult-led organizations and structures . . . primarily focused on caring for the individual as well as the corporate needs of adolescents.”¹⁹⁵ Likewise, during this period the typical American family was a safe, secure and nurturing place for children and adolescents to grow and mature.¹⁹⁶ This was good social capital, which resulted in the task of adolescence being a relatively stable and short stage of life, however this picture of adolescent life would change with the social upheaval in the 1960's.¹⁹⁷

The societal shifts that took place beginning in 1960's deeply impacted the social capital of the adult population, meaning adults had less to give to the nurturing and raising the next generation.¹⁹⁸ This, over time, resulted in a society of adults that began to turn to the very “systems, structures, organizations, and institutions that were designed to nurture and care for the young,” including schools, sports leagues, activities, and church groups, as an outlet to deal with their own pain and loss of social capital.¹⁹⁹ However, not only did societal changes affect the institutions that worked with adolescents, resulting in less institutional social capital, but the social capital that adolescents received from family was to be impacted as well.

In Ties that Stress, David Elkind lays out the way in which the before mentioned cultural changes from the modern world to the postmodern world have impacted the family system, which he divides into the modern “nuclear family” and postmodern “permeable family.”²⁰⁰ Elkind argues that the modern world's focus on the self-evident truths of the inevitable progress of society, the universality of natural laws, and the regularity of the universe were applied to everything in society,

¹⁹⁵ Clark, 32.

¹⁹⁶ Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance*, 1-2.

¹⁹⁷ Clark, 32.

¹⁹⁸ Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance*.

¹⁹⁹ Clark, 33.

²⁰⁰ Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance*.

including the family system.²⁰¹ Moreover, a Darwinian understanding of progress was applied to the family system, resulting in the post World War II “nuclear family,” made up of two adults and at least one child, being seen by society as the ideal form of family, not because of the quality of relationships within the family, but strictly because of the structure itself.²⁰² In other words it was the structure of the nuclear family that was ideal, not necessarily the quality of the relationships individual family members that made the family work.²⁰³

The characteristics of the nuclear family revolved around the importance of the family's role in providing a safe place for child rearing and the togetherness of the family.²⁰⁴ The positive aspect of this “nuclear family” structure was that it benefitted children and adolescents by providing good social capital and definite boundaries from the negative influences of society, enabling children and adolescents to devote themselves to the task of growing up, but the negative aspect of this structure, which included the understanding that gender roles also had evolved, was that it placed the stress on adults, particularly mothers.²⁰⁵ It was this imbalance that shifted to children and adolescents after the social revolution of the 1960's and contributed to the abandonment of adolescents by adults.

Elkind argues that the postmodern “permeable family” structure is designed to meet the needs of adults, but places the stress on children and adolescents by removing the boundaries and safety, thereby making them grow up too fast.²⁰⁶ In the “permeable family,” as Elkind states, “Contemporary children were no longer protected and shielded from some of life's harsher realities, exempted from adult decision making and responsibilities, or given opportunities to engage in the play and pastimes

²⁰¹ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

unique to childhood.”²⁰⁷ The characteristics of the “permeable family” reflect the characteristics of postmodern society, e.g. fragmentation, decentralization, new standards of morality and a frantic pace of life, but, is still built on modernity's commitment to autonomous individualism.²⁰⁸ However, the permeable family structure, which Elkind compares to a railway station, meets the individualistic needs of adults in this fragmented, busy society, but puts the stress on children and adolescence; as Elkind states:

For work-oriented parents, the home as a station, to come to and depart from, is need-fulfilling. A railway station is a noisy hub of activity that provides food, information, and transportation much more than it provides nurturance. But for children and teenagers, the home as a station is often less than satisfactory. As in a station, no matter how many people are about, the young person often feels lonely and alone.²⁰⁹

Thomas Oden states that in modernity narcissism is the key, meaning, “Myself becomes the central project of moral interest; self-enjoyment and self-development become the central goals,” and this narcissism has bled over into contemporary parenting, or as Oden calls it “antiparenting,” where the parents’ focus is more on their own happiness than it is on parenting their children.²¹⁰ The result of all of this is adolescents have been abandoned.

The Outworking of Abandonment

The changes in American society have been dramatic over the past four or five decades, resulting in systemic abandonment of adolescents, and what is equally alarming is that this systemic abandonment has coincided with the lengthening of adolescence. What this means for adolescents, particularly mid-adolescents, is that the years when persons most need (and want) the guidance of adults who are committed to walking with them as they complete the task of adolescence, they are left

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁰⁸ Oden, *After Modernity-- What? : Agenda for Theology*, 195-197.

²⁰⁹ Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance*, 58.

²¹⁰ Oden, *After Modernity-- What? : Agenda for Theology*, 79.

on their own.²¹¹ In order to understand how this systemic abandonment has impacted teens, a look again at the three tasks of individuation will be helpful: “the task of discovering identity . . . Who am I?; the task of accepting responsibility for one's life, or achieving autonomy . . . Do I matter?; and the task of reconnecting in appropriate ways to others in community . . . How do I relate to others?”²¹² Again, because the task of adolescence is accomplished in and through community, coupled with the fact that contemporary adolescence is the result of the loss of social capital, means adolescents are left to answer these questions on their own. The outworking of this situation is a new society in the world beneath, a new form of relationship in clusters and a layered identity or divided self.²¹³

A Complex Social Reality²¹⁴

It is important to note that while the culture of systemic abandonment impacts both children and adolescents equally, because the cognitive ability for abstract thought, and self reflection, does not begin until mid-adolescence, the impact of the abandonment is not fully felt, or reacted to, until the high school years.²¹⁵ In Hurt, Chap Clark states, “By the time adolescents enter high school, nearly every one has been subjected to a decade or more of adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adults' agendas, needs, and dreams,” and as a result of this reality, mid-adolescents, out of a desire for community and a safe place, have had to create their own social system and culture with its own set of rules, which Clark calls “the world beneath.”²¹⁶

²¹¹ Clark, 53-55.

²¹² Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 54-55.

²¹³ Clark.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46, 56-70.

Adolescents live in an adult-centered agenda driven world where they are sized up, judged and separated based on skill and performance. Mid-adolescents all along the talent scale recognize that they are judged and valued by their performance, therefore one of the crucial life skills that an adolescent has to develop is the ability to “navigate the multiple expectations of teachers, parents, and other adults” while sustaining relationships with peers, as well as learning how to balance loyalties between family and peers.²¹⁷ This involves learning how to navigate through the stressful maze of adults, including parents, coaches, teachers, youth ministers, etc., most of whom have their own specific performance agenda for teens, and each representing a layer of their identity, each with its own specific challenges, they must balance.²¹⁸ Moreover, as mentioned above, mid-adolescents, who live out of a framework of “ego-centric abstraction,” have yet to develop the ability to integrate their layers, and this results in mid-adolescents living out contradictory multi-layered selves as they respond to the different adult agendas.²¹⁹ It is out of this reality that their world beneath society provides midadolescents “the respite they need to survive the aggressive anonymity of the high school world,” and the social landscape of the world beneath is populated by groupings of friends called clusters.²²⁰

Clusters, which start to form at the beginning of mid-adolescence, are “smaller groupings of friends... who navigate as a unit the complex network of social interdependence with a loyalty similar to that of a family,” i.e. clusters are the way adolescents attempt to fulfill the need for safety and community (social capital).²²¹ These friendship groupings are united by “a set of respected and controlled expectations, loyalties, and values,” but, in Clark's words, what really unites a cluster “is a

²¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 64.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

²²⁰ Ibid., 64.

²²¹ Ibid., 74-75.

common, almost tribalistic bond and unifying social narrative.”²²² Similarly, whereas in years past, particularly the post World War II era, teens shared a sense of community based on a common high school, neighborhood and even church, today these elements represent a forced and false sense of community; the cluster is their safe community.²²³

With respect to the differences between clusters and cliques, a clique is a set of friends that are chosen out of a recognized need for interdependent community, whereas clusters are groupings of friends of the same “social narrative” that group together for mutual self-protection.²²⁴ Likewise, the bonding agent of cliques is a true mutual self-giving relationship, whereas the bonding agent of a cluster is more “contractual” with ego-centric motivations at its heart.²²⁵ With respect to timing, clustering is a sign that a teenager has moved from early adolescence to mid-adolescence and is now reassessing his/her social standing and the need for a group to provide safety.²²⁶ Lastly, the cluster a teenager is in, which usually lasts through the end of high school, is a big determinant whether or not, and to what extent, a teen participates in the self-destructive behaviors, e.g. drinking, drug use, sexual activity, cutting, etc., that have come to define contemporary adolescence.²²⁷

While space does not allow a full discussion of the teenage subculture, it is pertinent to understand that the pressures and risky behavior that adolescents engage in flow out of the culture of abandonment and stress and are a reflection of American society’s values with its “narcissistic hedonism” and loosening sexual morals.²²⁸ It stands to reason that persons who are in the life stage of

²²² Ibid., 75.

²²³ Ibid., 85-86.

²²⁴ Class notes, Youth Family and Culture Cohort, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 2009.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Clark, 82-83.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Elkind, *Ties That Stress : The New Family Imbalance*, 188-208; Oden, *After Modernity-- What? : Agenda for Theology*, 31.

identity formation and who need the nurturing of caring adults for the healthy completion of the process, would conform to the powerful influences of a community-starved and sensual society if those nurturing and guiding adults were absent. However, the reverse is also true, for no matter how fragmented and hedonistic society becomes, social relationships have much more power on us than ecological factors ever can.²²⁹ This is the context in which the youth ministry movement began and grew.

Back to the Youth Ministry Movement

Beginning in the late 1960's and early 1970's through today, youth ministry has been a distinct movement in the American church, but as history shows, it has also primarily been a white middle-class movement.²³⁰ During this era most American churches that could afford to, hired someone to focus on youth ministry, and youth ministers, with the help of Youth Specialties, Group, and others, became highly resourced.²³¹ Also, as colleges and seminaries began offering degree programs, youth ministry became more professional, meaning less people used youth ministry as a stepping stone to other ministry roles.²³² However, despite the professionalization, because of the “one-eared Mickey Mouse” model mentioned above, youth ministry in local churches tended to become a program/department of the church where ministry to teenagers took place, and the youth minister, having to function as a jack of all ministry trades, e.g. teacher, programmer, worship leader, volunteer trainer, administrator, trip planner, evangelist, counselor, communications expert, etc., was the person hired to do youth ministry.²³³ Also, while the youth ministry movement adapted the

²²⁹ Class notes, Youth Family and Culture Cohort, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 2009.

²³⁰ Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, 249-309.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

parachurch model to the local church, it lost the zeal and commitment the parachurch organizations' had to going to youth in favor of settling for ministry to those who would come to it.²³⁴ Again, this was happening in primarily white, middle class churches, and such demographics, along with the quasi parachurch model, are the source of the main criticisms that youth ministry is too white, too entertainment focused, too separated, and too shallow.²³⁵ In the twenty-first century the church is beginning to feel the reality of these criticisms, as Mark Senter notes, "The bad news is that youth ministry in the twentieth century has shaped the Protestant church of the twenty-first century," for many of the flaws of youth ministry in the twentieth century are manifesting themselves today in "Doctrinally thin, ethically tolerant, and consumer oriented" adults and students; i.e. Christians whose identity and mission reflect culture more than Jesus Christ.²³⁶

The failures of twentieth century youth ministry have not come from a lack of creativity, professionalism, training, resources, and available activities and experiences for youth, for all of these have been abundantly available. The greatest failures in the youth ministry movement have been the failure of churches to enfold youth into the full life and mission of the congregation, as well as the failure of the youth ministry movement to adapt to the before mentioned changes in American adolescence and the increasing diversity of the American landscape.²³⁷

Section Four: Implications for Christ United Methodist Church

As shown above, CUMC is a congregation that has been shaped by Christendom, modernity and postmodernity which has manifested itself in the church's upper-middle class identity and values, an understanding of missions as an activity of the church that happens in the inner city or in another

²³⁴ Ibid., 43-98.

²³⁵ Ibid., 249-309.

²³⁶ Ibid., 309.

²³⁷ Ibid.

country, a highly departmentalized ministry structure, and the historical “one-eared Mickey Mouse” model of youth ministry, fostering the view that youth ministry is something performed by the youth staff and their volunteers with the youth who are in the church or who are willing to come to the church. This congregational reality is set within a complex and changing ministry context that has also been profoundly shaped by an overarching cultural Christianity as well as the societal baggage and brokenness of modernity and the yearning for community and metanarrative of the postmodern condition, and while God has worked in and through the congregation in powerful ways over the course of its forty-nine year history, the adult congregation of CUMC must, in order to have a vibrant, transformative youth ministry, embrace their communal identity in Jesus Christ as His called out missional body and understand that youth ministry is not a department or sub-ministry of the church, but is a vital missional calling of the entire church to evangelize, disciple and assimilate youth into the full life of the congregation and its mission. The following are implications for the communal life and missional outreach of the church.

Implications for the communal life of the church

In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin states that in today’s society “the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it.”²³⁸ Given the Trinitarian foundation of communal life, the adolescent task of identity formation and understanding of one’s role and interaction in community, and the understanding that a person’s identity and understanding of truth comes from communal participation, a church’s ability to make disciples of youth, teaching them to love and obey Jesus, hinges on the adult congregation’s identity as a community in Jesus and their incarnating of the gospel in everyday life.

²³⁸Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 234.

As mentioned above, the current pastoral leadership of CUMC has begun a three plus year congregational wide discernment process of listening to God in order to reaffirm its identity in Jesus Christ and discern the missional vision God has for the congregation in its ministry context. In this process the church, with an understanding that it has been called as a sent community to make disciples, will discern its core values and its unique Spirit-led missional calling in its ministry context. In light of this current discernment process through which the church will affirm its identity in Jesus as His sent community, the internal implications for the church's youth ministry are a needed congregational paradigm shift, a look at the cultural language and markers within the life of the church, and the role of staff.

A Paradigm Shift

The first implication for CUMC's youth ministry is that the church as a whole needs to make a paradigm shift from the paradigm that sees youth ministry as a department with hired staff to do ministry, to seeing youth ministry as a vital aspect of the church's mission in the world. As mentioned above, the history of CUMC's youth ministry has followed the historical track of the youth ministry movement by hiring a full-time youth minister in 1985 and, essentially, attaching the parachurch ministry model to the congregation.²³⁹ From this point, the paradigm of youth ministry was a relational, programmatic and staff centered youth group model that the congregation applauded as it became the "in youth group" in Jackson. The staff centered focus did not change as the ministry grew through the late 1990's and into the twenty-first century when it continued to function as its own entity by adding more staff, implementing small groups, adding regional and international mission trips, new

²³⁹ Dave Marshall, by Ingram, History of Christ Umc Youth Ministry. The following is from this interview as well as the experience of the author who worked part time from August 1995 to 1999 and began his full-time tenure in 2000.

outreach events, etc. In November of 2004 the church made a complete campus move to a brand new facility, but the building layout, which had a youth center wing that, while physically part of the building, was set apart from the central common areas of the building, only reinforced and expanded the idea that youth ministry was its own entity and the staff did the youth ministry. However, over the past four years concerted efforts have been made to involve as many parents and other adults in the church's youth ministry, as well as involve youth in ministry with younger youth and children, but the overall paradigm of youth ministry as a department with staff paid to do the ministry continues to linger among the congregation.

The new paradigm must be a communal understanding of youth ministry. A communal paradigm of youth ministry understands that it is the missional call of the entire adult congregation to raise up and disciple adolescents in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6. Moreover, a communal paradigm of youth ministry flows out of a Trinitarian ecclesiology that sees the local church not as a religious organization, volunteer society, or marketplace of religious goods and services, but as a "family of families" whose members, out of their common identity in Christ, live in a self-giving relationship as a body and not as autonomous individuals.²⁴⁰ In this paradigm of youth ministry each youth, whether they are flesh and blood relatives or not, are seen as the church family's precious children who need both a loving household and loving extended church family. In this paradigm of youth ministry every church member and staff member is part of the church's youth ministry, and in light of today's systemic abandonment and deficiency of the social capital that is so crucial to adolescent development, this type of youth ministry where each youth will be known and cared for by multiple caring adults, is needed more than ever.

²⁴⁰ Dennis B. Guernsey, *A New Design for Family Ministry* (Elgin, IL: D.C. Cook Pub. Co., 1982).

A New Culture

CUMC is in the middle of a paradigm shift to a communal understanding of youth ministry, but several cultural shifts are needed in order to move more fully to this paradigm of youth ministry. One such cultural area is language. From the congregation's standpoint, the language associated with the programmatic and staff centered youth ministry paradigm, or youth ministry as its own entity, is based in second person singular pronouns, e.g. "your youth," and/or "your youth ministry," or definite articles, e.g. "the youth," and/or "the youth ministry," and since language is inseparable from culture, making the paradigm shift involves the intentional usage of second personal plural pronouns, "our youth," "our youth ministry," etc., by every member and staff member.²⁴¹

Secondly, in light of the before mentioned shifts in American society, a growing understanding of who youth are and the challenges society presents them, along with a corresponding compassion, is a must for the adult congregation of CUMC. Similarly, considering American's rapid drift to a post-Christian society, abandoning Christian culture's tendency of assuming people will come to the church is another needed cultural change at CUMC. There must be an overarching paradigm shift among the adult congregation at the church that understands the youth ministry as a missional calling to disciple youth, which implies the adults of CUMC being proactive in making relationships with youth, both membership youth and youth in the surrounding community.

Also, given the disappearance of American society's cultural markers for adulthood, it is pertinent for CUMC to develop true discipleship markers, rites of passage, and corresponding church celebrations for its youth in order to disciple them into the full adult responsibility of church membership. Directly connected to the discipleship markers is the continued shift of understanding

²⁴¹ David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence : Improving Your Cq to Engage Our Multicultural World*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 111-114.

that the ultimate goal of youth ministry is not entertainment, education or even keeping youth involved, but assimilating youth fully into the congregational life and mission of the church as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, a major culture shift, which CUMC is currently in the middle of, is the philosophical shift in the understanding of the roles staff and laity in the church's missional call. This is a shift from a paradigm where the staff is paid to do the ministry to a biblical understanding of church leadership as equippers of the laity for the mission of the church to go and make disciples (Eph. 4:11-16). For the youth ministry staff this involves equipping the laity to disciple youth, but it also involves moving away from the youth minister as a jack of all trades to an interdependent equipping relationship with other ministry staff who, as youth are more fully assimilated into the church's mission, are working closely with youth themselves.²⁴²

Implications for the Missional Outreach of the Church

Along with the congregation's "hermeneutic of the gospel," a Trinitarian ecclesiology of unity in diversity, as seen in Paul's letters to churches in Galatia, Ephesus, and Colossae, has major implications for CUMC as the church must reach out across cultural, socio-economic and racial barriers to the youth and families in the neighborhoods surrounding the church's property.²⁴³ With the reality of systemic abandonment and the clustering of adolescents, one implication for CUMC is the shift to understanding that youth ministry must be a missional endeavor to a non-homogenous subculture, meaning the church must "resist all attempts at uniformity of structure in favor of a

²⁴² Greg Johnson and Mike Yorkey, *Faithful Parents, Faithful Kids* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 247-249.

²⁴³Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 234.

missional unity in diversity.”²⁴⁴ Similarly, in light of the youth ministry’s traditional connection with a middle-class white demographic, coupled with the racially and socio-economic diversity of the neighborhoods around the church property, continued growth in a biblical understanding of missional ecclesiology is needed. Also, in light of the adolescent and cultural diversity, coupled with the damaging spirit of competition local congregations have with each other and with Young Life, a new kingdom minded ecclesiastical partnership among local congregations and Young Life must emerge. Lastly, in light of the youth subculture’s diversity coupled with the number of middle and high school campuses in the area, a continued growth in seeing the local campus as a mission field for our church is crucial. All these missional outreach implications stem from a Trinitarian understanding of God, and must be addressed by the staff and congregation.

Conclusion and New Questions

CUMC in Jackson, MS is a complex church, having been impacted and shaped by the societal changes and church structures discussed above. Moreover the church’s ministry context is an equally complex mix of affluence, Christian culture, demographic change and human brokenness associated with modernity and postmodernity. With the stated end goal of implementing a discipleship model for birth through college, new questions must be asked concerning how the church can truly become a hermeneutic of the gospel in mission to youth and families both within the church body and in the surrounding community. These questions include:²⁴⁵

- How does the staff create a culture of biblical community and discipleship among the adult congregation that, in turn, creates a culture of nurturing discipleship with youth?

²⁴⁴ Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church : A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 268.

²⁴⁵ Implicit in everyone of the following questions is the understanding that without the convicting, unifying, empowering and guiding work of the Holy Spirit any attempt by the staff and congregation to answer these questions is futile and will result in exasperating the self-centered, consumerist tendencies of CUMC.

- How does the church foster a sense of communal cohesiveness and intergenerational interaction in a facility that lacks adequate central common space?
- How does the staff begin to equip parents and other adults to disciple youth both in the church body and youth in the community surrounding the church?
- What does a communal youth ministry paradigm look like in a large congregation that is spread out over three counties with youth in over fifteen different metro area schools?
- How does the staff equip and organize members to effectively use local school campuses as missional youth ministry contexts? Likewise, how does the staff foster and grow a kingdom minded ministry partnership with other local congregations and Young Life?
- What steps does the church need to take to more fully assimilate current youth and new youth and families into the life of the congregation?
- What does ministry to late-adolescence look like in a congregation that is situated miles from the closest local college campus and where almost all of the membership youth attend college in other parts of the state and country?
- What does a system of communal discipleship markers, rites of passages and celebrations look like, taking into consideration the stages of adolescent development, the local cultural age level transitional events (sixth grade, ninth grade and high school graduations) and the U.M.C. tradition of confirmation?
- What does a symbiotic staff relationship look like as it pertains to youth ministry, and how does the staff begin to foster this relationship?

By prayerfully seeking God and trusting in His guidance in answering these and other questions, CUMC can continue its transition to becoming, more fully, a missional church in partnership with other local congregations in making disciples of youth.

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