LUTHER SEMINARY
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY in CONGREGATIONAL MISSION & LEADERSHIP
ABSTRACT LIST (2007-2012; no graduates in 2009)

Stephanie Lutz Allen (2010)

*Pastor as Manager: Redeeming Management as a Missional Practice*

This explanatory research examined the question of how a missional understanding of leadership informs clergy management practices. The focal management practice was clergy supervision of staff. Fifty-one clergy, staff, and personnel lay leaders from five Protestant congregations were interviewed. Participants viewed leadership as discerning and inspiring vision, equipping, and mediating conflict; management as implementing the vision, equipping, organizing, resourcing, and mediating conflicts. The differences between the five participating congregations were that two churches further along in the missional change process had a pervasive purpose statement which guided their work and a collaborative staff team which lived out egalitarian relationships.

David K. Anderson (2010)

*One in Christ: Growing Missional Capacity to Incorporate Children with Disabilities*

Participatory Action Research project employing mixed methods to discover how to grow congregation’s missional capacity to incorporate children with disabilities. Context for research history of disabilities, Disability Rights Movement, Disability Studies and literature of organizational change. Develops theology of disability centered on human vulnerability and voluntarily vulnerable God. The perichoretic Trinity is a model of community and impetus of *mission Dei*. Parents telling stories of their lives with children with disabilities in the congregation. Findings include the impact of congregational culture on awareness and acceptance. Critiques of the cultural narratives of awareness and sameness that reinforce varriers of charity model.

Brian N. Ballard (2011)

*Global Short-Term Mission and Local Civil Society: A Mixed Methods Study*

Sequential explanatory mixed methods study. Researches ways global short-term mission (STM) fosters civil society initiatives in participants’ local communities. Reveals both components influencing STM participant impact as well as components of STM participant impact. Based on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Bridging global and local contexts through cogenerative networks of differentiated unity within a paradigm of missional accompaniment. Cultivating intercultural solidarity through a multi-perspectival process of communicative action and reflective discernment. Bridging social capital toward new civil society initiatives. Rooted in perichoretic understanding of God’s mutual indwelling and dynamic interconnectedness. Shaped by missional theology and practice.
Jennifer Mary Bannerman (2010)
*The New Exodus: Leaving the Egypt of our Past, Being Transformed by God’s Sacred Wilderness Time, and preparing for the Promised Land of God’s Kingdom*

Explores the Exodus story as a model for congregations in the midst of change and transformation. Discusses different types of change, change within systems, and models for change. Explores use of symbolic and story to aide change. Examines biblical understanding of Exodus and theological implications for church today. Research assesses effectiveness of Exodus study process in helping congregation self assess their place in the journey and steps for moving forward in developing a missional ministry.

Julianne E. Barlow (2012)
*A Congregation’s Missional Attitudes: Sharing Faith Stories Express God’s Redemptive Work*

A mixed-method participatory action research methodology partnered Kruglanski’s Unimodel of attitude change with the ideal of sharing faith stories with others in everyday life. Research explored and measured missional attitudes by grouping three distinct manifestations of attitudes: cognitive, affective, and conative. Interview data revealed attitudes about the congregation’s part in God’s work, a missional approach to individual growth and transformation, and a missional awareness of the effects of sharing faith stories on relationships with others. Baptismal identity and God’s Word informed missional attitudes about sharing faith stories: embracing possibility, expecting God, and exploring with others.

Christian Dominic Boyd (2010)
*Formed and Always Being Reformed as a Community Under the Cross: The Search for Missional Capacities within a 21st Century Presbytery*

This thesis explores current primary and secondary theology within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) tradition and places it into conversation with theories from the social sciences. The social science theories considered were organizational development, diffusion of innovation, and social networking in relation to organic community. The research delved into participants’ concepts of missional church, leadership, and organizational development, as well as the purpose of a regional church body and how it may identify, equip, and resource missional leaders. Results pointed to the pastors’ need for a form of *church* for themselves, as well as potential benchmarks for regional church bodies.

William A. Enns (2007)
*Leadership Formation for Pastors of Large Churches*

The present research seeks to understand the relational nature of leadership and leadership formation required for large churches. This relational nature is examined from the theoretical perspective of emotional intelligence as developed by Daniel Goleman, Level 5 Leadership as identified by Jim Collins, and systems theory. The theological framework is perichoretic essence of God’s own Trinitarian being outlined by Jean Zizioulas, Jurgen Moltmann, and Miroslav Volf. Building upon this theoretical and theological framework this study explores the role of mentoring in the formation of leadership for large churches.
Paul D. Erickson (2012)
*From Despair to Hope: A Study of Missional Renewal in Congregations*
Qualitative, simple exploratory research project exploring the characteristics of missional renewal in congregations. Summarizes renewal journeys in four small, Midwestern, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations. Develops a theology of missional accompaniment by bringing the concept of concursus Dei and a theology of the cross into the missional church conversation. Reviews missional change models and their use of diffusion of innovations theory and organizational change literature. Explores how a theology of missional accompaniment informs the ways in which congregations and their leaders develop relationships and engage their context, building momentum for change sustained by hope.

Cheryl M. Fleckenstein (2011)
*Benedictine Values and Practices: A Tool for Enhancing the Missional Awareness of Emerging Adults*
Explores how introducing Benedictine values and practices to emerging adults enhances their awareness and understanding of their missional identity within a church. Emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 29) are crucial years for understanding missional identity – a theme basic to Benedictine values and practices. Thesis provides a history of Benedict of Nursia and his Rule, examines literature about emerging adults and Benedictine values and practices: hospitality, obedience, stability, prayer, *lectio divina*, and work. Research taught Benedictine values and practices, defined *missio Dei*, missional church, and missional identity, to emerging adults, and examined data from study sessions, questionnaires, and a group interview.

Brian William Ford (2012)
*Beyond the Church Walls: A Journey of Missional Discipleship and Community Engagement*
Examines impact of increasing missional awareness and understanding among key congregational leaders and how that increases their missional imagination and leadership engagement in a congregation using Participatory Action Research. Encouraged a deeper look at components of missional discipleship through theoretical and theological lenses. Encouraged key congregational leaders to help congregation increase awareness of needs in its context and its place as God’s companions in civil society. Used mixed-methods quantitative/qualitative assessment. Theoretical lenses: organizational culture, missional leadership, and civil society. Theological lenses: missional church, missional imagination, theology of neighbor, hospitality to stranger, separation of church and state, and feeding the poor. Congregational leaders utilized their influence in the congregation to help engage its community through partnerships with three nonprofit agencies.

Kurt M. Friedrich (2010)
*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons Participating in Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Congregations: Hospitality with Insider Outcasts*
Grounded theory method informed by qualitative inquiry guided learning from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons reasons on their participating in Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations in a Southern Metroplex area. Three categories, religious heritage, hospitality, and LGBT faith experiences emerged. A
theory of hospitality with insider outcasts states: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender persons participate in Evangelical Lutheran Church in American congregations where the congregation’s practice of just hospitality considers all as insider sojourners and values sexual identity as one of many differences through with God blesses the community.

**Mark Jerome Hagen (2008)**
*Spiritual Discernment for Church Staff: Integrating Personal Vocation with Congregational Mission*

Many pastors are responsible for the supervision and annual evaluation of church staff members. They may discover, however, that they lack the training, resources, and models to adequately engage staff members in a distinctive process of theological reflection that focuses on the healthy integration of one’s sense of call with the defined mission of the congregation. This model in ministry thesis project provides an ongoing process of spiritual discernment in which participating staff members come to fuller awareness of their Christian identity and are better able to connect their individual vocation to the larger mission of the congregation and church.

**Kathleen Whippo Haller (2007)**
*Midwest American Lutheran in the 21st Century: Images of Regional Faith, Practice and Missional Implications*

Varieties of factors influence presence in or absence from the community of faith. Competing cultural pressures of the 21st century life in the United States and fading influences of denomination seem to mitigate against involvement in mainline congregational life and service. This exploratory qualitative grounded theory study seeks to explore members’ perceptions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its proclamation of the *missio Dei* (Gospel). Interviews were conducted with leader members of six Midwestern congregations or ministry setting related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Region 6, with intent to uncover key determinative impetuses to faith and missional response, taking into account key variables of denominational, cultural, regional, familial, and social affiliation.

**Michael J. Huntley (2011)**
*Nourishing Grass Roots: Cogenerative Vision Cultivation for Missional Ministry*

Paul A. Herpich (2008)
Whole Hearted Devotion to God: Bible Study, Prayer, and Testimony As Practices Integral to Building Missional Ecclesiology in the Local Church: An Action Research Study

Whole hearted devotion to God is a life-long process as God’s Spirit call, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the church in sending members of the body of Christ into the world. A missional ecclesiology enables the people of God to develop faith habits and practices designed to equip them for this ministry. In this action research study and particular faith habits and practices of Bible study, prayer, and testimony will be practiced through four interventions designed to empower the members of Suburban Lutheran Church, Upstate New York, to embrace these practices as their own as they live out a missional ecclesiology.

Keith A. Kolstad (2007)
Discerning God’s Dreams: Clarifying a Congregation’s Missional Vision through the Art of Discernment

Discernment of a congregation’s vision for mission is a key component to strategic missional planning. Vision for mission is the expression of a congregation’s understanding of how God has uniquely gifted the congregation in that time and place and the dreams God has for the missional use of those gifts. Out of this vision a congregation is empowered to create missional goals and strategies. This project describes and reviews how a 130-year-old Lutheran congregation in a small town experienced the ancient art of discernment in its quest for clarity of a missional vision.

Heidi Radmacher Kvanli (2012)
Cultivating a Staff’s Missional Identity: Working Together in the Communion of the Trinity

This qualitative participatory action research was conducted in a large multi-staff congregation. An associate pastor was the intervening variable in the process of cultivating a staff’s missional identity through a series of three collaborative interventions. Baseline and endline data were collected through focus group interviews. Theological and biblical perspectives: missional church, perichoresis, togetherness as described in Acts, vocation. Theoretical perspectives: collaboration, leadership, communication. Research results indicated a growing awareness of missional identity among the staff and the motivation to informally continue the research process.

Lonny L. Kvanli (2008)
Transforming Stewardship: From Function to Missional

Moving away from a functional understanding of stewardship and toward a missional understanding, this research was conducted at a Midwestern Lutheran church and used a mixed-methods, action research model with a quantitative longitudinal survey and qualitative interviews. It attempted to ascertain whether missional understanding of the church and acceptance of the congregation’s new mission and vision statements would have any positive correlation with financial contributions to the church. The primary conclusion was that no increase in pledging could be correlated to the missional emphasis or the mission and vision statements; however, 23 percent were influenced by the mission and vision to increase their financial pledge.
Partnership: A Practice for Cultivating a Missional Awareness in the Congregation
Using participatory action research the practice of partnership was introduced to the Village in the Valley Lutheran Church in the context of worship, using the modalities of preaching, testimony, and blessing. A survey was administered before and after the intervention in order to measure the movement in missional awareness in the congregation. Using a variety of statistical methods it was determined that within the limits of this research the intervention had an effect upon the congregation. Survey results showed that participants grew in their ability to articulate missional concepts and they grew in their agreement with missional statements. The survey used in the intervention is offered to the church for further refinement and study to be used as a tool that measures movement in missional awareness.

Lauren R. Ley (2007)
Anxiety and Inactivity in Congregational Systems
Explores the relationship between anxiety in individuals and/or in congregations to individual inactivity in congregational systems. Defines key variables and outlines the key explanatory concepts: family systems theory set within general systems theory. Surveys the literature on inactivity: typologies, contextual themes, past methods of research, and providing a review of general and family system concepts. Explores anxiety in the work of four existentialist Christian theologians. Uses a confirmatory mixed-method quantitative research with a nested qualitative component, testing for effects between individual maturity and individual inactivity, and between congregational climate and individual inactivity. Congregational climate is significantly related to inactivity whereas individual maturity is not. Open congregational systems and open theological systems are both defining characteristics of healthy religious community.

Todd G. Mathison (2011)
Metamorphosis: Transformation into Missional Leaders
Explores transformation into missional leaders by investigating: How does engaging in a missional change model influence church leaders in a missional direction? Key theories of adaptive and missional leadership combine with Trinitarian theology that shape a simply exploratory research study yielding qualitative data from within a single congregation. Hypotheses about missional transformation are proposed where variables of understanding a Trinitarian God, a sense of belonging, the experience of being the church sent, and the force of inherited church forms and practices of ecclesiology and missiology converge under the work of the Holy Spirit.

Loren D. Mellum (2011)
Let Your Light Shine: Assessing Missional Capacities in the Worship Life of a Congregation
This thesis explores the latent and manifest capacities of worship present in a congregation. These capacities are the inherent strengths in the corporate worship life of the congregation that, when discovered and identified, might further missional participation in God’s world. Grounded theory informed by appreciative inquiry and asset mapping served as the methodology for this thesis. The theory that emerged is named, Participatory Missional Worship As An Other-Centered Way of Life. The theory is
grounded in three core categories, three distinct capacities of worship, and five hypotheses that further missional participation in God’s world.

Elizabeth D. Miller (2010)
Old Wine in New Wineskins: Reframing Moravian Customs as Missional Practices
This case study using participatory action research explored how reframing Moravian traditions as missional practices equipped members of one Moravian congregation in the upper Midwest to respond to God’s invitation to participate in the missio Dei. Considered from the biblical perspective (John 20:19-22 and Acts 1:6-11) that emphasized the sending nature of the Triune God, the missional impulses of Moravian customs and practices were tested through the hermeneutic of changing the organizational culture of a congregation. Results from quantitative and qualitative surveys indicated that participants grew in awareness and understanding about how placing the old wine of Moravian customs in new wineskins could motivate members to join God’s mission to the world.

Robert G. Moss (2008)
The Neighborhood Congregation: A Study on the Relationship between Missional Identity and Local Context
Whether a congregation is located in the inner city, sprawling suburb, small town, or open country, it exists as part of a local context. As a holy community created, called, and sent by the Triune God into that context, congregations most fully live out their missional identity through relationships within that context. Congregations live as both the gathered and sent people of God in the midst of a neighborhood and do so based on the relational nature of the Trinity. This project studies how four member congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America influence and are influenced by their neighborhoods and therefore more deeply understand their identity as participating in God’s mission in their local context.

Kevin P. Mundell (2010)
Missional Preaching in a Small Mid-Western Mainline Church
Case study research using qualitative data focused on communication process in preaching missional sermons to change attitudes and behaviors in a small mid-western mainline congregation. Research deals with crisis in preaching and how a missional understanding of God affects it. Focuses on communication aids in preaching. Three feedback loops involved listeners in the sermon preparation process. Missional understanding: God as triune, kingdom is central, missio Dei, evangelism is a three-part drama, perichoresis. Keywords: communication theory, sociocultural tradition, cybernetic tradition, Ong’s orality and secondary-orality, persuasion theory, adult learning theory, transformative adult learning theory.

Richard A. Nelson (2011)
Missional Pastors and a Flourishing Life
Explores the concept of happiness, and researches subject as it is experienced and constructed in the lives of missional, ELCA clergy serving in congregational settings in Minnesota. Implications for other pastors and leaders may be drawn from this sampling. Secular and theological framework, definitions, and causes for happiness are established.
Research was conducted in order to ascertain key attitudes, core faith convictions, and life practices intentionally adopted by pastors whom self-identify as both missional and happy to which they attribute a significant measure of their happiness in life. Resulted in identifying ten components these leaders identify most frequently as adding to their overall experience of happiness and well-being in life.

**Randall G. Olson (2008)**  
*Interpreting Bivocational Pastoral Ministry with a Missional Imagination*  
Explores with narrative inquiry methodology the effect of the bivocational model of pastoral ministry on the priesthood of all believers. Missional theology of abundance contrasted with culture of scarcity in declining mainline denominations. Ten qualitative interviews conducted in five bivocational ministry contexts. Interview participants include a bivocational pastoral leader and one member from two ELCA congregations, and ELCA emerging ministry, a Mennonite congregation, and a Mormon ward. These narratives, together with the researcher’s bivocational pastoral ministry. Research results are informed by biblical foundations and theological and theoretical perspectives.

**Scott E. Olson (2011)**  
*Apostolic Discernment in Five Papers: Increasing a Synod’s Capacity to Engage Missional Leaders*  
This thesis used Participatory Action Research with the nominating committee of an ELCA synod to increase its capacity for discernment to identify and engage missional leaders for service on its council. The research design was concurrent mixed methods (baseline and end line surveys with a final group interview), with the quantitative data analyzed by the paired t-test. Four interventions were organized around four components of capacity: missional knowledge; missional beliefs and attitudes; missional skills and abilities; and process expertise. Results indicated a significant increase in capacity and produced a list of desired qualities of a missional leader.

**Martin N. Overson (2011)**  
*Mission Statements for Missional Identity: Creating Remembrance by Repetition*  
This study evaluates the role of mission statements in the life of a congregation, measuring if their use raises the member’s level of awareness and understanding of missional identity. Four theoretical perspectives are presented: Organizational Change, Leadership, Mission Statements, and Learning by Repetition. Through the dynamics of organizational change and leadership, the congregation’s use of a mission statement during weekly worship was measured for effectiveness in changing the congregation’s culture. The goal was a higher awareness of missional identity including a heightened sense of faith and remembrance in God’s mission to the world.

*Cross-Training Christians for Rural Servant-Leadership: An Exploration of the Role of a Congregation in Nurturing Leadership in the Community of Wessington Springs, South Dakota*  
This study explores the relationship between what is learned and experienced in the Christian faith community and people’s involvement in collaborative leadership within the rural community of Wessington Springs, South Dakota. The author makes use of
Martin Luther’s theology of the cross and his teaching regarding Christian vocation, including the calling of parents as family leaders. This approach to leadership employs a missional ecclesiology, with attention to the Triune God’s transformative, sending work in the world, and examines contributions from knowledge about civil society and human and social capital. Asset mapping is examined as a tool for leadership development.

Michael D. Peck (2007)
*The Work of God’s people: A Search for a Vocational Missiology*
This explanatory research seeks to discover how one’s level of awareness regarding baptismal vocation translates into missional praxis. This research is based on the assumption that there is a correlation between one’s awareness of baptismal vocation and the ways in which one intentionally participates in God’s mission in daily life. Utilizing existing data from the Centered Life Initiative at Luther Seminary, typologies of baptismal awareness are identified. Based on these typologies, individuals are identified for in-depth interviews. During integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, a hypothesis and future research parameters are proposed.

Diane (Dee) Haugen Pederson (2010)
*A Missional Church Community of Many Cultures and Peoples*
Communities across the U.S. are rapidly growing more diverse, and the gaps that exist between people of diverse cultures and races in U.S. communities are also present in U.S. churches. This thesis seeks to discover how participants in congregations that are becoming more diverse can experience a deeper sense of community as God gathers and sends them across cultures and races. The research identified obstacles to getting to know others in the church, and planned intentional opportunities designed to help participants build relationships. The research data indicated that participants who attended these events enjoyed interactions with people of a culture or race different than their own more frequently than those who did not. The presence of these relationships in congregations today reflects the divine community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and envisions the eternal community that will be known one day as God’s reign comes in all its fullness to people from every nation, tribe, language, and people.

John Charles Ragan (2010)
*New Life on the Prairie: A Study of Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behavior Patterns of STaR Congregations in a STaR Synod in the ELCA*
Goal of project was to learn attitudes, beliefs, and behavior patterns of small-town and rural (STaR) congregations moving to incorporate mission into their identity. Based upon work of Albert Ellis’ Rational-Emotive Therapy. Ellis’ A-B-C Theory states that attitudes and beliefs affect one’s behaviors. Social science theories considered were organization development, relational leadership, servant leadership, and transformative leadership. Literature areas reviewed were rural sociology, rural church, missional church, and leading change. Theological topics were *perichoresis*, apostolic mission, and new creation in Christ. Research data obtained by use of survey distributed to thirty-one congregations and two group interviews.

Bart Roush (2012)
Incorporating Adults Toward a Missional Imagination: A Study of Four Congregations
This qualitative exploratory research identified capacities used in robust new member incorporation processes of four Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations and analyzed to what extent they were missional. Theologically grounded in the Great Commission, the Trinity and the missional church, the doctrine of election, Christian nurture, and the Body of Christ. Reviews assimilation and catechumenate literature. Theoretically informed by set theory, social capital, and adult education theory. Concludes that intentional and robust incorporation processes framed by a missional ecclesiology are necessary, focusing on discipleship over membership is important, and membership processes, language, and classifications should be reconsidered.

Jill E. Rowland (2008)
Breaking Open the Alabaster Jar: Assessing Vitality in Missional Emerging Congregations
This thesis explores missional emerging congregations and the assessments for vitality that they utilize. From the research findings, it offers a grounded theory for assessing vitality as well as a proposed assessment tool to be tested by missional emerging congregations. Five key lenses – grounded theory, missional theory, the emerging church, postmodernism, and organizational theory – deepen an understanding of the research findings and are used to reflect on patterns, trends, and issues at the missional emerging congregations. In addition, a biblical and theological framework offers further reflections on the research findings.

Robert E. Sachs, Jr. (2007)
Reconciling the Believing Nonbelonger: Readiness to Reach and Receive Lost Sheep
This study examines and explains readiness of reconciling with believing nonbelongers from 284 respondents in two categories of 129 systematically selected ELCA congregations in the western United States that received adults during 2001-2005. A concurrent-nested, mixed-method design integrates biblical-theological missio Dei and missio ecclesia foundations with Prochaska’s Transtheoretical Stages of Change and Parshall’s Contextualization Spectrum. Chi-square crosstabulations, simple logistical regression, and Centering Resonance Analyses show: faith or origin, worship attendance growth trend, regional location, population size and growth trend, clergy and lay partnership, and programmatic emphasis have significant effects on the readiness of congregations and respondents to receive the unaffiliated.

Daniel P. Schlewitz (2012)
Christians believe that the gospel story has relevance for every individual. Cultural trends have created difficulties for Christian witness to convey the story of Jesus to those outside the church. The story is often perceived as irrelevant to everyday life. Narrative inquiry methodology examined meaning behind stories of eight persons seeking better understanding of what witness might best entail today. Biblical, theological, and theoretical frameworks used to interpret these stories and meanings embedded within them. Results of this research offer possibilities for relating the story of Jesus to others in a manner that helps to foster functional relevance.
Laurie Skow-Anderson (2010)
*Pentecost on the Prairie: The Movement of the Holy Spirit Creating Multicultural Ministries in a Rural Community*

The purpose of this research was to design interventions that move a rural uniracial congregation toward being a more open multiracial congregation. A mixed-method sequential explanatory design was used. Theories about faith maturity and racial contact were explored. Data about demographics, social networks, mission and purpose of the church, racism, change anxiety, health, and future of church was gathered using surveys, interventions, interviews, and focus groups. Possible conclusions (1) PLLC is building capacity to be a second or third generation multiracial congregation. (2) Increase contact between PLLC members and members of the multiracial community may increase member’s comfortability with multiracial ministry.

Michael K. Strangeland Sr. (2007)
*Introducing Small Group Ministry to a Rural Community*

Explores the introduction of small group ministry into a rural community. A rural two-point parish seeks to further develop cooperative ministry with the congregations located in nearby towns. Research explores attitudes toward small groups as a means to overcome objectives and stumbling blocks to participation. Seeks to attain sufficient initial involvement to sustain the effort long-term and develop relationships between members that will enhance and encourage further development of the congregational partnerships and provide the opportunity for continued spiritual growth of participants.

Marcia L. Sylvester (2012)
*Leading Off Road: Leading Congregations in the Missional Era*

A grounded theory study of four pastors serving congregations identified as having missional characteristics. Intent of the study was to discern what components of pastoral leadership are present in such congregations. Five components of leadership emerged: 1) A willingness to journey with the congregation. (2) Possessing a shared vision with the congregation. (3) Expression of a strong sense of vocation. (4) Willingness to engage in a shared distribution of power. (5) Ability and willingness to lead their congregations into an unidentified future without relying on the certainty of a known outcome. These components help frame future research possibilities for missional leadership.

Marty D. Tollefson (2012)
*The Congregational Turn Towards Discernment: Practicing Church in a Missional Era*

Seven common practices of discernment are identified within three congregations that have a missional self-understanding. These practices underscore the importance and reciprocity between the local congregation, mission, and a vocation of discernment. Missional church, pneumatology, and eschatology serve as the theological lens. Systems theory, communities of practice, and the practice of Christian discernment serve as theoretical perspectives. Qualitative, simple exploratory is the methodology for this thesis. This research affirms that missional congregations engage in practices of discernment and discernment shapes congregations missionally. Missional congregations
live into their open future through practices of discernment that are indigenous to the local congregation.


*Is There Room in the Inn? A Systems Theory Perspective on Congregational Capacities for Mission and the Matter of Sociological Space*

This study identifies ten ELCA Lutheran congregations that have plateaued from 125 to 250 in average worship per week from 1990 to 2005, in settings where populations are growing. It seeks to identify attitudes and expectations among three groups within the congregation – pastors, key leaders, and regular members – around the issue of missions, evangelism, and church growth. A three-phase sequential mixed methods exploratory approach – QUAL/QUAN/QUAL – examines reasons why these congregations remain a certain size. The research assesses themes of system stress, social and leadership capacities, and the dynamics of homeostasis, which would support a systems theory perspective for growth capacity.

David E. Tryggestad (2008)

*Practicing the Faith for the Sake of the World*

This study explores the *practice* of faith in light of scripture, faith formation, and God’s mission to the world. It examines the relationship between faith and practice, believing and doing. It also considers how practice forms us as Christians and how faith informs and forms practice. Chapter one sets out to describe the study overall, including a brief description of faith practices. Chapter two consists of a review of recent literature on faith practices from a wide range of researchers and theologians. Chapter three builds biblical and theological foundations for this research. Chapter four describes the community-based action research model used in the study. Chapter five is a discussion of the results of the research, including statistical analyses. Chapter six consists of a summary of findings in relation to method, theory, and biblical and theological foundations. The epilogue addresses areas of learning for me as well as for the congregation.

L. Sacia Vik (2010)

*Vending Machines Don’t Make Disciples: How an Understanding of the Redemptive Reign of God Can Help Transform the Consumerist Mentality within the Church*

Explores if introducing an understanding of the redemptive reign of God would increase the missional awareness of a discipleship group using faith practices, and if this could contribute to the continual conversion of the church by addressing its consumerist mentality. Social science theories utilized were participatory action research (PAR) and a missional change process based on the diffusion of innovations. Theological perspectives included were the redemptive reign of God, reductionism, missio Dei, and perichoresis. The intervention was a four session bible study on the reign of God and was done with two existing small groups within the congregation.

Melanie J.S. Wallschlaeger (2007)

*Blessings and Woes of Social Location: Intersections of Faith and Socioeconomic Class*
Intentions of this study concern the discovery of similarities and differences of faith experience among socioeconomic groups of poverty and middle class in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Through personal interviews of twenty-five people the researcher asks questions of faith experience, congregational involvement, definitions of key terms, and interpretations of national crises. The study also reveals insights into experiences of interviewees as they meet together to share conversation and interpretations of three scripture passages in which participants identify with key characters of biblical stories. This study offers an exploratory qualitative research design with implications and suggestions for further study in local congregations and communities.

James Nyebe Wilson, II (2011)

*Missional Multicultural Strategies for Congregational Leadership*

The triune God’s intended multicultural or heterogeneous ecclesiology and missiology coupled with the twenty-first century demographic change and multicultural realities in the United States is challenging homogeneous and ethnocentric institutions and communities to embrace emerging multicultural realities. The increase of immigrant population in the United States has changed the demographics of communities and neighborhoods. It is, therefore, imperative that the church, especially an aging, declined, and ethnocentric church, shifts its sense of God’s mission from mono-cultural to multicultural missiology. This thesis offers a way forward.

Joel V. Xavier (2008)

*Sunday Morning What Are People Doing? A Study of a Local Population*

This study sets a path toward careful social science study and understanding of Sunday morning as a unique time segment in U.S. culture. This study also establishes a descriptive baseline of what people are doing in this segment of their lives which can be used to ground further study. This study is summarized with careful reflection about how the information gathered may be useful to Christian though. Attention is given to cultural self-understanding as religious person, a spiritual person, or a person of faith. Mixed method explanatory research was applied to achieve these research interests. The population to be studied was the people who had a residential mail delivery in two adjacent zip codes. In the first part of the study, the QUAN research was carried out using a broadly-based questionnaire. In the second part of the study, the QUAL research was carried out using interviewing two of members of the population of the survey area.