

## Part I

# Rationale for a United Church of Canada Microfinance Fund Program

*And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. –Luke 5:37*



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Additionally, Vancouver School of Theology (VST) agreed to collaborate in assessing the feasibility of a micro-lending program as outlined in Part II of the proposal and provided a student intern to work on the project. Thanks are extended to Rev. Dr. Richard Topping, VST Principal, Rev. Janet Gear, Assistant Professor of Public and Pastoral Leadership, and student intern, Jay Irwin. George Meier, however, takes full responsibility for the content and analysis for the program rationale.

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George Meier

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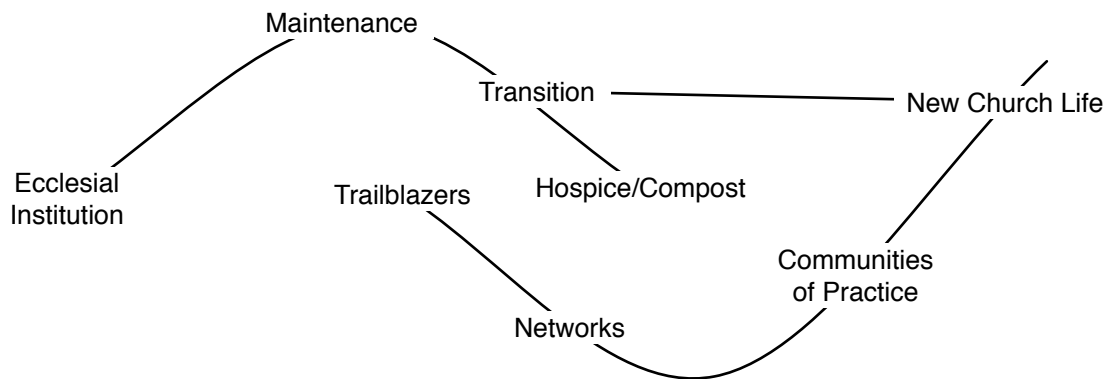
## **Proposal Summary and Motivation for the Proposal**

This document proposes creation of a United Church of Canada microfinance fund program for experimental and entrepreneurial ministries outside the traditional governance structures of The United Church of Canada in order to listen deeply to and participate in what the Holy Spirit is doing beyond our denominational wineskin. Through prototyping, networking, and communities of spiritual practice outside our normal accountability structures, The United Church of Canada can adapt in new ways to serve God and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Accountability would be achieved through a covenantal microfinance loan agreement and circle of accompaniment and periodic reporting. Vancouver School of Theology (VST) has agreed to collaborate to explore and test the proposed program.

During a BC Conference staff retreat, facilitator Chris Corrigan taped two curves to the floor. The curve of the dying church system bowed upward and then down: the curve of the living system leading to new life began under the top of the first arc, curling downward and then up. The two lines never crossed, although there was a bridge toward the end of the dying curve that offered a way to move from dying toward birthing of a new church. The living systems arc began with individual trailblazers; ministry experiments that failed as often as they succeeded. Further along, individuals joined in networks of experimentation and information sharing. This is a fertile time and space for prototyping akin to learning labs that may lead to shared communities of practice. Some of these shared communities of practice are found in the emergent church described by Phyllis Tickle and others. Over time, the living systems progression may lead to the uppermost end of the

curve where new church life is born for the institutional church. Here is the point of contact, the bridge to new life—a bridge we all yearn to cross.



Looking at the curves, a burning question emerged: how could the resources still located in the institutional church be better used to help the trailblazers, networkers and new communities of practice that often have no or limited access to resources? Microfinance may be a modest tool to encourage new ministry experiments that have neither charitable tax status, approved calling body, nor other authorized status in the institution.

As a collaborator, VST understands it enrolls some students who enter seminary with little or no intention of seeking ordination. Often, such students are called to ministries outside denominational structures. The microfinance program offers support that may be combined with other creative forms of fundraising and actual production of revenue from products, services, etc. Students, among others, would be affirmed in their heartfelt ministries—these students may become our teachers and designers of the future church.

## **Introduction**

The United Church of Canada Comprehensive Review process makes clear it is time to seek new ways of serving God, noting fewer people attending worship, fewer participating young adults and children, financial and demographic pressures, closing churches, overstretched volunteers and diminishing resources. Whatever may come from the Comprehensive Review and without underestimating its contribution to God's new day for the United Church, we must adapt to engage God's new day. Reshaping the structure does not create new wineskins, especially where there is a continuation of centralized control of doctrine, traditional pathways for authorization of ministry, authority, definition of local ministry units, and accountability. Internal renewal, revitalization and resource management may be improved, but these structural modifications and improvements will not be enough to meet our changing world.

The microfinance proposal addresses at least one way to engage God's new day through a more adaptive approach. Part II of this document sets forth in detail the proposed microfinance program. Part II sets out the values, assumptions, decision points for implementing a micro-lending test program, the test program design and mechanics for its implementation, a timeline and sample operating budget for conducting the test program. Any denomination, including The United Church of Canada, could chose to adapt and implement the microfinance program design.

At the retreat described above, I was so "convicted" of the importance of the traditional institutional church supporting trailblazers, networkers and new communities of practice that it would have been easy to leap over any more in-

depth analysis of a move beyond our usual ministry structures of authority and accountability. In Part I, I attempt to avoid such a precipitous leap by examining the socio-cultural and the religious/spiritual issues that suggest denominations such as The United Church of Canada adapt in new ways in our various contexts for doing ministry. The analysis not only provides support for undertaking the suggested microfinance proposal, but it also proposes other creative responses The United Church of Canada might implement given the spiritual/religious context in which it is situated in North America today.

Part I provides the background that leads to a number of the values and assumptions listed in Part II, including:

- Support experimental entrepreneurial ministries outside the traditional governance structures of The United Church of Canada in order to listen deeply to and participate in what the Holy Spirit is doing beyond its denominational wineskin.
- Promote the organic development of ownership of new ideas while pushing institutional boundaries and governing constraints as to experimental and entrepreneurial ministries.
- Through prototyping, networking, and communities of practice outside normal accountability structures, The United Church of Canada can adapt in new ways to serve God and share the good news of Jesus Christ.
- In this time of spiritual awakening, The United Church of Canada cannot thrive only through renewal, church plants, organizational efficiency or implementation of known best practices.



- Adaptive denominational change requires that The United Church of Canada accompany those outside its wineskin: to “get on the balcony” to create the distance and perspective needed to better observe the dance of spiritual awakening, and allow itself to be changed.
- People desire a spiritual authenticity that develops through significant personalization and development of personal playlists that may or may not include church as we know and define it. This personalization includes transformational community life.
- Inviting people into church by creating different denominational brands can unwittingly create an ego-centered organization, as opposed to an eco-centered denomination engaged in open, collaborative spiritual labs for the Gospel work of love and justice and meaning making in our world.

**Systemic change** – This analysis begins with a reminder of the challenges in doing systemic change and maintaining a denominational system open to adaptation.

Such change is difficult because there are no known solutions in the denominational tool box and church loyalties and identity are challenged.

**Institutional Shifts** – As the following analysis unfolds, two major church institutional shifts are proposed. First, adaptation is furthered by supporting and learning from those outside our wineskin. Second, in our North American context for ministry, the traditional progressive mainline church must adapt to each person on a spiritual, transformational journey instead of each person being asked to adapt

to the institutional church and its institutional way of supporting the spiritual journey. The adaptation proposed in the second point is furthered by supporting and learning from those outside our wineskin. The microfinance proposal is a tool in the adaptive process.

The shift toward personalization is examined in the context of what Charles Taylor calls the “Age of Authenticity” and in this time of “Spiritual Awakening” as described by Diana Butler Bass. Without creating a false dichotomy between being religious or spiritual, the analysis also considers some of the reasons the personal Christian spiritual journey is moving outside traditional religious institutions, and observes that while Christian community may be essential for the spiritual journey, such Christian community may be found inside or outside the institutional forms.

Given factors indicating a more radical personalization of the spiritual journey, as well as the resources and communities developing outside the institutional church, these questions arise: Can The United Church of Canada, given what is unfolding in our North American context, identify and walk with those outside the denominational accountability structures? Can it support the more intense personalization of the spiritual journey? A clue to what this process might look like can be seen in the changes forecast for schools and the future of learning in the coming years in the United States. Such forecasting can provide a framework for considering what’s unfolding in this time of spiritual awakening in North America.

**Lessons from the World of Learning** – The world of learning is impacted by the same socio-cultural and technological changes that impact denominations and spiritual growth. Personalization impacts the learning journey. Learning is also

affected by technology and open access to resources for the learning journey and the concomitant rise of new learning agents, coaches, mentors, platforms, and communities.

A learning forecast developed by KnowledgeWorks, one of the major education forecasters in the US, can begin to provide a useful frame for thinking about the personalized spiritual journey. For this project, the learning forecast has been adapted with KnowledgeWorks assistance to address the landscape for spiritual development in the coming years. The spiritual/religious forecast is populated with signals about what's already occurring in the North American spiritual context and how those changes point to what's ahead. The forecast relating to spirituality provides a basis upon which The United Church of Canada might consider creatively meeting the needs of those on the personalized spiritual journey in the coming years.

Adaptation in the environment in which the United Church lives and has its being requires we deeply and humbly listen to and walk with those incorporating the work of the Holy Spirit outside our wineskin. Microfinance is a modest way to open ourselves to the spiritual and social transformation for which we hunger.

## **Leveraging Change: A Systems Perspective**

A system changes when its equilibrium is disturbed and managed in a way that allows the system to find a new homeostasis. These changes can be small and incremental. Such small changes over time result in adaptive change as surely as finches modify their beaks in response to prolonged drought and changes in available food. Part of the challenge for The United Church of Canada is to keep the

institution in a state of enough disruption or dis-ease to keep creativity at a high level without descending into debilitating chaos. Using the systems relationships developed by Chris Corrigan described above, the challenge is to find multiple ways to move beyond the institutional trajectory and support new life unfolding at the edge, where the church has little if any control. In *Leadership on the Line*, the authors advise:

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility.

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. . . habits, values, and attitudes come from somewhere, and to abandon them means to be disloyal to their origin. Indeed, our deeply held loyalties serve as a keystone in the structure of our identities. Loyalty is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it represents loving attachments—to family, team, community, organization, religion—and staying true to these attachments is a great virtue. On the other hand, our loyalties and attachments also represent our bondage and limitations. . . . Refashioning loyalties is some of the toughest work in life.<sup>1</sup>

Denominational authority and accountability structures are frameworks for maintaining our identity. They can command a great deal of loyalty. However, denominational authority and accountability structures and ministry unit requirements prevent the United Church from funding or authorizing those who prototype (trailblazers). These trailblazers typically have no standing and the United Church has no procedure for oversight of these creative ministries. Corrigan's curve, beginning with trailblazers, locates the work of the Holy Spirit and Gospel outside the Church's wineskin.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002, pp. 2, 28.

This microfinance proposal is a bridge for listening to and walking with the trailblazers, networks and communities of practice that may help us encounter and embrace transformed church life. It creates space in which to reframe how we think about those of our loyalties that create bondage and contribute to decline.

Transformation needs to be stimulated and experienced, not controlled. We live in a dilemma-filled world that is not amenable to technical solutions.<sup>2</sup> This dilemma-filled world is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, and these qualities are predicted to get more intense.<sup>3</sup> Our denominational structures do not hold up well in this kind of world, and indeed, the current suggestions for structural reform through the Comprehensive Review may only make it more difficult to operate under these predicted conditions. In troubled times, according to Bob Johansen, faith will live in the space between judging too soon (treating adaptive work with technical solutions) and deciding too late (a meaningful response to climate change).<sup>4</sup>

The challenge today is to risk boldly, be courageous, prototype iteratively, be opportunistic, listen and listen again, embrace failure, laugh, learn, discern and lean into the future with intention. The Holy Spirit and Gospel invite us to this dance of transformation. We are invited to walk with the Jesus who stilled the storm, the Jesus whom Mary Oliver describes so well in her poem *Maybe* which closes “tender

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Johansen, *Leaders Make the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012) and *2008–2018 Map of Future Forces Affecting the Episcopal Church* (Palo Alto: Institute For The Future SR-1171, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Bob Johansen, *Leaders Make the Future*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Johansen, *Leaders Make the Future*, pp. xxi–xxii.

and luminous and demanding as he always was—a thousand times more frightening than the killer sea.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Christendom’s Death and Church in an Age of Authenticity**

**What We Know for Now** – Church scholars are telling us that our vision of recognized, respected and sought-after “friendly service” to the nation is dead.<sup>6</sup> Our traditional protestant pedagogy for encountering Christ is anemic (*A Church with the Soul of a Nation*<sup>7</sup>). Christianity needs to confess its complicity in clergy sexual abuse, abused residential school children and broken homes and communities, and hubris in relating to First Nations and others suffering from our spiritual paternalism. At an even more macro level, violent global religious fundamentalism has led some in our communities to dismiss religious institutions as on balance detrimental to humanity.

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Oliver, “Maybe” in *House of Light* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> We can easily celebrate the end of religious institutional hubris—the tendency to play God among the earthly powers and principalities often as their partner in creating order within the powerless majorities. However, our Biblical story makes clear that we are always in relationship to the powers and principalities. The question is who are we in relation to those powers and principalities. In this anti-institutional time, our denominational identity is at issue in very complex ways. Local identity will be very contextual and may still appear with a Christendom flavour in some places and be suspect in others. At a national level, identity needs to be assessed in new ways. See Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Volume II* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1997), pp. 6–12. Identity based on market differentiation or a compilation or compendium of creeds is grossly inadequate. Out of this time of spiritual awakening and experimentation, new forms of institutions will undoubtedly arise that are theologically rooted. Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis: JoPa Group, 2011), p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), see for example pp. 154–155, 184–185, 263, 269–271.

The spiritually hungry are finding ways to meet their needs outside a recognizable and traditional church institutional setting. And, contrary to Reginald Bibby's suggestion in *Beyond the Gods and Back*, even the deepest questions of meaning—including the most heart-wrenching loss—are being addressed by communities without visible Christian theological understanding or rituals.<sup>8</sup>

By way of example, in the tragic drowning of four New Denver, BC young adults in 2014, the 500-person community was shell-shocked. Families and the community found ways to grieve, hold hands, offer support, craft and adapt rituals around First Nation's practices, and be present to one another with deep openness and care. Not one public ritual gathering drew on Christian Scripture or theology. Jesus was never publically mentioned at any ceremony. No memorial or ritual gathering was held in a Christian church.

**Institutional Church in an Age of Authenticity** – The end of Christendom is the least of the challenges facing progressive mainline denominations. We also face a changing world that is disrupting denominationalism. Understanding the disruptions a bit more allows room to readjust our loyalties, see the world afresh, and minister effectively in our current cultural context.

According to Charles Taylor, we are in an “Age of Authenticity” that deserves serious consideration as a modern ideal and with respect to which we are called to determine how we wish to live.<sup>9</sup> For Taylor, this age or ideal is too easily dismissed as self-centered or narcissistic. Denominations are urged not to be dismissive. Here

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<sup>8</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back* (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2011), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), p. 84.

are some of the points he makes that pertain to spirituality in this time in North America:

- The struggle ought not to be over authenticity, for or against, but about it, defining its proper meaning.<sup>10</sup>
- The very conditions for realizing authenticity itself are defeated if pursued without regard to the demands of our ties with others and the demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations.<sup>11</sup>
- Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, ego-centered individualism and personalization must be differentiated, as personalization is the fuller meaningful quest for the kind of authenticity to which Taylor speaks. According to one of Taylor's interpreters in the religious field, James K.A. Smith, we need to distinguish between the framework in an Age of Authenticity Spirituality and the content.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis for Taylor is on a transformational perspective that is essential to religion—one that carries us beyond human flourishing. While the framework may seem individualistic, the content is not necessarily individualistic.<sup>14</sup> Taylor refers to St. Augustine "who saw the road to

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, Inc., 1991), p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> We may be called to walk with the poets outside our sectarian theological halls. Wendell Berry writes: "You know yourself only poorly and in part, the best and the worst maybe forgotten. However you arrange the pieces, however authentic, a story is what you'll have, an artifact, for better or worse. So go ahead. Gather your



God as passing through our own reflexive awareness of ourselves.”<sup>15</sup> This understanding is at the core of many Christian meditation organizations such as The World Community for Christian Meditation. Personalization is not the enemy of the institutional church, tradition or systematic theology. Rather it is a spiritual landscape in which The United Church of Canada can and perhaps must do ministry.

Here are just a few ways in which the landscape is being revealed. A recent expression of spirituality grounded in these understandings of authenticity emerged from the Occupy Movement. In *Occupy Spirituality*, Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox describe what happened for many:

A second point is that this new spirituality is contemplative and experience based. It starts from life rather than concepts. Nonetheless, concepts are celebrated as tools to connect the dots and deepen the experience. So this new spirituality is lived in a constant dialogue between experience and concepts, where one informs the other, thus leading to subtler and subtler understandings. . . . Rather than thinking that God will happen outside of our lives, it's about starting from what we are already experiencing, acknowledging the sacredness of it, and then using practices and other things to deepen that experience and to sustain that experience.<sup>16</sup>

The intense struggle for personal authenticity today, grounded in a higher power or Jesus and deeply embedded in transformative community, is evident in such nondenominational settings as Underground Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Seminary of the Street in Oakland, California, and Jacob's Well in Vancouver, British Columbia. For example, Seminary of the Street is “a school for the training of love warriors working toward the transformation of their communities by embodying God's love in the world,” through which “students

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findings into a plausible arrangement. Make a story. Show how love and joy, beauty and goodness shine out amongst the rubble.” Wendell Berry, *Leavings* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), p, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox, *Occupy Spirituality* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2013), p. 23.

cultivate the resilience, the unsentimental awareness of oppressive systems, the skills, and the deep and sustaining relationships to respond to injustice with steadfast love and creativity.”<sup>17</sup>

The Age of Authenticity and the individual spiritual quest invite the church to leave the building and join others on the journey of life. This is not a new refrain for The United Church of Canada. For example, it was the passion of Raymond Hord while Secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service in the 1960s. According to Phyllis Airhart, just prior to Hord’s death, he insisted that the church’s urgent task was “to prepare and train her members to be a part of the church of the dispersion” that was “scattered in a pluralistic culture.”<sup>18</sup> But what does that look like today for The United Church of Canada?

## **Spirituality and the Traditional Religious Container for Developing and Expressing Spirituality**

Decisions about where The United Church of Canada needs to focus ministry resources, including a program like microfinance for ministries beyond the normal denominational accountability structures, are affected by understandings of spirituality and “spiritual but not religious.” This section looks at some definitions relating to spirituality and criticisms of religious institutions.

Spirituality as referenced here does not imply that those who are loyal to traditional religious institutions and grow in their faith through those institutions are not spiritual or engaged on a spiritual journey. Sociologist of religion Nancy Tatom Ammerman, in her recent study (Ammerman 2014), has examined and

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<sup>17</sup> <http://seminaryofthestreet.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, pp. 259–260.

categorized for purposes of sociological study the different ways of looking at spirituality. The categories developed include: Theistic; Extra-theistic; Ethical spirituality; and a political and moral view of spirituality that is contested and is often framed as spiritual but not religious.<sup>19</sup>

The Theistic cultural grouping ties spirituality to the divine, the Extra-theistic locates spirituality in various naturalistic forms of transcendence, and an Ethical spirituality focuses on everyday compassion. According to Ammerman, the meanings are distinct but overlapping and present both inside and outside religious communities.<sup>20</sup> Each, however, has a cluster of meanings. For example, those employing the Theistic cluster move easily among three ways of talking about spiritual life—it is about God, it is about practices intended to develop one’s relationship with God, and it is about the mysterious encounters and happenings that come to those who are open to them. They live in a territory peopled by divine actors.<sup>21</sup> The Extra-theistic landscape is one with a world of experiences that do not depend on the Christian (or any other) God but that nevertheless signals transcendence, a reaching beyond the ordinary. This genre of spiritual discourse includes transcendent connections to others, the sense of awe engendered by the natural world and moments of beauty, life philosophies crafted by an individual seeking meaning, and the inner core of individual self-worth.<sup>22</sup> According to

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

Ammerman, this is a language about spirituality that can be spoken by people who do not claim religious affiliation.<sup>23</sup>

Ethical spirituality is a cluster of meanings that centre on doing good; right action and orientation. However, this cluster easily cuts across Theistic and Extra-theistic. There was sufficient evidence to mark this as a separate cluster even with the considerable overlap. “Spiritual but not religious” was not considered a cluster of meaning as much as it seemed to be a boundary-maintaining device and source of legitimacy.<sup>24</sup> This self-identification connotes dissatisfaction that Ammerman says is better described as “moral and political” than as analytical. It creates a contested space about spirituality and religion which is broader than any assigned cluster of meanings.

As used in this study, spirituality includes the sociological understandings of spirituality arising from the Ammerman study. While “spiritual but not religious” is treated herein as part of a contested space<sup>25</sup>, all those using the phrase in this study are considered to be religiously engaged and spiritually interested. This is contrary to Ammerman’s experience among her sample of 95 persons, where all but one person using the phrase were critical of religion but were themselves disengaged and disinterested and therefore, according to Ammerman, making an “invidious” distinction.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Not as much of an issue in Canada. The intensity of the debate does not exist as it does in the United States.

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, p. 50.

Given the challenges faced by mainline denominations, popular understandings of spirituality and “spiritual but not religious” offer important clues in considering what may be impacting the future of mainline denominations. Diana Butler Bass, for example, notes:

But spirituality is neither vague nor meaningless. Despite a certain linguistic fuzziness, the word “spiritual” is both a critique of institutional religion and a longing for meaningful connection.<sup>27</sup>

Later she fills this out, saying:

To speak of “spirituality” simultaneously signals discontent with religious institutions and longing for a new, different, and deeper connection with God, one’s neighbor, and oneself.<sup>28</sup>

For Bass, “when channeled wisely and fueled by a hopeful vision of the future, discontent can be the beginning of genuine social transformation by inspiring courageous action.<sup>29</sup> This is her hope for the church and the new spiritual awakenings about which she writes.

Kelly Bean, a theist, in *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church*, sets out how one can fit into any of the first three categories developed in the Ammerman study and not be associated with a traditional church institution. Although affirming the importance of tradition and the historical Christian institutional church, Kelly Bean writes:

Many non-goers are leaving the institutional church in hopes of finding something more than what the structures in which they had been a part could provide or allow. They are engaging in age-old practices that are new to them (often adopting ancient Christian practices or lifestyles), and they are cultivating relationships with intention. They are caring for their neighbors and keeping it simple and real. These people want to make a difference in the world and in their communities. Rather than focusing on

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<sup>27</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

programs, curriculum, excellence, and performance, they are doing what is doable right in their own backyards while some are being stirred to sacrificial action in response to profound needs in other parts of the world. They are practicing being disciples and inviting others to a winsome way of discipleship.

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But for those who identify themselves as “spiritual,” the word represents a way of life that isn’t fettered by rituals, rules, and beliefs that feel irrelevant. It is relational and vibrant.<sup>30</sup>

Kelly Bean raises issues about those who do not go to an institutional church as well as those who are leaving the institutional church. The replicable or measurable sociological definition of spirituality does not seem to be at issue. The issues instead seem to centre on institutional credibility, the perceived sense that religion or spirituality is all about the institution rather than transforming lives, the differences of opinion as to what it means to follow Jesus or be on the Christian way, and the practices supportive for spiritual growth.

In an open letter to churches, Kelly Bean writes:

Churches and non-goers alike are called to a life of being church. It’s worth repeating, no matter where we are, we who choose to follow Christ are each called to urge one another on to love and good deeds and to be church.<sup>31</sup>

These authors are asking these very personal questions in many different ways:

“What does it mean to follow Jesus?” “What does it mean to be church?”

Christian community is integral to the spiritual journey, as Kelly Bean, Diana Butler Bass, Nancy Tatom Ammerman, and Brian McLaren (among many others) make clear. As Ammerman notes, “religious’ communities create a discursive arena, a community of conversation in which the presence of a spiritual layer of reality can

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<sup>30</sup> Kelly Bean, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), pp. 65, 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

be perceived.”<sup>32</sup> Christian community, however, is not a co-extensive concept with institution. Institution has connotations of well-formed tradition and theological understandings, well-developed organizational polity, and mandatory authority and accountability structures. Institutions are organizational systems that over time have developed a homeostasis that naturally resists change. Organization is the method or polity by which the institution or Christian community is formed, organized and operates. Christian community may be found within or without the institution, just as persons in the Theistic category may be found within and without the institution.

Christian community may be vital for everyday spiritual or religious living, but not necessarily religious institutions or organizations. Issues have been raised as to whether or when religious institutions and the institution’s loyalists are being the church or are unable to respond to the Holy Spirit blowing where it will in the current cultural, social and physical contexts.

Church communities also may be in contested space insofar as people are making judgments as to whether such communities seem to be an authentic expression of Christ. For example, Kelly Bean quotes Richard Rohr:

It’s true that the church did not officially start until the Day of Pentecost, but since the church is based on the person and work of Christ, it really began with Jesus. He is the one who is “calling out” people who will call upon Him for salvation. All who do so are automatically members of the body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:13). When it comes to the church, there is the church invisible, comprised by all those who have trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord. And there is the visible church, comprised of those who gather together. Not all members of the visible church belong

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, p 36.

to the body of Christ, and not all who belong to the body of Christ gather physically in a church.<sup>33</sup>

Rohr's opinion is just one expression of the way the contest is framed.

Another emerges from the play, *Equivocation*, written by Bill Cain.<sup>34</sup> Set in 1605–1606, the gunpowder plot has unfolded and the King of England through his prime minister, Cecil, is trying to convince one of the great playwrights of the day, Shag, to put on a production vindicating the King's handling of the affair. Shag is promised much but resists putting his name to the play. In one scene, a lightning-like byplay between the playwright and the prime minister unfolds:

SHAG You want to found the nation on a lie.

CECIL You think Rome was founded by twins suckled by wolves?

SHAG So, we are Rome now?

CECIL Rome is over, and so is Wittenberg.

SHAG And when both religions are gone, what will be left?

CECIL Why—(with wonder and admiration) You. You will be left. You will be the measure of all things. (then) People will go to your plays as they used to go to church. Reverently. And they will leave exactly as they went in, unchanged but feeling somehow improved. Have you ever looked at one of your audiences? You make them happy, but not so happy as to make them reject their unhappiness. You make them angry, but not so angry as to inspire action. You reduce all of reality to spectacle, making action unnecessary, even impossible... You are the perfect civic religion. (deep admiration) Your work will outlast the Bible—which it resembles—but you've improved on it.

SHAG How?

CECIL You've kept the willing suspension of disbelief and gotten rid of the moral demands.

The playwright's words touch that nagging feeling among many within and without the institutional church that institutional religion today leaves people exactly as they went in: unchanged but feeling somehow improved. This contested space is especially interesting given the many ways loyalists in the institutional church enact

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<sup>33</sup> Kelly Bean citing Richard Rohr, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church*, p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Cain, *Equivocation* (Ashland: Oregon Shakespeare Festival Production Script, 2009), p. 37.



their understanding of love your neighbour as documented by Ammerman and others.

Is this merely an instance of “What we have here is a failure to communicate” or a boundary-setting technique? Is there something more? The Ammerman study findings about the church and the environment are shocking. She observes: “People *outside* religious communities were half again as likely (compared to active religious participants) to include care for the earth among their list of concerns; and not surprisingly, they almost never saw this as a spiritual matter.”<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, how is it that the United Church of Christ denominationally, for example, could risk so much—including suing the state of North Carolina—and yet, as of December 2013, had only 23% of its local member churches complete the process to be open and affirming? Every church member may say we love our neighbour and tell confirming spiritual stories, but the reality is that an LGBT person only has a one in four chance of walking into a church that fully embraces them. The Ammerman study acknowledges the disconnect between religion and social and economic justice, but provides no analysis saying why this is so. Are we left with cynical Cecil?

Institutional loyalists may indeed be spiritual, but they are declining in numbers. In the United Church of Christ, during the years between 2000 and 2010, there was a net loss of 696 congregations and 318,897 members.<sup>36</sup> Between 2009 and 2013, national basic support declined by 21.3%. Seven in ten churches have

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<sup>35</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Spirituality in Everyday Life*, p. 237 (location Kindle ebook version 4491, 4497). Ammerman notes from the Pew Forum 2010, “Just 6% say that their religious beliefs have had the biggest influence on what they think about tougher environmental rules,” p. 238.

<sup>36</sup> United Church of Christ, *Statistical Profiles Fall 2013 and Fall 2014* (Cleveland: The Center For Analytics, Research and Data, 2013 and 2014).

fewer than 100 members in worship; national support from each church dollar is less than a penny. Some would argue that progressive mainline denominations—including The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ—are dying.<sup>37</sup>

For people like Carol Howard Merritt, hope is centred on *loyal radicals* who feel comfortable in a denomination, even with the reality we live in a post-denominational culture.<sup>38</sup> For theologian Douglas John Hall, “our problem is ‘systemic’.” He finds a disconnect between Christendom and Gospel. In his view, “the old, established churches are prevented from proclaiming gospel precisely on account of their establishment, or the remnants of the same.”<sup>39</sup> He says, “It is therefore an exceedingly serious matter when there is an impression in the public realm that the churches have nothing to say today. But precisely that impression, I contend, exists—and exists conspicuously—in the public arena today, and even among Christians themselves.”<sup>40</sup> Looking ahead, Douglas John Hall opines: “But I am persuaded of this: that unless our so-called mainline Protestant denomination of North America can recover the kind of unceasing quest for *gospel* that is our chief calling as disciples of the Christ, few of these denominations will survive to participate in the *ending* ceremonies of this century that we have recently entered.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Derek Penwell, *The Mainliner’s Survival Guide to the Post-Denominational World* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2014), p. 5 and Douglas John Hall, *Waiting For Gospel: An Appeal to the Dispirited Remnants of Protestant ‘Establishment’* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), Kindle ebook edition location 52.

<sup>38</sup> Carol Howard Merritt, *Reframing Hope* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2010), p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, Kindle location 150.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 680.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, Kindle location 741.

Hall's passionate arguments make it clear that, for him, institutions have an important role in speaking and enacting the Gospel in the North American context. One Greek interpretation of the word "gospel" is "war report."<sup>42</sup> People long to hear good news from the life and death struggles on the front lines. Are we, the church, bearers of Good News in the midst of today's life and death struggles? Are we making the word incarnate by enacting that word on the front lines of life and death? Is the institutional church at the local level up to the challenge of bearing and being the Good News today? For some, including Douglas John Hall, the answer to that question is not clear.

The Ammerman study does not address these concerns. We acknowledge that the spiritual stories shared through that study are not unusual; they are important for those who have lived the stories and appreciated the connection of their stories to their faith communities. However, it's hard to hear those larger lived religious stories, the Gospel as suggested by Douglas John Hall, at the local church . It's almost impossible to hear about economic issues and the environment, issues which are intertwined at the heart of the life and death issues on the front lines today.<sup>43</sup>

Some people are looking for that Christian community which can sing the song upon which our lives and the life of our planet depend today. Carol Howard Merritt, in *Reframing Hope*, observes "since environmentalism is such a significant issue in a new generation, many people are attracted to spiritual communities that

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<sup>42</sup> Robert B. Coote and Mary P. Coote, *Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 103.

<sup>43</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

make creation care a priority. <sup>44</sup>For the most part, they are not finding that creation is a priority in the traditional local church.

It is important not to confuse the fact that we can identify spirituality in the traditional mainline church (Ammerman's findings) with the issues of the health of churches or denominations. In the situation of The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ, the identified problem seems to centre more on institution and organization than on theology. The "spiritual but not religious" debate muddies the analysis because it often expresses frustration and name-calling (political/moral sphere) and focuses on institution versus non-institution instead of on what we need to move forward.

In this Age of Authenticity and Spiritual Awakening, experience does matter. The nature and perceived quality of the experience matters. Many yearn to walk the Gospel story and make the story with others, not to simply hear stories from the pulpit. Experience comes first and concepts follow; stories are shared in an action reflection model (praxis). But at the present time, the institution is simply not geared to consistently provide these experiential opportunities. The occasional program can, yes; but not everyone will be able to get to the program at the time set or want to participate in that particular program.

As currently organized, the institution—no matter how well-meaning or well-financed—doesn't always work in this Age of Authenticity and time of Spiritual Awakening. It's not even fair to expect it to do so. It may work well for those who have mastered the system; that's good as far as it goes.

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<sup>44</sup> Carol Howard Merritt, *Reframing Hope*, p. 97.

For many, to walk the story or make the story with others does not involve sitting on church committees or boards or practicing the most excruciating form of democracy and report writing. We are killing ourselves with structure and process which all send a message that trust is a scarce commodity when it comes to running the church.<sup>45</sup>

Church boards and committees are no place to learn how to run a non-profit community service program. Teamwork, leadership and management best practices have long ago left the church behind. The saddest thing to see is an executive with transformational leadership skills come into the church, drink the water, and turn into a leader intent on conserving all that has gone before. Somehow reverence and prudence have become irrevocably joined at the hip in the institutional church. The risk of the cross seems out of date.<sup>46</sup> Homeostasis wins again. But, the Holy Spirit will not wait around; it blows where it will.

The statistically validated tool created by Speed Leas and George Parsons known as “The Congregational Systems Inventory” gives a clue to the issues.<sup>47</sup> Generally, lay leaders are managerial and do not hold a good tension on a continuum with needed transformational skills. Generally, churches learn by doing better what they already know how to do. Learning by failing is not the preferred option and a good tension between the two is usually absent. And, generally church leaders may try to do some visioning and strategic planning, but often the chart paper gets put in

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<sup>45</sup> Derek Penwell, *The Mainliner's Survival Guide to the Post-Denominational World*, pp. 63–67.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> George Parsons & Speed B. Leas, *Understanding your Congregation as a System* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 1993).

the closet and does not appear until the following year. Implementing mission is laborious. Meetings without action seem endless.

Those who emphasize experience are running as fast as they can away from this system. Prototyping and iterative change are the language of the day, a way of learning by experiencing failure. It's fast, it's hands-on and it fits with a "maker" mentality. It fits with what's expected of people in their work settings. Tom Bandy compared church processes to a game of croquet. There are many today whatever their spiritual inclinations who simply are not interested in playing that institutional game. Not only do they dislike the way the game is played; they do not find the game helpful for their spiritual development. Avoiding the "spiritual but not religious" frame, Brian McLaren suggests that traditional churches and new Christian community expressions are both invited by the Spirit to a new or renewed journey of aliveness.<sup>48</sup> Denominations should empower the journey of aliveness, according to McLaren.

Likewise, Kelly Bean also makes clear that institutional issues do not detract from appreciation for tradition and the historic place of the institutional church and what it has to teach those on a different path. Her word for this is "*Sankofa*."<sup>49</sup> These issues<sup>50</sup> are not fought out in public like abortion or creationism. There are no public rallies. Whether rightly perceived or not, people move toward what feels

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<sup>48</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *We Make the Road by Walking* (New York: Jericho Books, 2014), pp. xviii–xxii.

<sup>49</sup> Kelly Bean, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church*, p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Note that other issues exist as well. Materialism and scientific advances have raised additional questions relating to religion and God or gods. Much work has been done to find ultimate meaning and value in life and creation without gods or religious communities. The arguments are sometimes demeaning and sometimes as kind as Alan Lightman in *The Accidental Universe*. The arguments can also broaden the whole notion of religion beyond our usual frames such as what the late Ronald

more authentic for themselves. They are also raising issues as to the authenticity of the institutional church, much as Martin Luther King, Jr. did so many years ago in his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*. It's important to pay attention intentionally to what might be unfolding. We need to go beyond the 2008 Barna study cross-section to the edge of what is unfolding and stay awhile.<sup>51</sup>

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Dworkin sought to offer in *Religion Without God*. This is a contested space; it too impacts the future of progressive mainline denominations.

<sup>51</sup> Author's note: Having lived on the West Coast for 45 years as a partner in a large urban law firm, social activist, church member, minister, non-profit executive director and conference minister, my personal experience is different from the Ammerman sample results. Some communities wouldn't function without the grace and good work of unaffiliates. If I could construct my dream team to effect change in Portland, Oregon there would be three unaffiliated and one theist, highly affiliated. I had more reputation capital and political access to effect community change as a lawyer than I have ever had as a minister. Church is not about training laity to take their rightful place in the workings of democracy—it's about Gospel and it is about the storm-stiller Jesus who is more frightening than the killer sea in his call on our lives for love and justice. Except in a few instances, I did not hear about that Jesus in the Ammerman study. In small rural areas, the community is the tribe and sacredness emerges among the tribe or segments of the tribe as community life unfolds. In my cultural context, to elicit statistics as to who contributes or volunteers more (unaffiliated or affiliated) is unhelpful information. It promotes division. The unaffiliated of any stripe are our collaborators for healing the world and enacting love and justice. We cannot do it without them.

## **Taking Stock and Making the Turn Toward the Forecasted Spiritual/Church Landscape in Which The United Church of Canada is Called to Live**

As mentioned above and outlined in detail in part II, microfinance can be a bridge allowing the institutional church to engage, support and learn from the trailblazers, networks and emerging communities of practice that exist outside institutional authority and accountability structures. Microfinance offers the opportunity for the institution to become vulnerable and changed by an encounter with the new movement of the Spirit that is unfolding.

The Corrigan systems diagram indicates, in its general movement of new life from risky trailblazing to communities of practice, the renewal and rebirth we long to experience. The diagram, however, says nothing about what is unfolding along the new life curve or what is forecasted to unfold. But what's unfolding goes far beyond what one reads concerning emergent or emerging churches. The role of microfinance and other ministry opportunities for The United Church of Canada are most productively understood by moving from the underlying analysis to date to a more focused and detailed picture of the forecasted spiritual landscape.

Religious institutions are not alone today in trying to come to grips with the changing socio-cultural and technological shifts impacting institutional well-being. Educational institutions are similarly impacted. Paying attention to what's forecasted for the future of learning offers a critical model for understanding the emerging spiritual landscape. With assistance from KnowledgeWorks, the framework for developing its learning forecast has been used to capture and interpret what's forecasted to unfold in the spiritual/church landscape. The results



provide a far more integrated, systemic picture than what is offered by looking at what's happening, for example, in communities that are called emergent or emerging church. The signs of things to come are outlined below, and it is in this creative ferment that microfinance for ministry outside denominational accountability structures has its place.

## **The Forecasted Landscape for Learning That Helps Religious Institutions Map the Spiritual Landscape**

At least in the United States, the container known as school is being blown apart by the winds of change and the pieces will fall into new patterns via a process akin to genetic recombination.<sup>52</sup> KnowledgeWorks, educational consultants working on this project, forecast that in ten years:

1. "School" will take many forms. Sometimes it will be self-organized.
2. Learning will no longer be defined by time and place.
3. Learners and their families will create individualized learning playlists reflecting their particular interests, goals, and values.
4. Those learning playlists might include public schools but could also include a wide variety of digitally-mediated or place-based learning experiences.
5. Radical personalization will be the norm, with learning supports and approaches being tailored to each learner whether within a traditional

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<sup>52</sup> KnowledgeWorks Forecast 3.0, *Recombinant Education: Regenerating the Learning Ecosystem* (Cincinnati: KnowledgeWorks, 2012) and related resources "A Glimpse into the Future of Learning" (Cincinnati: KnowledgeWorks, 2013) and "2020 Forecast Update—Creating a World of Learning" (Cincinnati: KnowledgeWorks, 2011).

setting such as a place-based school or across a variety of settings that comprise a self-organized learning journey.

6. Educators' jobs will diversify as many new learning agent roles or curatorial roles emerge to support learning.
7. Geographic and virtual communities will take ownership of learning in new ways, blending it with other kinds of activity.
8. A wide variety of digital and other networks, platforms, and content resources will support learning.
9. Diverse forms of credentials, certificates, and reputation markers will reflect the many ways in which people learn and demonstrate mastery.

This forecast for the future of learning is impacted by several critical disruptions:

- Transformational investment strategies and open access to start-up knowledge will seed an explosion of disruptive social innovations.
- Systems, including dashboards, will help people target precisely their interactions with the world.
- Activity of all sorts will be increasingly independent of institutions as contributions become more ad-hoc, dynamic, and networked.
- Innovative, open business models will leverage complex networks of assets and relationships to create ultra-customer-centric experiences across industries.
- As a do-it-yourself culture continues to spread and the nascent sharing economy grows, social innovation and shared infrastructure will be driven

by people's needs and points of connection and will be created with or apart from traditional institutions rather than by those institutions.

What's happening to the learning environment in the United States is happening to progressive mainline denominations in North America.

## **Making the Connection Between Impacts to the Learning Environment and the Socio-cultural Shifts Impacting the Future of Denominations in North America**

**Overview** – The factors impacting learning described above are also found in our religious and spiritual context, as evidenced by a close reading of *Christianity After Religion* by Diana Butler Bass, *Emergence Christianity* by Phyllis Tickle, *A Religion of One's Own* by Thomas Moore, *The Mainliner's Survival Guide to the Post-Denominational World*, by Derek Penwell, and *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church: The Unofficial Guide to Alternative Forms of Christian Community* by Kelly Bean, among others.

For example, Phyllis Tickle and Derek Penwell discuss the impact of technology on the spiritual journey. Numerous books have been written on the effective use of social media for churches. Diana Butler Bass discusses the importance of belonging coming before belief and the personalization of the spiritual journey: "Instead of believing, behaving, and belonging, we need to reverse the order to belonging, behaving, and believing. And therein lies the difference between religion-as-institution and *religio* as a spiritually vital faith." Diana Butler Bass has this take on belonging: "If we think of belonging only as membership in a club, organization, or church, we miss the point. Belonging is the risk to move

beyond the world we know, to venture out on pilgrimage, to accept exile. And it is the risk of being with companions on that journey.”<sup>53</sup>

On the subject of personalization, Butler Bass notes: “But Christian spirituality insists that the self is a preposition. We find and know ourselves in relation to our location on a journey and through the relationships that form the web of our lives.”<sup>54</sup> She continues, “Christian spirituality of the self enjoins that God is not only located in us, but that God acts, speaks, heals, loves, touches, and celebrates through us.”<sup>55</sup> And, “Church is, therefore, not an institution . . . but a community of relationships where people’s selves are with God and with one another, bound by love.”<sup>56</sup>

As this analysis moves next to consider the unfolding Christian spiritual landscape, Butler Bass provides a cogent transition:

The new global Great Awakening is not contained by the stage of the local Congregational church, in small groups, at camp meetings or tents, or at Pentecostal tabernacles or progressive political meetings. This awakening is being performed in the networked world, where the border between the sacred and secular has eroded and where the love of God and neighbor—and the new vision of belonging, behaving, and believing—is being staged far beyond conventional religious communities. Although churches seem the most natural space to perform spiritual awakening, the disconcerting reality is that many people in Western society see churches more as museums of religion than sacred stages that dramatize the movement of God’s spirit.

**Forecast** – The KnowledgeWorks’ learning forecast framework provides a template for organizing, recognizing and assessing the signs of things to come as they relate to the personal spiritual journey and the various individual and communal

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<sup>53</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, pp. 187–198.

<sup>54</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, p. 190.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

expressions relating to that spiritual journey. The spiritual forecast below bears witness to the changes ahead.

1. Church will take many forms, often with no denominational accountability. Sometimes it will be self-organized. Sometimes it won't claim to be a new form of church.
  - a. Silicon Valley Progressive Faith Community: A new church that started with no denominational affiliation or accountability but whose minister is trained and held accountable to a traditional Protestant denomination.
  - b. Momastery: An AA- and Jesus-grounded blog with a related service organization that offers a place of deep connection and reflection and a vehicle for being of service in the wider community; it has most of the marks of church but would never claim to be a church.
2. Church and Christian spiritual growth will no longer be defined by time and place.
  - a. Into the Wilderness: An online spiritual learning and meditation platform with pop-up opportunities for episodic face-to-face gatherings, including worship and study, prayer, and meditation.
  - b. Spirituality & Belief in Second Life: A virtual world whose destinations include churches and other religious communities in which users can employ avatars to explore spirituality safely.
  - c. Center for Action and Contemplation: An online and physical gathering place led by Richard Rohr that offers spiritual resources, retreats, and programs.
3. Persons on a Christian spiritual journey will create individual spiritual playlists reflecting their interests, goals, and values.
  - a. Spirituality and Practice: An Internet-based spiritual resource collection organized around 37 essential practices of the spiritual life which is reviewed and vetted by its directors and which includes links to spiritual coaches, workshop leaders, and retreat leaders.
  - b. How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church: This 2014 book by Kelly Bean, the founder of Urban Abbey, an egalitarian inter-generational intentional community in Portland, Oregon, serves as a guide to alternative forms of Christian community.
4. Those spiritual playlists might include traditional churches but could also include a wide variety of digitally-mediated or place-based spiritual growth experiences.
  - a. Heart's Rest: A for-profit tent ministry offering spiritual retreats and direction, along with a spiritual lending library in a local community gift store, that is led by an ordained minister with a

- Ph.D. in Biblical Studies who operates Heart's Rest outside denominational accountability structures.
- b. Darkwood Brew: An interactive web television program and spiritual gathering that follows progressive Christianity principles and is quietly associated with a denomination through the affiliation of its hosts.
5. Radical personalization will be the norm, with learning supports and approaches being tailored to each person on the spiritual journey.
    - a. *A Religion of One's Own: A Guide to Creating a Personal Spirituality in a Secular World*: This 2014 book by Thomas Moore provides a guide to creating an authentic personal spirituality from a variety of sources.
    - b. *Occupy Spirituality: A Radical Vision for a New Generation*: This 2013 book by Adam Bucko and Matthew Fox encourages spiritual growth through ethically motivated action that does not depend on a church or denomination but instead emphasizes transformation of our broken systems.
  6. Denominational roles and professional staff positions will diversify as many new spiritual growth coaches, directors, community founders, and ministry agents such as curators emerge to support the spiritual journey.
    - a. Glennon Doyle Melton: The founder and leader of Momastery is a *New York Times* bestselling author and a TEDx guest; in recovery and unabashedly Jesus-centered, she tells the truth about herself, knows how to swear, and does not take herself too seriously.
    - b. Kelly Bean: This self-described "minister-at-large" has founded intentional communities, authored *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church*, and spoken at venues such as Fuller Seminary's church growth program and the Wild Goose Festival.
    - c. Katherine Ingram: This soul-centred life coach draws upon her training as a licensed therapist, her own grief experiences, and a variety of spiritual paths to help clients find an authentic life.
  7. Geographic and virtual communities will take ownership of spiritual growth in new ways, blending it with other kinds of activity.
    - a. Jacob's Well: An eastside Vancouver, BC ecumenical Christian community seeking mutually transformative friendship with those on the margins of society that also equips others to do the same in their own contexts.
    - b. New Way Community: An intentional inclusive community in Vancouver, BC located at the margins, which welcomes people of all faiths and circumstances and is informed by a Christian lens.
  8. A wide variety of digital and other networks, platforms, and content resources will support the spiritual journey.

- a. Redeem the Commute: A mobile app and website offering free courses on personal and spiritual growth as a gift for busy families living the commuting lifestyle.
  - b. The Contemplative Society: A non-profit organization and online spiritual resource that carries trainings, workshops, retreats, and books by Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest and hermit ministering at the extreme edge of her denomination with a very ecumenical—even interfaith—following. She has helped many people disaffected with Christianity find a way back. The Contemplative Society offers trainings and certifications for local spiritual teachers.
9. As more people take it upon themselves to find solutions, a new wave of social innovation will help address resource constraints and other challenges.
- a. Together Rising: This non-profit service offshoot of Momastery uses crowd sourcing and corporate partnerships to address community needs; for example, one call to raise money for an immigrant family yielded more than \$10,000 in a single day. In its distinctive governance model, there are no membership meetings or votes. Per person contribution limits may be set, such as a \$5.00 maximum per person donation for a specific fundraising cause.
  - b. Cahaba River Society Faith-Based Initiatives: A non-profit organization seeking to restore a river system in Alabama reached out to faith communities for support.
10. Diverse forms of credentials, certificates, and reputation markers will reflect the many ways in which people move along and support the spiritual journey and demonstrate mastery.
- a. Certificate of Spirituality and Social Change: This certificate offered by the Pacific School of Religion offers specialized training for the work of social changemaking for people from a variety of paths.
  - b. Fresh Expressions Course: A training course for pioneering ministries encourages fresh expressions of church coming alongside people on their personal journeys.
  - c. Seminary of the Street: An alternative form of theological training focusing on critiquing current systems and transforming community life through God’s love.

**The Recombinant Church** – The forecast gives shape to what might be called the Recombinant Church, just as KnowledgeWorks has referred to the future of learning as “Recombinant Education.” The recombinant church adapts to each person on a

spiritual, transformational journey instead of each person trying to adapt to institutional church. This shift of emphasis brings a new, diverse Christian spiritual ecosystem into being. Spiritual recombination promises to bolster the resilience of spiritual ecosystems. It's a process of putting the pieces—some long-established and some new—together in new sequences to create this diverse and evolving spiritual ecosystem.

## **Implications of the Recombinant Church for The United Church of Canada**

### **Spiritual Cultures**

Cultivate spiritual cultures that support individuals in pursuing authenticity and spiritual awakening.

- Put individuals, not institutions, at the centre.
- Foster interest-driven collaboration for supporting the spiritual journey.
- Cultivate cultures of innovation, information sharing, and continuous learning.
- Facilitate experience-based religious and spiritual experiences.
- Foster strong relationships and transformational community.
- Create the foundations and supports that will make radically personalized spirituality viable for everyone who seeks it.

### **Organizational Structures and Roles**

Support the development of diverse spiritual structures and professional roles.

- Simplify existing organizational structures and processes so as to free up attention and resources for theological work.
- Create new organizational structures, including new ministry unit definitions and requirements, appropriate to the expanding spiritual ecosystem.
- Establish new governance structures that support a focus on the needs of individuals versus the maintenance of the institution.
- Develop professional roles appropriate to the expanding spiritual ecosystem.
- Create new professional preparation, certification, and development approaches appropriate to diverse spiritual support roles.
- Establish new accountability structures appropriate to the expanding spiritual ecosystem.
- Support other kinds of communities in developing vibrant spiritual structures.



## **Church Offerings**

Recast church offerings to extend beyond institutional boundaries and support individuals in pursuing their customized spiritual journeys.

- Develop or partner to provide spiritual resources and community configurations for use in many settings.
- Curate resources for use in individuals' personal spiritual playlists, regardless of whether those individuals are members of the institutional church.
- Develop new online and in-person community-based platforms for the spiritual journey.
- Share and host practices that support a variety of pathways toward spiritual growth, partnering beyond the institutional church.
- Facilitate engagements wherein people go beyond the church walls to help each other and to improve their communities.
- Expand and intensify collaboration with unaffiliated people to heal the world and enact love and justice.
- Support church communities that we easily recognize in our tradition, but also be prepared to unbundle for others the marks of the church such that the recombinant church might arise.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Lead toward the creation of a flexible and radically personalized spiritual ecosystem.

- Broker connections with others involved in spiritual practice in other settings.
- Guide the values of the established church in migrating to new forms.
- Take the lead in helping people develop shared definitions of and approaches to spiritual authenticity.
- Engage broad stakeholder groups in creating and extending transformational visions for the spiritual journey.
- Treat the spiritual journey as a shared community asset among many spiritual guides, coaches, directors, communities, traditions and cultural contexts.
- Create new connections among those supporting the spiritual journey who teach and act in accord with The United Church of Canada's values.
- Explore innovative ways of funding ministries and other spiritual supports.
- Use policy to spark innovation and remove barriers to meaningful spiritual growth.

The United Church of Canada is invited to take the unfolding recombinant church to heart as a way of framing its future ministry. This includes the use of microfinance to support and learn from those living on the edge. Brian McLaren writes: "It is my hope that denominations will create special protected zones for

learning circles and other innovative faith communities, zones where fresh expressions of Christian spirituality, community, and mission can experiment and flourish without being subjected to normal protocols and expectations. In a sense, denominations can understand themselves to be entering into ‘new lines of business’ by fostering new faith communities in this experimental space.”<sup>57</sup>

What if the United Church created a spiritual learning platform for Canada that was as extensive as Spirituality and Practice in the United States? What if The United Church of Canada became the most trusted and transparent curator of biblical, theological, spiritual and social justice resources including coaches, directors, retreat leaders, and workshop presenters in North America?<sup>58</sup> What if the United Church contracted out certification for ministry to approved seminaries and recognized a host of certifications and organizations supporting personal spiritual growth? What if the United Church did less programming and more connecting to others outside the denomination offering much the same thing? What if our focus was on filling the gaps and not duplicating denominationally what can be easily accessed such as the plethora of environmental movements and causes one can ascribe to in North America? Finally, what if our focus was on creating partnerships and collaborations and social labs with others already living the Gospel outside our accountability structures?<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *We Make the Road by Walking*, p. xxii; see also Carol Howard Merritt, *Reframing Hope*, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> See, Steven Rosenbaum, *Curation Nation* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011), pp. 3, 4, 6. Curation is about adding value from people who add their qualitative judgment to whatever is being gathered and organized. Aggregation without curation is just a big pile of stuff. It’s the process of discerning quality for an intended audience.

<sup>59</sup> See Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2013) for an outline of what it means to organize around the emerging whole including broad cross-sector cooperation,

The microfinance proposal detailed in Part II is one modest step The United Church of Canada can take in entering the dance of adaptive change. God is already there in the fluid dynamic of change and chaos. We can accept the Holy Spirit's invitation to join God and the storm stiller Jesus and move beyond our institutional structure onto the dance floor of the recombinant church.

## **Incredible Gifts for Dancing with the Holy Spirit**

The United Church of Canada has much to offer in these changing times and the spiritual awakenings in which we find ourselves. The New Creed is alive and embedded in our hearts: we cry out "We are not alone." We can share this incredible knowledge that "you are not alone" with those in the midst of spiritual awakenings. To say this with integrity, however, means we must encounter others where they are, complete with their spiritual playlists and dashboards.

The Truth and Reconciliation process and our understanding of "all my relations" is a gift of enormous proportions in this dilemma-filled world. The church's deep listening, confession, silence, invitation, repentance, forgiveness, and participation in restorative justice function as model and mark of a spiritual ecosystem that can change the world. This process has provided new ways of being present to and involved in global and local dilemmas. We dance willingly in the refiners' fire. Can we dance like that with those outside our wineskins?

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most notably found in the social lab movement. Unaffiliates and tribes of all persuasions are our partners in these social labs.

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