



# Learning and Transformation

RESOURCES FOR CONVERSATIONS  
FROM THE TEXAS METHODIST FOUNDATION

## DOING THE MATH OF MISSION: FRUITS, FAITHFULNESS AND METRICS

### *Monograph 2-* GETTING TO THE WHY: TURNING INTENTIONS INTO OUTCOMES

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The *metrics monographs* are a series of five monographs addressing the mission of the Texas Methodist Foundation to support conversations on the purpose of ministry:

1. "Counting Resources and Measuring Ministry" (Released February 2013)
2. "Getting to the Why: Turning Intentions Into Outcomes" (Released April 2013)
3. "Phronesis and the Task of Figuring It Out for Ourselves" (Released August 2013)
4. "Counts, Measures and Conversations: Using Metrics for Fruitfulness"
5. "Be Careful What You Measure"

**The Strategic Direction of TMF:** The Texas Methodist Foundation will help the Church become more purposeful and more clearly focused on her God-appointed mission through the integration of financial and leadership resources.

**Our Intent:** The invitation of the Texas Methodist Foundation is for you to use this monograph to support conversations of learning among leaders within your church or conference.

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# GETTING TO THE WHY: TURNING INTENTIONS INTO OUTCOMES

Monograph #2 in a series of five Metrics Monographs on *Doing the Math of Mission: Fruits, Faithfulness and Metrics*

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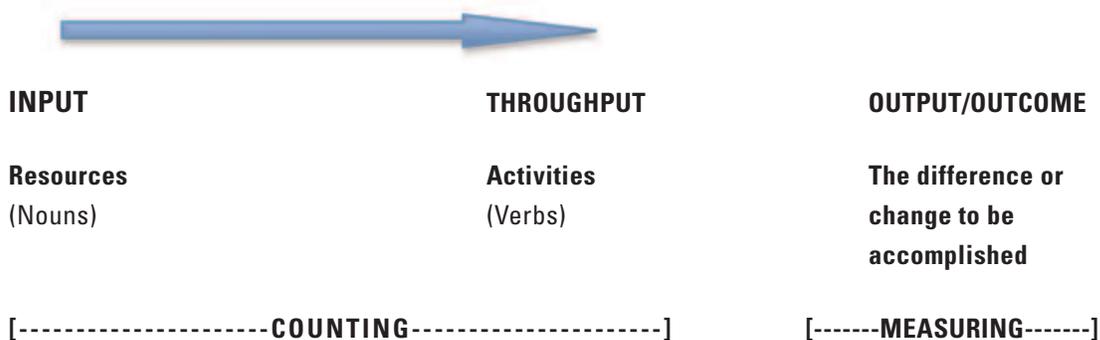
*"Most church boats don't like to be rocked; they prefer to lie at anchor rather than go places in stormy seas. But that's because we Christians view the Church as the object of our love instead of the subject and instrument of God's."*

- William Sloane Coffin<sup>i</sup>

This monograph on "Getting to the Why" is a continuation of a conversation begun in the first in this series of five monographs about mission and metrics. Most organizations I have worked with or been a part of – whether local congregations, annual conferences, or national groups – are much clearer about **what** we do and about **how** we do what we do than we are about **why** we do it. Is there a purpose to what we do? Is what we do to make some difference in our mission field, in the lives of people, in the communities where we live, in the globe we share? **Is there a why behind our anxiety and our activity that would, in fact, provide better direction to what we do and how we do it?**

A primary distinction made in the first monograph was a somewhat arbitrary separation of counting and measuring when addressing the issue of metrics. I argued that counting is what we do with our resources and activities, our inputs and throughputs. Counting gives attention to numbers. How many, how often, how much? Measuring, on the other hand, I argued, is what we must learn to do with our outcomes. Measuring gives attention to change. How far have we moved toward our goal?

The Deming systems model that I used to make this distinction is as follows:



In my experience counting our resources and activities has had more to do with the church as the *object* of our love and concern, as expressed in the quote from Bill Coffin that introduced this monograph. When counting resources and activities, we are commonly more concerned about whether we have enough and if



we are able to protect what we have. We count and then we ask anxious questions of scarcity: How can we get more members? How can we increase stewardship to underwrite the budget? What new programs do we need to start to attract people? How can we protect our buildings, our budget, our endowment . . . ?

I arrived at my first appointment as pastor to a church in Philadelphia soon after they had completed a building project. I was quickly taken aback by the board's unwillingness to consider using our brand new family life center for engagement with community people and groups who were not already members of our church, or with other community agencies who shared our purpose of making people's lives better. These leaders in my first church were not mean and uncaring people. Far from it. Their reluctance to use the family life center simply came down to the issues of the building being brand new, our carrying a substantial mortgage on the building, and our lack of available money to deal with someone breaking a window or increasing our insurance in case someone slipped in the kitchen. These were risks that we should take only with our own members where we had an element of control. **I could not have said it at the time, but we were too busy loving our church instead of thinking that it had a purpose as an instrument of God's love.**

Perhaps such self-love can bleed over into idolatry that even denies a church's purpose, such as the situation I found while consulting with one very large and resource-rich congregation. They spared no expense to build a magnificent children's Christian Education center that attached to, and matched perfectly, the flawless, magnificent worship center that sat on the top of the hill. Then they filled the walls of this new children's center with museum quality art. And finally, they enlisted a core of adult volunteers who came in early on Sunday mornings to monitor the halls to ensure the children did not touch the walls when coming and going. It never occurred to them that they were defeating their own purpose by having a Christian Education center where children could not feel comfortable. They could, however, count and re-count to any listener the cost of the building, the value of the art, the expense of upkeep, and the size of the endowment used to maintain it.

Conversations about resources/inputs (dollars, time, buildings) and activities/throughputs (programs, groups, projects), easily become worrisome and anxiety producing conversations about what we have, what we need, and how to get more. These are conversations heavily marked by problem solving and either caring for, or fixing, the church we love.

**Continuing our distinction, conversations about measuring our outcomes lean more heavily into our purpose - the church not as the object of our love but as the instrument of God's love.** This is where conversations turn to discernment and dreaming, and we ask about what we will make different in the lives of the people that we engage, in the communities where we live, in the globe that we share. This is no longer the church as the object of our love but as the instrument of God's love. Conversations are no longer about problem solving, but about possibility hunting.

We know how to count – and we pretty much have in hand the worry and anxiety that accompany counting. **It is not with counting but with measuring that we have so much new to learn.** Going back to my first appointment again for an example, another of the tussles we had to work through had to do with the baptism of an infant. About year three into my nine-year appointment, I was contacted by an intentionally inactive woman (her name was on our membership roll but she had made it clear that she had been offended by some incident well over ten years ago and would not be back to participate.) She recently became a grandmother and called me wanting to know when I would baptize the baby, whose mother I had not met and was similarly a "member" without



connection. I said I would let her know and I put the request on the agenda of the governing board for a conversation about the expectations we had as a congregation for those who were baptized in our church. I was bothered by my conversation with the woman and thought it would be a good and instructive agenda item for the board's consideration. Somewhat to my surprise, it was a short conversation with the board. My question about under what circumstances would we baptize the baby, despite the clear intent of the family not to have the baby participate in Christian community, was short-circuited by members wanting to proceed without the need for conversation with the mother and grandmother **"because you never know what good can come of it years from now."**

There it was: "because you never know what good can come of it years from now." An outcome. We wanted to make a difference in people's lives, so there were multiple and myriad ways in which we engaged people in worship, study, mission and community in that first church I served. **But we weren't at all clear about why we wanted to change people and what that changed person might look like if we were successful (faithful).** So any hoped for difference was sufficient – "you never know what good can come years from now from whatever we do now." How does a congregation plan for such diffuse and fuzzy changes? How does a congregation measure its progress toward such an outcome?

**The measuring we need to learn how to do must, of necessity, be much more focused and concrete than simply a hoped for wish.** The outcome the church needs is the hope-filled, health-filled, excitement-filled, disturbing differences that God dreams about for our lives and for our communities. Measuring is not worrying about what we don't have. It isn't waiting for what might happen if we just keep doing what we do. The outcomes we need are those deep, and even disturbingly clear, descriptions of what we believe can be different if God gets involved. Again, this is no longer problem solving, it is possibility hunting.

## **PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES**

"The difference between focusing on problem-reinforcing questions and outcome-directed ones is palpable, in terms of optimism, energy, and hopefulness," write Robert Penna and William Phillips in their resource for helping practitioners develop outcomes.<sup>ii</sup> Penna and Phillips summarize relevant research, noting: "Highly effective people invest little energy on their existing problem situations. Instead, they focus attention and energy on their desired outcomes or on what they want instead of these problems . . . A key to high performance across all these research contexts has been the ability to develop, articulate and stay focused on a compelling outcome."

To note the difference between problems and possibilities, Penna and Phillips invite the following exercise:

1. Think of a moderately serious problem at work or in your home.
2. Pose and answer these questions:
  - Why do you have this problem?**
  - What caused it?**
  - Who is to blame for it?**
  - What obstacles are there to solving it?**



3. Now take the same situation and answer these questions:

**What do you want instead of the problem? (Be sure to go beyond merely eliminating the problem.)**

**What would it be like if the problem was solved? What would you see, hear and feel?**

**Imagine the problem is solved; what has been gained?**

I find that the two sets of questions evoke different responses from me, as well as engage different levels of energy. I quite naturally plod into the first set of questions while the second set engages the energy of new possibilities. It matters how we frame our questions. It matters where we start our discernment and decision-making.

So, what is an outcome? A working definition...

The intention of these five monographs, and the conversations that will accompany them, is that we will teach one another better responses to this question about what an outcome is. For non-profit organizations, the shaping and use of outcomes is a perennially difficult task. For the moment, I will offer a place-holding definition of an outcome while we work together to get more clarity.

**"For the church, an outcome is (1)the difference that (2)you believe God has called you to make (3)in this next chapter of your life."**

An outcome is:

**1. the measurable/describable difference:** The fundamental and obvious proposition of the Christian faith is that because Christ is in our lives, something should be different. We should be different. Our relationships with others should be different. What we give ourselves to should create a difference. We are not here to preserve and protect but to challenge and change.

**2. you believe God has called you to make, i.e., the product of the purpose God has given you:** What is to be different is not about our preferences but about God's purpose. The outcome of a congregation is not about what we can think of to do next but about what God calls us to make different. A faithful outcome of healthy ministry requires more discernment of God's will than decision-making about our own future.

**3. in this next chapter of your life, i.e., to be accomplished in a clearly defined, and relatively brief, period of time:** An outcome is not for all time but is the necessary next step of development toward the larger dream that God has but which we cannot yet fulfill. Outcomes are time limited. They are about what we need to learn how to do, how to live, next.

## **DIFFERENCE AND TIME**

For us to move ahead, we need to take seriously the connection of time with our outcomes of ministry. Not to do so allows us the easy escape of idealists who are so captured by the ultimate hope that they easily sidestep the reality of proximate requirements. We can so easily dream of and hope for God's peaceable kingdom that



we refuse to engage the reality that to get there we must first cage some lions and also encourage some lambs. The temptation is to allow hard work to be displaced by wishful hope.

This is the current dilemma of the United Methodist Church that I have written of in earlier projects. As United Methodists we are now a people whose mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Like other mainline denominations whose congregations follow a clearly defined membership model, the shift from making members to making disciples is a frame-bending challenge. We want disciples – people changed by their encounter and engagement with Christ. We want a transformed world – a place changed by the differences that disciples bring to relationships, to setting priorities, to redirecting resources, to addressing the needs of others instead of the preferences of their own.

However, it is easy to get captured by the wishfulness of such a big dream and miss the hard work of the first steps. We are now a people who want to make disciples, but we have congregations where discipleship is not being practiced. We expect God's peaceful kingdom to be birthed from congregations that are contentious about their own decisions. We want to include others in our Wesleyan marriage of the changed heart and the missional hand, as long as they worship in our preferred ways, serve on committees, and remain loyal to our institution. **If we want to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, there is a lot of hard work to do. It is this proximate hard work of the "next steps" of our mission that is the appropriate subject of measurable/describable outcomes. What is the specific difference that God asks you or me (not some generalized "we" or "they") to address in this next chapter of our lives and work?** If we get this right and work at it, then we can ask the same question again in three to five years about what God calls us to do next, moving step by step from making members to making disciples.

The short story I have been using with conferences and have written about elsewhere, concerns a mother who sends her young son out on a pitch dark night to be sure the barn door is locked on the family farm. He leaves but comes back inside within seconds. When his mother asks what is wrong, he says he can't do what she asked because the night is too dark and he can't see the barn from the house. So the mother hands him a flashlight and sends him out again, only to have him return a second time in less than a minute. When she asks what's wrong this time, the son says that he still can't find the barn because the flashlight isn't strong enough to see that far. The mother sends him out a third time saying he doesn't need to see the barn. "Just walk to the end of the light," she instructs her son.

When one walks to the end of the light, the next portion of the path is revealed. All the young boy needs to get started is a conviction that the barn lies out there in a particular direction rather than some other direction. Then, as he goes, the path will be revealed sufficiently to allow him to proceed and make corrections in direction until the barn is found. This is where we are as a church at this moment. We are called to make disciples. We are called to change the world. But to do so, we must take some proximate steps that will make some immediate differences so that we follow a path that will lead us to our ultimate mission.

These necessary proximate steps are what our denominational *Call to Action* and the attention to vital congregations is all about. Picking up the conversation begun in the first monograph, we do not need more vital congregations for the sake of having better congregations that can reverse our membership decline, offer better programs, pay better clergy salaries, or pay their full apportionments. To focus on vital congregations in such a short-sighted way would simply be another step toward empty institutionalism – a form of loving our



church instead of using it. But we do need vital congregations because vital congregations are where disciples are made. **Vital congregations are that next step – that proximate outcome – that we, as a denomination, must pursue.** In order to fulfill our mission of making disciples, we need more vital congregations – so vital congregations are the necessary “tool” that we must learn to construct in order to make the church the instrument of God’s love.

The current task toward addressing our ultimate mission is to learn how to turn our disciple making intentions into measurable/describable outcomes – plausible, doable next steps. In our best examples this is why some of our annual conferences are restructuring, re-prioritizing and redirecting resources and focusing on the mission field within their annual conference bounds, instead of simply caring for the congregations, clergy, and committees that make up its constituency. In our best examples this is why some of our most vital congregations are prioritizing ministry with specific groups of people and focusing on making just one or two specific but significant changes in their neighborhood within the next five years.

**The criteria of time helps us to focus on doable differences.** In the next six months, one year, three years... what is the specific difference that you or your congregation is called to make? Answering this question, with its constraint on time, is a step toward a faithful and effective outcome.

## LEARNING TO TALK ABOUT OUTCOMES INSTEAD OF PROCESS

It may well be that in order to learn how to work with outcomes, we will need to first learn how to ask questions that prompt outcome responses. As noted above, it matters what question one asks because within the question is a clue to the answer. I love the old story of the priest who went to his superior to ask if he could smoke while he prayed, only to be told “no.” Another priest went to the same supervising father to ask if he could pray while he smoked, to which the answer was, “Yes, of course, my son.” **It matters how we ask the question.**

Again, using the contrast between counting, which gives attention to resources and activities, and measuring, which gives attention to outcomes and differences, there is a way to distinguish the kinds of questions we use as we work. Resources and activities are based in process. The difference we seek is based in outcomes. Consider the distinction below offered by Penna and Phillips from their work on outcomes.<sup>iii</sup>

### PROCESS-FOCUSED INTERVIEW:

- Q. What does your organization do?  
A. We provide services to low income residents of our community.
- Q. What kinds of services?  
A. We provide group and individual family counseling services.
- Q. How many people do we serve?  
A. Last year we provided 500 counseling hours to 125 families.



Notice how the questions of process lead to answers of activities and resources. We provide services. We offer group and individual counseling. We provided 500 hours to 125 families. The answers reflect the good work that the organization does. But it offers no real clues to the differences the organization is trying to make beyond the wishfulness to be of help and the hope that it is working. If one is a counselor in such an organization, it would be very possible to become tired offering many hours, much effort, and significant worry about those needing help without any conviction that one's work was making any measurable difference.

Consider the difference when asking outcome-focused questions.

### **OUTCOME-FOCUSED INTERVIEW:**

Q. What is your organization hoping to accomplish?

A. We are working to improve the parenting skills of abusive families.

Q. What kind of skills improvements are you working toward?

A. Reductions in use of corporeal punishment and increases in uses of positive reinforcers of good behavior, among others.

Q. For the coming year, what level of results would make the year a success?

A. For the coming year, we are working to improve parenting behavior in 200 families. (as measured by the use of corporeal punishment or the use of reinforcement of good behavior).

It is only when driving deeper into the outcome-focused questions that we discover the difference this organization is going to focus on is parenting skills in abusive families as measured by the use of corporeal punishment versus positive reinforcement of good behavior. To focus on parenting skills may not cure all the ills of families in the community, but it is a clear proximate outcome that, if well addressed, can move the community closer to becoming a healthy environment in which children can be formed.



Consider the following second table provided by Penna and Phillips in which process and outcome questions are viewed side-by-side.

<b>PROCESS-ORIENTED QUESTION</b>	<b>OUTCOME-ORIENTED QUESTION</b>
What housing services do you offer?	What community results do you hope to accomplish through your housing services?
What is it that your agency does?	What is your organization striving to achieve?
Describe the service needs your agency meets.	What changes in conditions or behavior are you attempting to effect in the people you serve?
What services must we offer to prevent our community from further deterioration?	What would be the ideal mix of people and businesses to make our community more desirable?
How can we overcome the learning challenges students bring with them to school?	What skill sets and knowledge must our children possess to be successful?
What public information strategies do you use?	What changes in attitude are you attempting to effect and with what specific groups?

Notice again how process-oriented questions focus in on problems - what problems are you trying to fix, what problems do you have to figure out in order to fix things? Outcome-oriented questions invite possibility. What could be different if you do your work well?

## **STEPPING BEYOND FUZZY IDEAS AND FUZZY LANGUAGE**

The fact is that one of the primary reasons churches and conferences (like all other non-profits) tend to live comfortably with process questions is that it is hard for us to be clear about what we are actually trying to make different, and equally hard for us to know if we are making the desired difference since we have only limited control on either the subject or the environment of our change.

Working in the for-profit world is not automatically easy work. It is frequently complex and difficult. Leadership can be buffeted about by changing industry standards, shifting economies, and paradigm shifts from local to global markets. Nonetheless, it is easier for leaders in a for-profit organization to identify clear, measurable, quantifiable outcomes. At its most basic level both the input and the output of a for-profit organization are clear and quantifiable. What goes into a for-profit organization is money. It is a quantifiable input with which the organization will purchase raw materials, build and maintain facilities, hire a workforce of producers and



managers, comply with human resource laws, tax laws, and a whole host of requirements, as well as oversee production, marketing, and delivery systems. And while the external market for which the work is to be done is not controllable, there are multiple measures of production and employment-based accountability that make the internal environment significantly more controllable. The work is complex. But note also that the desired outcome in a for-profit organization, what is to come out of the system, is equally clear. The desired outcome is more money coming out than what went in. Like the input, the output, too, is quantifiable. Effective for-profit organizations are rarely fuzzy in their outcomes or their measures, which makes it easier to determine the resources and activities needed to produce the desired outcome.

**Again, picking up the conversation begun in the first monograph, the critical difference between for-profit and non-profit organizations, as noted by Jim Collins, is that non-profits routinely do not know what they are trying to produce.**<sup>iv</sup> Management leader Peter Drucker, in one of his earlier books that quickly became a standard in the non-profit world, said that the outcome of all non-profits is an "improved human being."<sup>v</sup> As true as the effort to "improve human beings" is, it is not an outcome that invites critical thinking about how to do it. What is the clear and specific improvement in a human being that a non-profit organization is trying to make? That is actually a very difficult question for most non-profits, obviously including congregations and annual conferences. It isn't until we get clear and specific about the difference we are trying to affect (in the next three to five years -- don't forget the importance of providing a time frame) that we can move toward measuring progress toward our outcome.

Specificity brings clarity: We are going to improve the community by reducing corporeal punishment in abusive families and replace it with skills of positive behavior reinforcement. We are going to make disciples by first behaving like disciples, reducing the number of arguments in our board meetings that define people as winners or losers and replace those arguments with skills of careful listening and questions of discernment that will lead us to decisions connected to our purpose rather than our competing preferences. We are going to transform the world by increasing the percentage of young people in the school across the street from us who go beyond high school for college or technical training. Moving from fuzzy intentions to clear differences is a significant challenge to the church's ability to fulfill its mission.

**The difficulty of getting such clarity about what we in a congregation or an annual conference actually produce is one of the reasons we are so familiar and so comfortable with process conversations rather than outcome conversations.** Collins points out that when an organization is unable to measure its outcomes, it frequently measures its inputs and its throughputs - its resources and its activities.<sup>vi</sup> As noted in the first monograph, how many?, how often? and how much? are the current dashboard measures of the mainline church. These are all measures of resources and activities.

**We remain focused on inputs and throughputs because outcomes are so difficult.** It is a dilemma we share with all other non-profit organizations. For example, in 2011 a project was mounted to analyze the mission statements of 60 prominent museums that exhibit contemporary art. The inspiration for this project was a question about museum missions. What is the purpose of a museum? One result of the project was to note that there was very little consensus that could be found by analyzing the words museums used in their mission statements. However, many of the words described core functions -- collect, educate, exhibit, preserve. Note, these are essential activities / throughputs. They are verbs, actions, strategies. In similar fashion the church often describes itself as providing worship, Christian education, and missional outreach, also verbs, actions



and strategies. Like museums that collect, educate, exhibit and preserve, our description of a church that provides worship, education and outreach is not a statement of what we are called to accomplish but rather the activities that we practice in the hope that something is accomplished.

Perhaps the most telling part of the report on the analysis of museum mission statements is the following:

"One pattern that does seem to cut across categories is the vogue for anodyne formulations that set no tangible goals and forestall accountability. Museums all too often strive, engage, foster. Variations on this theme abound: advance, seek, aim, sustain, affirm, focus, honor, consider, invite and so on. To the dismay of foundation and government officials, there is little in this vocabulary to lend itself to measurable outcomes. Lack of specificity, in fact, may be the one trait that mission statements have in common."<sup>vii</sup>

"Anodyne formulations." I had to look that one up - anodyne meaning "not likely to provoke offense or dissent." In other words, the missions of the museums were chosen so as to not offend or discomfort anyone, including those who wrote the mission statements. Now, assuredly mission statements are not the same thing as clear outcomes, and are not meant to be. But the hint here is that perhaps our understanding of mission and our work on outcomes in the church may be hampered by our unwillingness to be so clear that it might actually offend or lead to discomfort or disagreement. **As long as we remain general, using fuzziness as a guideline it is not likely to upset what we know and what we do. It is sufficient to attend to our activities "because you never know what good can come of it years from now."**

Our mission statement in the United Methodist Church, however, clearly insists that we are supposed to be provoking and discomforting. Becoming a disciple of Christ is not being affirmed for who we already are, it is the discomforting confrontation of who we are not yet. The conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, and almost everyone else in the Gospels, was a discomforting event in which people were individually given a question they needed to wrestle with. Similarly, the world will not be transformed passively with general intents. Transformation is the hard, specific work of making something that is wrong become right, something that is dark to be brought to the light, something that is not yet to be brought into being. **Perhaps the most effective outcome is one that "offends" in its clarity. It risks describing something very clearly that is not yet.** And certainly part of the risk is that we are not sure how to bring about the change.

Again, consider a non-profit example from outside the church. Muhammed Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, received the Nobel prize for his pioneering work in microlending to the very poor in Bangladesh. Like other lending institutions, Grameen Bank uses obvious process metrics of numbers of borrowers, size of loans, rate of repayment, and other profitability indicators. These, however, are just the measures of inputs and throughputs, the resources used and the activities pursued in making loans. The real purpose of Yunus's work is to change the socioeconomic situation of its members and to move people out of poverty. One could simply offer loans and hope that it would help people out of poverty. But Grameen Bank did the hard work to precisely define "out of poverty" by developing its Ten Indicators<sup>viii</sup>:



### **The Grameen Bank Ten indicators:**

A member is considered to have moved out of poverty if her family fulfills the following criteria:

1. The family lives in a house worth at least Tk.25,000 (about \$350) or a house with a tin roof, and each member of the family is able to sleep on a bed instead of on the floor.
2. Family members drink pure water out of tube-wells, boiled water or water purified by using alum, arsenic-free purifying tablets or pitcher filters.
3. All children in the family over six years of age are going to school or finished primary school.
4. Minimum weekly loan installment of the borrower is Tk.200 (approx. \$2.81) or more.
5. Family uses sanitary latrine.
6. Family members have adequate clothing for everyday use, warm clothing for winter, such shawls, sweaters, blankets, etc. and mosquito-nets to protect themselves from mosquitoes.
7. Family has sources of additional income, such as vegetable garden, fruit-bearing trees, etc., so that they are able to fall back on these sources of income when they need additional money.
8. The borrower maintains an average balance of Tk. 5,000 (\$70) in her savings account.
9. Family experiences no difficulty in having three square meals a day throughout the year, i.e., no member of the family goes hungry any time of the year.
10. Family can take care of (its) health. If any member of the family falls ill, family can afford to take all necessary steps to seek adequate health care.

In addition to defining specific outcomes for each member, **Grameen defines specific outcomes for each bank branch:**

1. Borrowers repay 100% of their loans.
2. The branch is profitable.
3. Deposits are greater than outstanding loans.
4. All children of each member are in school or have completed at least primary school.
5. All members have crossed over the poverty line.

With such clear definition of outcomes, for both the borrowers and for the branch banks, the risk of "offense" is palpable - either one measures up to the mark or does not. Far from wishful thinking and hoped for results, the clarity by which being "out of poverty" is defined gives very clear goals to both the borrower and the bank.



## TURNING INTENTIONS INTO OUTCOMES - MOVING FROM THE WHATS AND HOWS TO THE WHYS

The argument of these metrics monographs is that faithfulness to our purpose requires that we go beyond intentions to the hard work of purposefully making a difference. To do so requires that we change our language and our measures from general to specific and from process to outcomes.

For example, one of the most helpful and influential books in recent years is *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Bishop Robert Schnase. The book gives sharp focus to the five practices of: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity - all of which are acknowledged by the author as "congregational activities", i.e., throughputs. In the introduction Bishop Schnase writes, "This book is designed to assist congregational leaders in holding a mirror to their own ministries in order to ask the questions 'How are we doing in practicing these qualities of ministry in our congregation? In our classes, choirs, small group ministries, mission teams, and leadership circles? How are we practicing these in our personal discipleship? And how might we do better?' The task of repeating, deepening, extending, teaching, and improving these practices would fill church agendas, guide church boards, and shape leadership training."<sup>ix</sup>

These are, indeed, the right conversations for our leaders to have so that our congregations become more vital and move closer to making disciples. Bishop Schnase writes, "People know that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ but they are seeking to understand how to fit this larger mission into their lives and into their church in a practical way." **It is this shift to the practical and specific level (the proximate outcomes) that requires clarity of outcomes.** It is the search for proximate next steps by which we get clear about what any one of the five practices would look like "on the ground" in our own congregation or conference. For instance, to be radically hospitable a congregation and its leaders must have both the subject of its hospitality and the difference their hospitality is to make clearly in mind.

In my second pastoral appointment which was located in the urban center of one of our Pennsylvania cities, our surrounding neighborhood was 40% African American, 40% Hispanic, and 20% white Anglo. There were churches in place to serve the African American and the white Anglo populations, but few Hispanic churches, and none in our section of the city. So the congregation I served set out to establish a new Hispanic congregation using our own heavily used building as the starting home for this new ministry. We were hospitable - friendly, inviting, welcoming. We even designated our chapel as the Hispanic congregation's worship space. However, at one point the relationship between our Anglo congregation and the new Hispanic church broke down as we argued about the appropriateness of storing snow tires from the Hispanic church's van in the chapel we designated for their use and which was still seen as sacred space to be used in accordance with the standards of the Anglo church. If we (the Anglo congregation) wanted to provide the ministry of the United Methodist Church to make disciples among our Hispanic neighbors, we needed much more clarity about our own radical hospitality.

Sadly, our hospitality remained an intent rather than an outcome. Had we done the necessary hard work of defining clear, measurable/describable outcomes we would have had a Grameen Bank-like list of descriptors of our hospitality which would surely have included "our Hispanic guests will have the agency to determine how they will use their own space" as one of the measures to change our intent of hospitality into an outcome



of hosting the birth of a new congregation. Without such clarity our hospitality spoke mostly of our missional intent and the kindness of our hearts without making our Hispanic brothers and sisters feel as if they belonged in the space we provided. Tellingly, during our dispute over the use of the chapel space, one of the Hispanic leaders said, "It is good to be invited into our brother's house" (meaning our Anglo church). However, he continued, "We are constantly reminded that it is our brother's house." If our intent was clear to us, our outcome was not.

Recently in consulting with a large community church, I learned of their new missional goal to provide ministry "to those who have been damaged by the Christian church." This group of leaders did the necessary discernment and hard work to see these people in their community and to discern that they had the capacity to invite these people into a disciple making relationship with their church despite the negative experience of these people in other congregations. Their intent was in place.

However, to move past intentions to get to outcomes, this congregation needed to define their hospitality well beyond the limits of friendliness. What was their strategy for how to identify, invite, welcome, and provide safe space in their congregation to these particular people? They would also have to be able to clearly describe what it would look like for a person to have overcome previous "damage." To accomplish their outcome they would need to "build their system backwards," an idea that will be explored in the third monograph in this series. For the moment it is enough to say that the clearly understood "audience" of their ministry, those who had been damaged by the church, would need equally clear measures of the difference in the hospitality required to include these people back into an institution that they would prefer to avoid because of past experience.

The why of a radically hospitable congregation is to make disciples of Jesus Christ - something that is best done within the context of Christian community. Until we get the why of our congregations and conferences right, the whats and hows are simply activities. **But once we are clear about the why, get focused on the specific who, and name the clearly defined outcome we are called provide, the whats and the hows will then struggle to move beyond a simple friendliness that believes that if we are nice to people "you never know what good can come from it years from now."**

## **CLARITY AS A WAY OF LIVING AND THRIVING AS A FAITH COMMUNITY**

In the years since the United Methodist Church has been struggling alongside its sister denominations with shrinking membership and resources, we have learned quite a bit about leadership. Where we once defined leadership in terms of the decisions a leader made on behalf of others, the most recent focus has been on the conversations that leaders invite others into. Conversation is the currency of change. What we invite people to talk about, to think about, to pray about, determines the path that we will follow into the future. Leaders have the power of agenda - they have the responsibility of determining what a congregation or annual conference will focus on by giving time and attention to a conversation. A primary leadership act is to be able to develop an agenda for conversations which tells people that it is more important for us talk about "this" than to talk about "that." **The argument of this monograph is that in very many settings, it is more important for us to talk about outcomes than to talk about resources and activities.**



We are currently in a moment in which there are three essential types of conversations that leaders can invite others into: maintenance conversations, preferential conversations, and missional conversations.

**Maintenance conversations** give the primary focus to preserving who we were and following the rules we have set. There is great value in remembering and preserving our evangelical roots and our "methodical" purpose of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the church and across the nation. However, maintaining too much of the norms, policies, rules and traditions we have accrued along the way can be stultifying to a people who now need to gather energy and courage to enter into a changed cultural mission field where old ways have become ineffective. Maintenance conversations have their place but easily undermine the very mission we claim for making disciples.

**Preferential conversations** focus on satisfying the people who are already in our congregations or focus on attracting the people we wish were in our congregations. Preferential conversations also have an appropriate place in our work. The Word of God and the invitation to discipleship will be heard by people only when we understand the unique preferences by which they will respond to involvement and engagement with others and with the issues of a changed life. In any mission field, the carriers of the Good News have to first learn the language and the ways of the indigenous people. Preferential conversations, however, easily slip into judgments about the right way and wrong way to go about things. When focused only on preferences, the way in which something is done easily trumps the importance of doing it. At its most limited, preferential conversations devolve into the search for ways to keep people happy and unchanged instead of being challenged by the demands of the Gospel.

**Missional conversations** focus on purpose and on the possibility of the future. The origin of the word "mission" is mid 16th century denoting the sending of the Holy Spirit into the world, from the Latin *missio* or *mittere* meaning "send." To send is to talk about what is not yet, what is possible with the sending of the Holy Spirit. It is here that clarity of purpose and outcomes is most important in order to participate with the Holy Spirit to address that which is, not yet, accomplished. Discernment about what God dreams for us, and for which God sends his Spirit, requires a specificity about what is yet to be if we are to be the helping hands to make it so

We are clear about our maintenance and our preferential conversations. We know quite a bit about our past performance, norms and rules. Fingers continue to be pointed at who did what wrong as well as what cannot be done because it lies outside of our rules. We are quite clear about our preferences and who likes to do what in particular ways. The worship wars of the recent decades have been remarkable examples of preferential battles.

**What is now needed is conversation about clarity of mission.** Who are we now? What has God called us to make different, now? Who is our neighbor, now?<sup>x</sup> In the long struggle to understand our current situation as a denomination and as congregations, our attention is now being increasingly drawn to the need for clarity of outcomes – clear statements of purpose as defined by the specific difference we are called to make. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research released its most recent report on church growth in 2011 in which it offered a number of congregational activities and orientations that either positively or negatively correlated with congregational growth. Tellingly, the research report once again confirmed earlier research, stating that "one of the stronger correlates of growth was the extent to which a congregation has a clear mission and purpose."<sup>xi</sup> Clarity of mission and purpose requires specificity. It needs the identification of the clear and



specific difference that is to be made in order to be faithful and fruitful. It needs clear outcomes that are describable. And it needs clear measures that enable us to know whether we are moving in the right direction or not.

**It is to this specificity of outcomes and measures, unique to each setting of ministry, that we will next turn our attention in the upcoming third monograph.** For despite the good work that has been done in efforts of congregational transformation and with the repurposing of our annual conferences, there are no standardized or programmatic answers we will find to determine what any single congregation or conference must do. It depends on the difference that each is singularly and uniquely called to make. There is still more for us to consider in this work of getting clear about what we must change in order to get closer to God's dreams for us.

## Endnotes:

<sup>i</sup> William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) p. 140-141.

<sup>ii</sup> Robert Penna and William Phillips, *Outcome Frameworks: An Overview for Practitioners*, The Rensselaerville Institute, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.* p.7f.

<sup>iv</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sector* ([www.jimcollins.com](http://www.jimcollins.com), 2005) p. 4-9.

<sup>v</sup> Peter Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: Harper Business, 1990) p. xiv.

<sup>vi</sup> Collins, p. 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Reported in the Art Basel Miami Beach daily edition by Andras Szanto, December 1, 2011. This article was passed on by friend, Gary Keene, a colleague who understands that the church has much to learn from looking at other organizations, industries and professions.

<sup>viii</sup> Steve Rothschild, *The Non Nonprofit: For-Profit thinking for Nonprofit Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012) p. 53.

<sup>ix</sup> Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) p. 8.

<sup>x</sup> Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2003).

<sup>xi</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway, *FACTS On Growth:2010* (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011) p. 8.

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