

**Organizational Identity:
How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory Inform
Institutional Thrive-ability**

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Capstone Thesis for Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

May 2019

Words of Gratitude...

...for the collective body of Christ that gives me hope and purpose every single day.

...for my parents, Angie and Steven; you are the reason I am.

...for my husband Peter; because you love me even if, and even when.

...for Lauren and Brian; you helped keep me grounded in life with new life

...for Grandmom and Jaydin; thank you for the snacks!

...for Aunt Chris; you opened my eyes.

...for Kim and Jim; you let me wrestle with these ideas out loud and in brave spaces.

...for Rita, Roxanne and Amsalu; you walked with me.

...for Alex, John, Jayson, Katie, Kim, Leila, Melanie, Micah, Quinn, and Tommy; you raised
your voice and shared your story

...for the people, places and spaces that have given my life meaning.

Thank You.

Table of Contents

Words of Gratitude...	2
Table of Contents	3
Prologue	5
Introduction to the Research	9
Defining Terms	12
Defining the Community	13
Defining the Problem	21
Intention for this Work	29
Methodology	31
Research Process	32
Ethical Considerations	38
Risks	39
Understanding the Landscape	40
The Golden Circle	40
Complex Systems Theory	42
Emergent Self-Organization	45
Ontological Argument	48
Narrative	49
Stories	51
Stories as Gifts	54
Habitus	55
Synaptic Self	56
Cultural Evolution	58
Summary	61
Theological Education and The Rostering System	64
Theological Education	64
The Rostering System	67
Report and Recommendations from the Theological Education Advisory Council	75
Theology of the Cross	79

Interview Analysis	88
Question 1: How do you define and understand the term identity?	89
Question 2: Share about your identity?	93
Field Research	106
Question 3: How has your calling shaped your understanding of your identity?	107
Question 4: How do you perform your identity?	129
Summary	139
Conclusion	142
Limitations	144
Current Ecclesiastical Structures	144
Representation	145
Positionality	146
Recommendations for Future Research	148
Curriculum Development	148
Collaboration	149
Resistance and Change Theory	149
Reflections	150
Bibliography	153
Appendices	156
Glossary	157
Informed Consent Packet	160
Final Informed Consent Release	166
Documentation Release Form	167
Sustainability Curve	168
Audio Logs	169

But Moses said to God, "If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they are going to ask me, 'What's this God's name?' What am I supposed to say to them?"
God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'"
God continued, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever..."
Exodus 3:13-15

Prologue

Twice in my life, I have been given an intentional opportunity to reflect on my identity. Once was when I was preparing to travel to El Salvador for an alternative spring break trip and the other was as I was preparing to travel to Houston, Texas for the 2018 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's National Youth Gathering. Both times were initiated by, and with, the phrase, "I am."

Before El Salvador, one of the professors leading the trip asked the group to complete "I am..." poems. A quick Google search will reveal that this poem offers an opportunity to reflect the different emotions, preferences, and reactions one projects into the world. In a list arrangement, the fill in the blank poem offers sentence starters like, "I wonder...", "I worry...", "I feel...", "I dream...", and "I hope..."

I remember sitting in the chapel classroom of California Lutheran University thinking, "this is hard!" Not because I was unable to dive deep or unwilling to be vulnerable, but because I did not feel like those fill-in-the-blank lines were large enough to capture the essence of my being. While I watch others complete their poems, I sat paralyzed. I was waiting for some feeling deep within my soul to connect as I wrestled with which options to choose as my answer to the question, "I am..."

After some time, I decided to do what I felt would best capture who I was at that moment. I turned the paper and made my own rules. I rejected the worksheet as it was and instead thought

about its intention. I created opportunity within the framework to invite others into my sense of self and my sense of being by answering the purpose question of the poem, and of the professor. Some how changing the narrative from a declaration of, "I am..." to a question, "who am I?" lessened the pressure. I used descriptors. I established processes. I addressed hobbies. I took time to answer the question by first thinking about all the different aspects at play in my life and the relationships between them that by the time I felt finished I filled the back side of the template as if it were a blank canvas.

When we were asked to share, I watched others read straight down their list and waited with anticipation because I knew that when it was my turn I would have to twist and turn my paper so that the poem I created was not just a linear progression through the prompt, but a narrative web of statements and questions pulling, and pressing, and working together to construct meaning of all the moments, interactions, thoughts, feelings, et cetera. I had experienced to that specific moment in time. As I was reading I was cultivating a becoming, a new reality and an awareness of self that had not existed before, and would never exist again.

The second time I was paralyzed by a similar experience was when I was leading a group of high schoolers and their adult leaders through a "Getting Ready" session produced by and for the ELCA Youth Gathering. I was instructed to ask my group, "who are you," and give them space and time to respond. As soon as I released the group into the activity, I too, immediately began asking myself the same question, "Who am I?"

This time, I was a little more prepared, but it was still difficult to decide what would make the cut and what would not. I was aware of who was in the room, and that I was

functioning in a leadership role. Those aspects of my location affected the image of self I would produce and I was conscious of those factors influencing me. ¹

Even though I was more prepared at that time, I still struggled. The struggle was different but still real. I was more aware that at the time I could not capture, or articulate, every piece of my being because while I am aware of some things I am simultaneously unaware of others. There were things I was working through and things I was learning, and there were things I knew I still had to learn and things I knew I might never come to know. But more than that awareness, I struggled because I could not fathom taking all that I am and reducing it down to language that was insufficient to capture all the complexities of my being. So I felt again, at that moment that I had become the product of all the pieces before and that that product would never be again because I was also actively becoming.

My being was, is, and will always be in constant state of arriving and becoming because my identity and sense of self are always in a constant state of evolution, adaptation, and malleability. Trying to explain WHAT I am, without explaining WHY or HOW I am, seemed really, really tricky.

Also, I lied...

There is one more time that I have been asked to answer, "Who am I?" and it was when I began my Capstone.

"Who are you in this research, Colleen?"

"What is your positionality?"

¹ As an important side note, I must say, I did not use the "I am..." poem template during this activity. I have used it in other workshops however, I always address it as such, a template to organize thoughts if individuals find it to be helpful. Otherwise, I invite individuals to capture their "I am" moments however they feel most comfortable: through pictures, lists, diagrams, paragraphs, et cetera.

"Which is the chicken and which is the egg?"

"How are you arriving here?"

"Why is this work important?"

"What does this work mean to you?"

"Who are you and who are you being?"

These questions you all have been asking have made sense, and still they fit within the pattern. I could feel the answers and I could see the answers. I just could not articulate the answers. Until now.

What I have come to know, as I write and re-write this research is that I can capture moments and current themes and narratives of who I am, but I cannot easily articulate WHAT I am because WHAT I am is trivial and temporary, as well as open to interpretation, re-formation, change, and the process of becoming.

I am WHAT I am, but WHAT I am is WHY and HOW I am.

My performance of identity is not restricted to a particular chapter; it is the whole story. And while my identity can be articulated, analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated, based on any one moment, it would be foolish to assume that the notion of "I am," and of being, can be solved rather than curated. I am understood through relationships and the meaning I create with, and alongside, all that I encounter.

Introduction to the Research

The prologue included at the beginning of this work was incorporated to offer context about HOW this work developed. It has been offered my quest for deeper meaning concerning the relationship between individual, collective, and institutional identity by first drawing attention to the nature of my own becoming through this work. As a pre-introduction the prologue constructs the simultaneous and parallel, yet inconspicuous, research taking place among the larger research narrative and positions my identity within the individual identities being studied. As such, this thesis offers auto-ethnographical commentary interspersed among academic analysis in an effort to best understand my place, as an individual within the community, and responsibility for co-creating and curating the organizational identity of the institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The nature of emergence, and emergent organization manifested itself in this research but when the research for "Organizational Identity; How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory Inform Institutional² Thrive-ability" was first proposed, the initial intent was to look at the overlap among identity, culture, and leadership with a specific look at the impact an organization's identity has on the formation of individual identity which in turn informs the process of organizing, or institutionalizing. Understanding that culture can be learned, modeled and sustained through institutional systems and then transmitted to individuals and groups

² I have chosen to use the word "institution" because of the following quote by Mike Murawski. "We are inseparable from the institution, in other words. Any critique of museums is a critique of us; and any change needing to happen in museums is, therefore a change that needs to start with us." This quote is a reminder that institutions, at the most fundamental level, are human structures produced by building communities and a collective identity. This quote re-humanizes institutions and positions them as performances of collective identity and attributes authority to the individuals that comprise the institution rather than the institution itself.

through the structures, systems, and processes of an institution was the foundation of this research which was proposed to spend time reviewing structural processes and "ecosystems" at play within the ELCA. Given the complexities of this institution and the influences on it, this research proposed a look at the roles of two specific systems: Theological Education and the Rostering System.

The interest in these two roles stemmed from the influence they have in and on sustaining culture within the ELCA. Theological Education works to sustain culture and cultural products such as identity because it serves as a central authority on Lutheran theology. The leaders of the institution are taught the more in-depth and more intricate details of the Lutheran faith during Theological Education, and this leaning becomes the foundation of their leadership. As leaders they are expected to transmit their learning to those they are leading. The Rostering System, the process one goes through to become a professional leader, also serves as a source of authority in the ELCA. As an authority source, it creates the hierarchy of the institution by establishing levels of permission for ministry through the roles of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service.

In the beginning stages, this research also proposed a look at leadership theory in an effort to produce a curriculum that could be used and adapted for the institution at the level of Theological Education. The intent was to articulate a relationship between leadership theory and thrive-ability. While that link is still assumed, it is more pressing to articulate the evolving nature of the research.

The main focus of this research shifted from producing solutions in the form of curriculum development to generating a better understanding of my own identity and its relation

to the church, the individual identities and their interactions with the institutional identity of ten research participants. An integral part of this shift is attributed to the realization that my own identity is in the process of becoming through this work. This parallel realization, as articulated above, helped frame the real quest of understanding self in relation to one's community and shaped the research for its current frame.

The research presented in this thesis addresses the complexities of identity and systems by narrating different pieces of both and how they are at play in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This narration offers a look at how leadership identity is formed, articulated, and performed, and inquires about the thrive-ability of the ELCA based on its current identity performance through Theological Education and the Rostering System.

This research pulls from auto-ethnography, identity scholars, Lutheran theology, and interview analysis to address the following question: If the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America looked into the "mirror of the cross,"³ would the institution need to change? This question is rooted in generating a collective sense of self-awareness and begins to address tensions between identity construction and identity performance by asking what the institution sees in the mirror and wondering if that is the image it wants to see, and even if that is a projection of HOW the institution is becoming and wants to exist in the future? Using an overarching theoretical framework of Sinek's Golden Circle and Complex Systems Theory, this research offers language to the complexities of identity, identity construction, and identity performance in relation to Emergent-Self Organization in an effort to understand the relational

³ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997). 77.

web which brings together individuals, communities, and institutions for, and in, the process of identity construction and performance.

Defining Terms

Due to the interdisciplinary approach of this study a glossary has been included in the Appendices. The glossary provides definition of the terms and theories used in this research. A few key terms have been pulled from the glossary and are included in the table below:

Important Terms	
ELCA	ELCA is an acronym for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Identity	Ontological production of the self. Identity is complex and relies on conscious and unconscious knowing as well as external and internal factors. It is subject to transformation but is ultimately rooted in belief and deeper meaning. Identity aligns with WHY and HOW a person approaches being in the world.
Identity Markers	Factors that produce and allow meaning to emerge. These include, but are not limited to: religious affiliation, group membership, political persuasion, nationality, ethnicity, personality type, belief, tradition, historical context, gender identity, sexuality, et cetera.
Identity Performance	Displays of identity performed as products of WHY and HOW. Identity performance is the transition from HOW to WHAT and is visible to onlookers. In organizational identity, identity performance is displayed in systems, structures, and models.
Institution	At the most fundamental level institutions are human structures produced by building communities and a collective identity. Institutions are performances of the collective identity.
Roster	The list of ministry which captures turns of ministry within the ELCA.
Sustainability	Sustainability occurs by introducing change to different levels within a system. As the system moves toward equilibrium, adaptation must take place. If adaptation does not take place the system is subject to dissipation. Sustainability is result of novelty introduced into a system of cultural evolution which produces adaptation.
Theological Education	The school, or education, of the church which primarily fosters an understanding of purpose.
Thrive-ability	Thrive-ability is a result of intentional novelty, empowered emergence and self organization. Thrive-ability enables transformation and becoming by focusing on the alignment of identity and identity performance within the disequilibrium of a system.

Defining the Community

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed in 1988 when three bodies of Lutherans merged together: The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the Lutheran Church in America. The roots of The American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) are grounded in Martin Luther's reformations of the sixteenth century. The ALC, AELC and the LCA were direct representations of European expressions of Lutheranism.

Some of the first recorded documents expressing the polity of Lutheran churches date back to the 1800s. Polity refers to the governing documents and organization of an institution. Because this research pertains to organizational identity, it is important to cultivate the relationship between polity and opportunity. *Polity* is not simply "the boring stuff churches [or organizations] must do"⁴ instead, it is the medium through which community agreements⁵ are performed. Community agreements create and clarify agreements and expectations within the group that then allow full participation of the individuals within the group. Community agreements also serve as structure intended "to avoid confusion."⁶ In order for community agreements to be meaningful, they must come from the group itself. Another term that expresses the impact and possibility of community agreements is a *covenant*. A covenant is an agreement

⁴ Colleen M Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Aberdeen: St.Paul's Lutheran Church, 2016).

⁵ "Resource Zine," *Resource Zine* (AORTA: anti-oppression resource and training alliance, 2014).

⁶ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 61-67.

that brings about a relational commitment between God and God's people. Covenants and community agreements take the form of polity when the most significant expression of the community for which they are meaningful, agree to the reality through which systems, structures, and organizing emerge. Polity, therefore, is the foundation of being for organizations and institutions. The first records of community agreements for the Lutheran collective included a formal assessment called *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829*. In this record, Robert Fortenbaugh dissects the historical foundation of the ALC, the AELC, and the LCA. This resource provides an account of the processes and steps taken that allowed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Maryland (ELCM)⁷ and the surrounding Lutheran bodies to emerge in the nineteenth century.

The European cultures influenced the structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Maryland in three main ways. The first model is the Episcopal System. The Episcopal system dictates that a prince, or an equivalent monarchical leader, is the head of the church because of his secular power. The second model is the Territorial System which implies that the church is ultimately invisible -- an important hallmark of Luther's influence-- and yet, specifically visible. The visible church is a human institution and according to the Territorial System should be governed as such while the invisible church refers to "that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit.... Furthermore, the [invisible] church includes not only the saints presently living on earth but all the elect from the beginning

⁷ Narrowing in on the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Maryland keeps this paper local.

of the world."⁸ The third model carried over from Europe was the Collegial System. In this model, everything was to be determined and agreed upon by its members.⁹ A primary mix of the second and third models prevailed. The Territorial System empowered clusters of churches to join together in partnership while the Collegial System gave power and authority to the individual congregations. Lutheran theology yielded capacity for any governance, not contradicting the Word, to be considered proper.¹⁰

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Maryland was one of the strongest cohorts, and it was very active and progressive in the district. Teams comprised of clergy and lay leaders led the ELCM. When the ELCM went to the General Assembly, The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States Assembly, in 1829, it was part of church formation history. The orders set in place by this first general assembly included:

1. Establishing a name: The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America.
2. Delegating regulations: Representation was to be comprised of members from all the synods, following a ratio of at least one clergy member to one lay member with up to two clergy members and one layperson.

⁸ Jean Calvin, John T. McNeill, and Ford Lewis. Battles, *Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Volume 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960). 1012.

⁹ Robert Fortenbaugh, *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829 ...* (University of Pennsylvania, 1926). 16.

¹⁰ Robert Fortenbaugh, *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829 ...* (University of Pennsylvania, 1926). 28.

3. Determining the regularity of meetings: One General Assembly was to be held every three years. Officers of the General body were to be elected at the triennial assembly.
4. Processes for introducing liturgy: The General Synod would present resources and edits for the liturgy to the assembly for a majority vote.
5. Processes for the establishment of new ministries and organizations.
6. Creating synodical jurisprudence: Synodical jurisprudence was to exist in the appointing and ordaining of clergy while the General Assembly was to interfere only if or when appeals were brought forward.
7. Giving the General Assembly the right to affix grades.
8. Handling "doubt" at a General Assembly level.
9. Allowing ministers to appeal any and all rulings.
10. Giving voice and vote to visiting ministers.
11. Sending the outline guides and proposals to each synod within the organization.

Another order set in place in 1829 by The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America divided and named its three governing bodies: The Council, District Synods, and The General Synod.¹¹ While the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America was called to order in 1829, language barriers impacted its official establishment. Due to the substantial German language barriers, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America was not considered to be in Good Order until thirty-six years after the Methodist Church and thirty-eight years after the Presbyterian

¹¹ Robert Fortenbaugh, *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829 ...* (University of Pennsylvania, 1926). 146-202.

Church.¹² This slow progress is both ironic, since Martin Luther was the head of the Protestant Reformation, and wise because a lot of the orders and ecclesiology are currently present in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America today.

As mentioned earlier in this section the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is the result of a merger of three Lutheran bodies. It is essential to realize that the ELCA is also a reformed version of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America. There are many similarities between today's contemporary Lutheran church polity and the polity established in the 1800s.

The whole of the ELCA is divided into three governing bodies. The nomenclature for these bodies came to be in 1988 as adaptations of The Council, District Synods, and The General Synod. Today The Council is referred to as Congregations, District Synods are simply Synods, and The General Assembly is known as Churchwide.

Churchwide: The Church Council and four elected officers govern the work of the Churchwide organization. Its staff and elected officers work at the Lutheran Center in Chicago and other locations around the world serving as administrators, advisors, conveners, partners and resource people for the ELCA and its ministries. The Churchwide organization plays a crucial role in developing and supporting a culture of interdependence, diversity and common mission across all expressions of the ELCA and its partners. Churchwide is also responsible for working in tandem with its congregations and synods as well as agencies and institutions to plant mission seeds,

¹² Robert Fortenbaugh, *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829 ...* (University of Pennsylvania, 1926). 203-230.

develop growth opportunities, and build capacity to alleviate poverty, work for justice and create peace.¹³

Synods: The ELCA's 65 synods vary greatly in size, geography, membership, staffing, and programming. The smallest synod has 30 congregations, and the largest has nearly 300. The synods are grouped into nine regions, which are points of connection for them and the Churchwide organization. Synods unite the work of congregations within their areas, serve as local support, and guide pastoral and other staff candidates. In order to strengthen the relationship between synod leaders and the Churchwide office, many Churchwide teams relate to and support the work of the synods. It is the responsibility of the synod to unite the congregations by providing support, networking, and leadership to pastors and other church staff members.¹⁴

Congregations: ELCA congregations are centers for evangelical mission, where people of faith celebrate, learn, and connect with one another and others around the world through service and weekly worship. Congregations are usually housed in church buildings and are therefore most commonly identified as churches. Congregations can be defined as the origins of grassroots and bread and butter spirituality. The ELCA is comprised of nearly ten thousand congregations spread through the nation, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. Congregations provide weekly worship opportunities as well as community-based relationship opportunities.¹⁵

¹³ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

¹⁴ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

¹⁵ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

To even better understand the ELCA, it is important to speak to its social structure and community agreements. The Churchwide organization which is centered in Chicago, works with synods and congregations, and local and global partners to extend the mission and vision of the church. To narrate an image of the future, the ELCA proclaims the following mission, vision, and values:¹⁶

Mission: Together in Jesus Christ we are freed by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly and serve joyfully.

Vision: A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ makes for all people and creation.

Values: Our values are grounded in faith, in our biblical and Lutheran confessional sources and our love of God and neighbor. They speak to the way this church lives and practices our faith, and they will guide how we journey forward in Christ as church together.

Forgiveness and reconciliation – We are reconciled to God by God's forgiving mercy. Forgiveness and reconciliation flow from what God has made us to be in Jesus Christ and what God is doing with us in the world. As a people of God, we embody forgiveness in speech, action, and relationships, and our ministry in reconciliation is foundational.

Dignity, compassion and justice – Each person is created in God's image. We respect this God-given right to dignity and, inspired by the life of Jesus, show love and compassion for all people. Through proclamation of the gospel, through worship, and as

¹⁶ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

servants of God working for healing and justice in the world, we uphold and seek to protect the dignity and human rights of all people.

Inclusion and diversity – As Christ’s church, we value the richness of God’s creation and offer a radical welcome to all people, appreciating our common humanity and our differences. We are a church that does not view diversity as a barrier to unity. We recognize and will challenge dynamics of power and privilege that create barriers to participation and equity in this church and society – for women, people of color, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people who are marginalized or living in poverty, and the LGBTQ community.

Courage and openness to change – Because we trust in God’s promise and understand faith to be a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, we are emboldened to embrace learning and change in our spiritual and institutional journey as church. This means we are open to new ways and willing to take risks to discover God’s plan for this church.

Faithful stewardship of God’s creation and gifts – As church together, faithful stewardship is about holding to God’s purpose and ensuring the responsibilities and resources that God has entrusted to us are used with great care and with accountability to God, to each other and those served by this church.

According to the church of the past; the test of good order and proper organization is ability to clearly and simply state its purpose.¹⁷ Sinek would articulate this as the necessity of starting

¹⁷ Robert Fortenbaugh, *The Development of the Synodical Polity of the Lutheran Church in America, to 1829 ...* (University of Pennsylvania, 1926). 29.

with WHY.¹⁸ Either way, the mission of the ELCA is to do God's work and proclaim the good news in the world. In order to achieve this purpose the ELCA's governing bodies are committed to the foundation of leadership, activity, and involvement in communities, promoting of opportunities for dialogue and diverse perspectives, creating partnerships, and supporting ELCA members and ministries.¹⁹ Furthermore, The ELCA narrates their identity by claiming Christ's presence in the church and reminding others that there is a place for them because they are "the church that shares living, daring, confidence in God's grace." Liberated by their beliefs and faith, the ELCA promises to embrace the wholeness of individuals being including their "questions, complexities and all." And there is a constant invitation to join them in doing "God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world."

Defining the Problem

As a leader that holds both emic²⁰ and etic²¹ space in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I see a disconnect between the community agreements and the performances of identity at two levels within the organization: Theological Education and Rostering. In seminary, leaders are prepared to identify values, practices, and beliefs that inform the identity of individuals and the collective. Upon graduating and ordination, leaders are also expected to know how to

¹⁸ Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (London: Portfolio/Penguin, 2013).

¹⁹ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

²⁰ My emic space is defined by my baptism, confirmation, ministry and member participation within the ELCA.

²¹ My etic space spaces are defined by my lay leadership status within the ELCA.

nurture these identities in a way that sustains the collective, or institution,²² within the reality of a dying, mainline Protestant, church.²³

Theological Education serves as a method to sustain and teach the WHY's, or identity markers,²⁴ of this collective. Identity markers include, but are not limited to, religious affiliation, membership to a group, political persuasion, ethnicity, family, gender and sexual persuasion, familial and historical context, and relationships.²⁵ Markers of identity are often interconnected and are relative to the individual or collective using them. These identity markers are essential because they add context and language to, and for, the process of organizing and constructing individual and collective identity. For the ELCA, particular identity markers include Lutheran theology as the catalyst for belief, tradition, and social presence.²⁶ The specific markers that help define identity are important to understanding the reflectivity between the individuals that form the collective and the process of organization that those individuals go through as they emerge into an institution, as well as the relationship between the institution and its foundation: the individuals that are "inseparable" from it.²⁷ Organizational identity is the constructed identity

²² Mike Murawski, "The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums," *Journal of Folklore and Education* 3 (2016). 48-49.

²³ Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-Protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

²⁴ Meike Watzlawik, "Cultural Identity Markers and Identity as a Whole: Some Alternative Solutions, Culture & Psychology," DeepDyve (SAGE Publications, June 1, 2012), <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/sage/cultural-identity-markers-and-identity-as-a-whole-some-alternative-PW7V22CfhC>.

²⁵ Chad Renando, "Sniffing Your Identity Markers: Who Do You Say You Are?," Sideways Thoughts, accessed May 10, 2019, <http://www.sidewaysthoughts.com/blog/2013/08/sniffing-your-identity-markers-who-do-you-say-you-are/>.

²⁶ John, CCG - Interview -JN, personal, April 5, 2019.

²⁷ Mike Murawski, "The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums," *Journal of Folklore and Education* 3 (2016). 48-49.

that is created in community. It is narrated through community agreements that are presented in beliefs, education, values, mission statements, et cetera. and it is performed in institutional expressions of the community. These expressions are WHAT collectives create to enable reflexivity concerning one's identity and the way their identity impacts the formation of the collective, or institutional, identity.

In 2016 I attended a hearing at the Churchwide Assembly on Lutheran Higher and Theological Education and the ways seminary graduates and current students, three seminary presidents, one undergraduate vice president, and the Presiding Bishop were combating the narrative of a "the dying church."²⁸ I remember looking around the room and realizing that the most common identity marker of individuals present was "Pastor." This realization saddened me because it made it seem as if that particular expression of the institution, in that room, was reserved for rostered leaders. The fact that I was present suggested otherwise; however, I experienced an overwhelming feeling of non-belonging despite the community agreement of creating space for others.

That feeling took me back to conversations with my aunt who, while currently in recovery, is an addict. I remember listening to leaders within the institution preach a message of grace, unconditional love, and inclusion but witnessing a different encounter and experience for my aunt. Rather than being embraced exactly where she was in the space and context of congregational worship, she was consistently directed to spaces outside of that context -- a group, a program, the prayer list, et cetera. The interactions my aunt longed for, and the message

²⁸ Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-Protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

of grace she sought from the collective, was not performed as authentically as the model Jesus depicted for his followers. My aunt's identity was appreciated, but not affirmed, and her path toward recovery was not approached as an opportunity for the collective to live and practice the markers it claims.

Now, do not get me wrong, I do not believe the church as an institution has the capacity to be everything for everyone. However, I do believe that the way this institution performs its identity can be reclaimed by taking a critical look in the "mirror of the cross."²⁹ My critique, therefore, stems from the WHY of this institution and causes me to ask the questions: do we like what we see? Do we need to change, emerge, or transform? Does our identity performance in its current context of Theological Education and Rostering System align with the markers of identity we claim to be truths of our being? Do our present performances allow us to create spaces that generate belonging and affirmation of the unique individual identities of all people -- questions and complexities included?³⁰ From the Theological Education perspective, are we equipping our leaders with the tools, resources, and training they need to learn HOW to create these communities? Does our Rostering System enable emergence of call and vocation for the priesthood³¹ of all believers, and of sacred community outside the visible church? Are we being a church for the life of the world?³²

²⁹ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997). 77.

³⁰ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

³¹ Lutheran ecclesiology most commonly refers to rostered leaders as pastors or deacons rather than priests. The term priest is still used when talking about the priesthood of all believers because it denotes the language available to Luther during his time of writing since the Catholic church was strutted around the office of the priest.

³² "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

Luther advocated for an understanding that empowers ministry as a result of our identity affirmation through baptism. Luther asserted that through baptism all believers are ordained to do the work of the priesthood, stating that through the priesthood of all believers, Christians assume the same duties and rights as those set apart for formalized ministry.³³

Luther's work in, and on, the priesthood of all believers transforms the structures of the institution as it decentralizes institutional authority. By decentralizing institutional authority Luther re-roots authority in scripture, and ultimately, because scripture is the cradle that holds Christ, back in Christ.³⁴ This decentralization aligns the identity of believers with the identity that was spoken to them, and affirmed, in their baptism. Rather than linking call to the hierarchy of any roster, the priesthood of all believers links call to the Christian identity. Luther describes the general life of a Christian as one based "in Christ through faith, [and] in [their] neighbor through love"³⁵ with good works being done to allow growth in faith. Luther outlines the seven offices of priests, which he attributes as rights to all Christians:³⁶

2. ministry of the Word
3. baptism
4. consecration or administration of the sacred bread and wine
5. the binding and loosing from sin

³³ Luther, Martin. Concerning the Ministry, trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in Luther's Works, vol. 10: Church and Ministry II, ed. Conrad Bergendoff and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 4-44)

³⁴ Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," *LW 35:236*, 1523.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (Authentic Media Limited, 2012). 80.

³⁶ Martin Luther, Concerning the Ministry, trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in Luther's Works, vol. 10: Church and Ministry II, ed. Conrad Bergendoff and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 4-44)

6. sacrificing
7. praying for others
8. and judging and passing on doctrines.

While public ministry may not be the method of identity performance selected by each individual, it is understood that all are called by God to do something that will ultimately build upon their faith. In other words, Luther's priesthood of all believers does not require all Christians to do what the priest does but give permission for all Christians to identify as priests within the priesthood.³⁷

It is ironic that despite Luther's insistence on decentralizing institutional authority by establishing the authority of the Word, the ELCA has inherently structured its hierarchy around the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and therefore seems to favor the administration of the Sacrament, or at least the role associated with it, over the Word. As a central Christian doctrine, the Incarnation invites us to think critically about this and the act and tradition of communion which celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of the "word made flesh."³⁸

If communion is celebrated by representing Jesus' human form with "the promises of God made tangible in"³⁹ the elements of bread and wine and Ministers of Word and Sacrament are the only ones with permission to foster this celebration, then how can we, as an institution, be the church for the life of the world when we have systematically confined the restoration,

³⁷ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 106.

³⁸ " *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. John 1:14.

³⁹ Guy Erwin, "Facebook Post," May 5, 2019.

celebration, challenge,⁴⁰ and promise of the Eucharist spatially through call and institutional hierarchy?

When the Church is too visible and acts according to its institutional constructs rather than its foundational identity as people,⁴¹ it seems to place the cross above⁴² those for whom the cross was built. Then it begins to approach faith formation and Incarnation with complicated solutions. The church should instead remember that its narrative started with Peter, a human figure and the one on whom Christ chose to build church.⁴³ As a social institution "for the most vulnerable"⁴⁴ the church is far too complex for solutions. Instead, it rests in the promises of the cross made known to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Putting the cross at the center of the institution, instead of the creeds⁴⁵ or polity et cetera, links the power of the Incarnation with the sacramental traditions where the tangible God can be met. Rather than asking individuals to meet Jesus where Jesus is, within the confines of the current ecclesiology, placing the Word and the cross at the center of the institution re-humanizes it. The point where the Word and the cross meet gives individuals, and the institution, permission to move beyond the realm of visibility and to position themselves alongside [their] neighbor as priests at work because of their baptismal identity. If ministry is restricted by a call, then the possibilities of

⁴⁰ Kim, CCG - Interview - KG, personal, April 5, 2019.

⁴¹ Mike Murawski, "The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums," *Journal of Folklore and Education* 3 (2016). 48-49.

⁴² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (HarperOne, 2001).

⁴³ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Matthew 16:18.

⁴⁴ Rachel Wangen-Hoch, "Incarnation and the Holy Innocents," *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, December 1, 2010, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/241>.

⁴⁵ Jayson, CCG - Interview - JN, personal, April 4, 2019.

becoming and of transformation are limited to the current context. WHAT we have been called to in baptism is to move beyond the framework of institutional hierarchies, and ministry restricted by call in order to embrace our identity so that HOW we approach ministry aligns with WHY we are an institution.

Without a theological curriculum that trains leaders HOW to interpret, translate, and transmit the WHY of institutional identity, the current WHATs will persist, as will the dying church narrative. While the WHY is directly linked to the collective identity of an organization, the WHAT does not have to be. This differentiation is especially true for a complex institution rooted in an ontologically complex and emerging narrative. Rather than asking, "WHAT is God up to?,"⁴⁶ a more accountable question⁴⁷ might be, HOW are we living into, or HOW will we live into, our baptismal calling, and community agreements as a performance of our identity? By asking this question, I argue that the collective will need to relinquish some control over the complicated work of building systems, structures, and hierarchies of inauthentic authority and replace it with the more complex task of identity making and becoming. Doing so would allow the WHATs of this institution to transform and emerge into something new as a result of placing WHY and HOW at the center of organizing. This process of generating institutional self-awareness will create space for individuals and the collective to be come aware of God doing WHAT God does "for the life of the world,"⁴⁸ instead of assuming that creating space is about

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Eaton, "What Is God up to?," Living Lutheran, February 8, 2019, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/02/what-is-god-up-to/>.

⁴⁷ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009). 158.

⁴⁸ "About," ELCA.org (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), <http://www.elca.org/>.

allowing God to be at work in the world only through the institutional performances we have constructed. To put it simply, it is as if the institution has gotten stuck in the decline and is trying to control the WHATs rather than focusing on WHY we are who we are, and HOW we can more fully articulate our identity through our performance as a collective rooted in organizational identity.

Intention for this Work

This research is deeply personal for me. It represents a moment in my own becoming and an overarching plot in my narrative. Ever since I can remember, individuals within this institution have been asking me, "When are you going seminary?" I am sure they have been asking as a way to affirm the gifts I bring to this community, but too often, I have received it as a challenge of my identity. The call that was spoken to me at my baptism and the potential roster calls do not align, so it is as if I am stuck in perpetual discernment because WHAT I feel called to does not currently exist.

I hope that this work can, at the very least, offer some language to talk about our organizational identity and thrive-ability, and I would be over the moon if this work could serve as a platform to shift the narrative of "a dying church" by creating space for conversations that result in an interdisciplinary approach to Theological Education and explore leadership possibilities for other individuals like me.

While those intentions are more far-reaching, I hope that this research has had an impact on the individuals that chose to participate. I hope they developed a better understanding of their own identity and how it is influenced and constructed. I hope they better understand, as do I,

their positionality within the institutional framework and have generated awareness for how their gifts can continue to be used to influence institutional processes and organization.

I hope this research reminds us that God is at the heart of our community and that our commitment is to one another as members of the body of Christ. But ultimately, Dear Church, I hope this work has provided you an answer to your question, "When are you going to seminary?" and that you hear that it is just not that simple.

Methodology

The essential framework for this research lies in understanding that, "We are inseparable from the institution..."⁴⁹ This research was constructed to better understand the organizational identity and identity performance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Because institutions are inseparable from the individuals that comprise them this research is fundamentally rooted in the identity formation and performance of both individuals and the institution. Murawski⁵⁰ explains that, "...any critique of [an institution] is a critique of [self]; and any change needing to happen in [an institution] is, therefore a change that needs to start with us." This quote, therefore, has been the foundational approach to much of this work.

As a member that holds both emic and etic space within the institution of the ELCA, I believe I have a unique perspective on the stories we are telling -- the ones we use to organize and ground our identity performance. As such, I am part of the institutional narrative construction and performance and I am also a participant rather than rostered or elected leader. For this reason, I am in a unique position to offer up and understand the criticism and critique as opportunities, while simultaneously laying the groundwork and framework to build a path forward, all the while grounded and rooted in the identity markers of the individuals comprising the institution and of the institution as an organization.

⁴⁹ Mike Murawski, "The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums," *Journal of Folklore and Education* 3 (2016). 48-49.

⁵⁰ Murawski's quote specifically references museums however it can be generalized to reference any institution. As such a liberal understanding of this quote was applied and is offered here. The original quote reads, "*We are inseparable from the institution, in other words. Any critique of museums is a critique of us; and any change needing to happen in museums is, therefore a change that needs to start with us.*"

Understanding Murawski's quote has enabled me to conceptualize this research through a variety of disciplines. For instance, the interest in individual and collective identity stems from the field of Cultural Sustainability while the application and implications of identity within an organization or institution stem from management and leadership theory. The theoretical framework and application of Sinek's Golden Circle and Complex Systems Theory are explored to offer language to the complexities of identity and identity construction in relation to Emergent-Self Organization. Because of my positionality, this work is fundamentally rooted in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion as they pertain to belief, meaning-making and identity construction. Thus, bringing this research full circle and back to the discipline of Cultural Sustainability is the reflexivity relationship between individual identity and institutional identity.

Research Process

The first phase of research for this study took the form of informal participant observation. The informal participant observation I was conducting has been a constant and began even before this study was actualized. Because I was born, baptized, and raised in this church, informal research has taken place all my life through experience, meaning making, observation, and reflection. I have paid close attention to the processes, systems, and structures around me and often wondered how they came to be and whether or not they accurately depicted what I perceived to be fundamental beliefs, values, and narratives that informed the identity and constructed the habits of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an organized institution. This form of participant observation, while valid, is, of course, informal and therefore helped structure the framework, guiding question, methodology, and auto-ethnography of this study. This phase of

research became the more formalized opportunity to research institutional ecclesiology and raise questions of authentic identity performance.

To make sense of my lived experience I wrote an auto-ethnography. This auto-ethnography at the beginning of this paper was included to establish my positionality and reflexivity. It gave me an opportunity to ask myself WHY this research is important to me while also articulating HOW it came to be.

To officially formalize this research, I pulled from my lived experience and began the documentation in worship services and other publicly accessible locations. Additionally, I had access to more selective displays of organizational identity within the Delaware-Maryland Synod, including Leadership and Discipleship Team meetings, Youth Events meetings and events, and Young Adult leadership team meetings and events. I also had access to different places of worship within the Delaware-Maryland Synod. The various places of worship were a key aspect to understanding organizational identity because these worship services offered a more direct line to the thread Theological Education and the rostering system.

The most specific phase of research was conducted through interviews. The interviews were an opportunity for me to implement a core praxis of Cultural Sustainability and create space for individuals to share their stories and narrative account of identity construction. I was particularly concerned with the two-way loop affecting the relationship between understanding identity and forming a collective identity that then influences the ecclesiastical organization within Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As such, research participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Familiarity with and to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- An ability to articulate identity markers and constructs and
- Leadership in a ministry setting (broadly defined) or experience with Theological Education

As a researcher I paid close attention to and sought after the diverse perspectives shared by participants identifying across the spectrums of race, religious doctrine, color, national origin, ancestry, physical disability, mental disability, medical condition, marital status, sex, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender, gender identity or expression. I had planned for a total of four interviews and three of the four invitations were accepted. I felt that three interviews, while significant, was unsubstantial in increasing my understanding, so I recruited additional participants by crowd-sourcing on social media. I used Facebook to alert my network to my research and requested that interested individuals contact me.

Recruiting interview participants by crowd-sourcing and organic invitation was an important process step in terms of methodology because too often research done in association with the ELCA is constructed through a top-down approach. Oftentimes, inquiry begins as a motion or directive of the Churchwide governing body and I wanted my research to instead be as self-emergent as possible. I wanted to hear from those that felt like they had something to offer. Allowing research participants to self-select into the research seemed to create more meaningful conversations and gave me an opportunity to listen and curate a message rather than directing or pulling out a message. In this way, I had the privilege of hearing stories and I was receiving knowledge, not just extracting it.⁵¹

⁵¹ In a way, this decision became a gift and as Lewis Hyde offers, had "the power to join people together."

Often times, research participants reflected on the therapeutic and cathartic nature of the interview process and asked if they could share the participatory invitation with others in their own networks. This was an unintended aspect of the interview but shifted the notion of the way things are typically done therefore demonstrating the possibility of emergence.

A similar method of emergence took place during each interview as well. I briefed each research participant with my overall research goals by sharing the informed consent packet and giving them time to discern their participation. Once participants decided to move forward we selected a time to meet.⁵²

To begin each interview I explained to each participant through the informed consent packet and an overview of my research and research goals. This gave participants an opportunity to better understand my interests as well as the risks and benefits associated with this research, including the right to withdraw, as well as an opportunity to ask questions. From there, I explained that my methodology for conducting interviews included, and actually preferred, space for interviewees to share first. My reasoning for this is rooted in Lawler's understanding of external factors, and that in part, individuals make meaning by reacting to those factors. I wanted to meet participants where they were. I was interested in first hearing HOW they were forming meaning in relation to my research and furthermore, I wanted to hear WHY they agreed to participate and WHAT they felt called to externalize in narrative form and WHAT they wanted to share with me. To create this space, I often asked, "Where would you like to start?" or "What do you want me to know?" Because I know that is an invitation to vulnerable space I also gave

⁵² Many of the interviews were held with non-local participants so I used Zoom technologies as a resource. Zoom was selected because it is currently the only video-conferencing option that offers HIPPA approved compliance and security. Zoom is also the resource of choice for distance learning at Goucher College.

participants the option to decline this praxis. Only one interview participant declined and for that interview I began by asking the first question of the sample questions⁵³ that were included in the informed consent packet. For other interviews, I followed the lead of each interviewee. Most interviewees autonomously addressed each of the interview questions and were gracious when I took a moment at the end of each interview to verify that each topic was covered. In addition to the information I was pursuing, this methodology guided me to information for which I did not know I was even looking.

At the conclusion of each interview, I asked the interview participant if there was anything else they wanted me to know. Sometimes they shared additional stories and sometimes they did not. When the interview reached its end, I reviewed the steps I would take to complete my research process, reminded the participants of their right to withdraw at any point and their right to change their mind about anonymity and confidentiality preferences and I thanked them for making the time to participate in my research.

After each interview was completed I used the recording to produce a transcript of the interview.⁵⁴ I read through the transcription while playing the audio and/or video to check for accuracy. After I checked for accuracy, I let the interview and transcription sit for a day or two. When I came back to the interview and transcription, I read through it again while playing the audio. This time, I focused on making notes and highlighting critical and relevant parts. Some parts were critical because they were powerful stories while some parts were relevant because

⁵³ Sample Questions: 1) How do you define and understand the term identity? 2) Share about your identity? What makes you, you? 3) How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of who you are? 4) How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of identity?

⁵⁴ I used an online transcription service called Sonix.

they touched on one of the research themes. When this process was completed I converted each transcription to a shareable document and shared it back with the participant. This allowed the participant to see what was captured in the interview as well as to see what information I was focusing on and where that information was taking me. At this point, a couple of interview participants asked me to re-review the transcription for accuracy and one research participant articulated concern about what they had shared and wondered if, despite agreeing to participate without anonymity or confidentiality restrictions, they could easily be identified. I did review the transcriptions for those two individuals and resent them the updated copy. Because of the hesitation expressed by the latter participant I developed a final consent form and sent it to each interview participant for signature. This form re-articulated the risks, benefits, and right to withdraw and asked participants to select how they wanted to move forward by choosing from one of three options:

- I would like my voice to be heard through this research and agree to participate without anonymity or confidentiality restrictions.
- I would like to participate in this research and ask to remain anonymous.
- I would like to participate in this research and ask that my confidentiality be protected.

I used the notes I took during each interview and the transcripts, including the notes and highlights, to categorize relevant information by sorting quotes and themes. I waited to name each category until I had sorted through each of the ten interviews and their corresponding documents. What emerged were the themes and narratives I used to discuss my research findings. To make sure the research was comprehensive of the information I set out to find, I

then took the themes and narratives and re-categorized them according to the interview questions.

The final analysis I chose to complete was done in reflexivity and self-reflection. I wanted to make sure I captured the ontological shift in my own narrative language by articulating back the new reality into which each interviewee invited me. To do this I looked at each individual interview and generated one overarching theme that captures the new knowledge I have received. It was important for me to do this because of the ontological shift I have experienced in myself and this is my way to give credit where credit is due. In other words, I wanted to offer back to each of the research participants the way that their being has influenced mine.

Ethical Considerations

This research was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Goucher College. The IRB approved information about the research, possible risks and benefits, and the right to anonymity, confidentiality and withdraw were all reviewed. All of this information was presented to the research participants before participation. All of the research participants selected to participate without any anonymity or confidentiality restrictions; however, as the researcher, I have chosen only to reference them by their first names throughout this paper. Additionally, I have included a copy of the initial informed consent packet and a copy of the final informed consent packet in the Appendices. I have also included a copy of the documentation release form that I asked participants to sign as I recorded and transcribed each interview.

Risks

Risks associated with this research included psychological distress because the research asked participants to offer reflections on their own lived experience and meaning making in relationship to their identity formation as participants (leaders, members, et cetera.) in the institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Some of this reflection was offered as an assessment or critique of current practices within the ELCA and therefore research participants may be subject to known or unknown personal triggers and/or unknown responses from their peers and colleagues. The risk may be greater for current leaders within the institution, yet is no more probable than when brave and vulnerable opinions are voiced in current contexts associated with the institution of the ELCA such as Task Forces, Bible Studies, Churchwide Assemblies, Congregational Meetings, Church Council Meetings, Learning Seminars, Feedback and Evaluation Forms, Sermons, Living Lutheran Articles, et cetera.

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:13-16

Understanding the Landscape

In order to understand HOW identity is constructed and then performed, it is important to understand each of the pieces that support the construction process. The Golden Circle, Complex Systems Theory, Emergent Self-Organization, the Ontological Argument, narratives and stories, the habitus, the Synaptic Self, and Cultural Evolutionary Theory, are all part of the framework that builds the landscape of understanding identity and organizational identity. The intersections and relationships developed in this landscape show the interconnectedness of external and internal factors influencing and impacting one's sense of self and their identity as well as the similar process of becoming for collectives and organizations. Each part is important to the whole, and this section, therefore, spends time explaining the parts of the comprehensive landscape supporting the framework of this research.

The Golden Circle

In 2009, Simon Sinek, captivated leaders with his TEDTalk, *Start with Why -- How Great Leaders Inspire Action*. To date, Sinek's TEDTalk is still one of the most watched TEDTalks of all time.⁵⁵ His premise is that most organizations sell a product and know very little, or communicate very little, about their purpose, or as Sinek calls it, their WHY. Instead, of knowing WHY, Sinek believes these organizations can only articulate their WHAT. In other

⁵⁵ "The Most Popular TED Talks of All Time," TED Talks, accessed May 10, 2019, https://www.ted.com/playlists/171/the_most_popular_talks_of_all.

words, almost every organization explains WHAT they offer, WHAT they do, or WHAT consumers needs. The bridge between the WHY and the WHAT, is the HOW. The HOW is similar to the WHY in that a smaller percentage of organizations can describe HOW they do WHAT they do. These three pieces narrate and justify the organization's identity in the market place. This narrative forms a circle of movement which Sinek calls The Golden Circle. The Golden Circle looks like a ripple in a calm body of water. Its smallest, most inner circle is WHY. Its middle circle is HOW, and its outer circle is WHAT. According to Sinek, only the successful organizations operate from limbic brain to the neocortex by beginning with WHY and rippling through HOW out to WHAT. The successes of the organizations that follow The Golden Circle are captured because the limbic brain is responsible for all human behavior and decision making. The limbic brain is where our emotional connection takes place, and it has no capacity for language.⁵⁶ In other words, connections, trust, loyalty and "gut decisions" all start in the limbic brain, or with WHY. In Sinek's argument, consumers are driven to purchase WHAT because of their connection to an organizations narrated purpose. If an individual connects with WHY and HOW an organization is telling its story, then the neocortex which is responsible for rational and analytical thought spends less time analyzing and more time reacting on the drive seeded in the limbic centers of the brain.

While the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is not an organization that provides goods for consumption, it does give a framework comprised of belief, tradition, and culture that individuals can claim and use to articulate their identity in, and "for the life of," world.⁵⁷ For the

⁵⁶ Andy Partridge, "Executive Summary: The Golden Circle with Simon Sinek," *Enviably Workplace*, August 27, 2017, <https://enviablyworkplace.com/executive-summary-golden-circle-simon-sinek/>.

⁵⁷ "About," *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 2019, <https://www.elca.org/>.

ELCA to thrive and counteract the narrative of a dying church⁵⁸ this must be the first step in generating a sense of belonging where individuals can find comfort in and alignment of their perceived identity with that of the ELCA. In this context identity formation and articulation occur through the *habitus*. "The way individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it" helps explain the centrality faith plays in an individual's identity and therefore "structural positions [that] generate action" become the foundation of meaning and intentionality for the institutions these individuals create.⁵⁹ As leaders are formed, then aid in faith formation,⁶⁰ it is imperative to articulate the essence of their being and identity so that followers can make informed and intentional decisions about how they will reproduce and perform these cultural markers in their various communities.

Complex Systems Theory

Approaching the perceived, or constructed world, through a lens of Complex Systems Theory highlights the interconnectedness, and interdependence, of all things. Complex systems theory investigates the "relationships between parts" and how they "give rise to collective behaviors of a system, and how the system interacts and forms relationships with its environment." Scientific examples of complex systems include the brain which is formed of neurons, molecules formed of atoms, and weather formed by air flows. Social systems formed through relationships among people are also an example of complex systems. The pattern of

⁵⁸ Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-Protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977). 72-87.

⁶⁰ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: the Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperOne, 1995).

examples presented here give rise to the popularity of complex systems theory outside the realm of science and its impact and study in art, history, literature and other humanities. For the focus of this paper, complex systems theory is helpful to diagnose, define, and model features of identity and the relationships which structure the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Complex systems theory is useful because "it focuses on certain questions about [the nature of] relationships and how...parts [are made]...wholes. These questions are relevant to all systems that we care about, including institutions that form identity and conversely are formed by the identities that it created.

According to Yaneer Bar-Yam, there are three interrelated approaches to the modern study of complex systems, and they are:

- (1) how interactions give rise to patterns of behavior,
- (2) the space of possibilities, and
- (3) the formation of complex systems through pattern formation and evolution

These ideas are related to thinking about the possible patterns that can happen rather than just the one that is currently happening. Essentially, complex systems theory allows creative, intentional and maybe even brave exploration of the possibilities associated with incremental⁶¹, dynamic, innovative, or even destabilizing change⁶² by allowing leaders to recognize, understand and capture indirect effects, possible outcomes or impacts. In other words, complex systems allow leaders the opportunity to ask WHY questions that Sinek encourages.

⁶¹ Yaneer Bar-Yam, "General Features of Complex Systems," *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* 1 (2002). 3-4.

⁶² Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

Not all questioning, or relationships, however, reveal complex systems or even complex problems. Sometimes an issue with which one is concerned is complex and sometimes it is complicated. The question of a dying church is complex, not complicated, thus affirming a complex system made up of countless social, cultural, theological, and managerial relations. The interdependence and sustainability of these relationships are a complicated problem to face, yes, but more than that, and maybe more accurately, they are a problem of complexity. This semantic shift is proposed by Rick Nason, an Associate Professor of Finance at Dalhousie University's Rowe School of Business.

In his book, *It's Not Complicated: The Art and Science of Complexity for Business*, Nason articulates that complicated problems can be solved with algorithms, systems, and processes, while complex problems involve too many unknowns and too many interrelated factors to reduce to rules and processes.⁶³ Therefore, complex systems and complex problems give way to opportunity, possibility, and creativity. By intentionally addressing complexity, each part of the complex system, in this case, the institution of the ELCA, the individuals, the communities and the systems and structures themselves, is open to transformation. For Nason, leaders need to intentionally employ four strategies when consciously managing complex systems and problems. Those four strategies are:

- (1) recognize which type of system you are dealing with;
- (2) think "manage, not solve";

⁶³ Theodore Kinni, "The Critical Difference Between Complex and Complicated," MIT Sloan Management Review, June 21, 2017, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-critical-difference-between-complex-and-complicated/>.

- (3) employ a "try, learn, and adapt" operating strategy; and finally, and perhaps most importantly,
- (4) develop a complexity mindset.

As intentionality develops a mindset focused on addressing and managing complex systems and problems arises, while simultaneously a mindset of transformation emerges. This transformational possibility can be viewed as the potential for emergent, self-organization.⁶⁴

I believe this is the style of leader the institution of the ELCA should be training. Since the sustainability of the institution is rooted in the gifts and identities of the individuals that comprise the institution, leaders within the institution should not only function as problem solvers by solving complicated problems that may arise but should also be fluent in navigating, and enticed by, complexity as well. Complexity is at the heart of the Lutheran identity in grace, the nature paradox, the Priesthood of all Believers and the Theology of the Cross.

Emergent Self-Organization

While complex systems theory narrates the interconnectivity of all things and the way complex systems should be approached, the theory of emergent, self-organization offers a practical HOW for leading within a complex system, like that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In emergent, self-organization "systems achieve order because multiple local agents interact and those interactions produce unintended outcomes without the intervention of a central controller." In other words, organizations take on properties and structures that are unexpected because people and groups interact and the results of those interactions produce perpetual novelty. This means that within a complex system there are

⁶⁴ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

various interactions, reactions, interpretations, et cetera, taking place at any given moment. Each of these moments affects the moment that precedes, and succeeds, thereby sparking results that may or may not be conceived at the moment of initial interaction. The power of the summation of these moments is the transformative process that cultivates the creativity of individuals interacting within a "complex web of feedback loops." Emergent-self organization enables, rather than controls, the process of emergence and of becoming by stirring some activation toward an unknowable future, even though for Lutheran Christians, identity is rooted in promises that have been made known.

While emergence cannot be controlled, it can be fostered. To foster emergence, individuals, particularly leaders, shift the narrative and traditional norms of what a leader is supposed to do or should do, to move systems and organizations. In complex, emergent, self-organizing leaders "abandon the notion that [they can] create foreseeable futures" and instead focus on facilitating correlation by helping others make sense of what is happening by giving meaning to unfolding events.⁶⁵

Martin Luther is an example of a leader within a complex, emergent, self-organizing system because he "re-framed the church's purpose."⁶⁶ While Luther was not the only reformer, he did assume the role of the tag. Tags function as leaders in the process of organizing by always directing the attention of the members within the system toward a deeper meaning and purpose, or WHY. Because of cultural shifts already at play, Luther's actions and writings were a catalyst of change rather than an instigation. Despite all that aligned to form the Reformation, Luther is

⁶⁵ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

⁶⁶ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

credited as the "symbolic reference"⁶⁷ point for spiritual reformation and the historical emergence of something new. Luther was able to capitalize on sensitive conditions by introducing novelty, or more so, a re-generated understanding and alternative application of scripture to one part of the system in order to bring about unexpected changes in other parts of the system, and more realistically, to the system as a whole. Leaders do not always need to assume to role of a tag within emergent, self-organization; however, they are responsible for reframing the narrative in a way that empowers and motivates individuals. When individuals feel empowered, they can perform their gifts authentically, and as a result, transformation is possible.⁶⁸

Empowerment is contagious and gives rise to "swarm like behaviors" that enables collectives to "achieve remarkable accomplishments...in a seemingly chaotic fashion."⁶⁹ The process of self-organization encourages individuals within the collective to approach complexities as opportunities with their gifts, with meaning, and with purpose in unorthodox ways. By doing so, the collective can manage difficult problems and create space for emergence by greeting each opportunity with a possibility or a hope for the future⁷⁰ rather than with solutions, control, or rigidity. This deviation from traditional leadership norms inspires individuals to transcend their self-interest and instead, foster an environment suitable for the

⁶⁷ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

⁶⁸ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009).

⁶⁹ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

⁷⁰ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009).

collective.⁷¹ This model of transformational leadership, rather than transactional leadership, holds surprise and emergence as core values in dynamic situations and reminds communities of the interconnectedness of all things,⁷² reinforcing the core of complex systems theory.

The reason complex systems theory is applicable in this paper is because of the nature of communities. Peter Block, in *Community: The Structure of Belonging* writes that "communities are human systems." Pairing this understanding of community as human systems with Murawski's notion of institution creates a bridge to understand individuals and communities, or collectives, as the foundational structure of institutions and therefore understand institutions as complex systems that are capable of emergent, self-organization.

Ontological Argument

St. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1033-1109, is the father of the ontological argument. St. Anselm proposed the ontological argument as a means to explain, and prove, the existence of God in 1077. The case, outlined in his work, *The Proslogion*, or *Discourse on the Existence of God* argues that, if "it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.... Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived."⁷³ In other words, one's understanding of reality, in fact, limits reality and likewise, one's reality limits one's

⁷¹ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

⁷² Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009).

⁷³ "Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ont-arg/#H2>.

understanding or existence in reality. Anselm's theological argument pulls from the philosophical study of being, ontology.

Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that studies the relatedness and nature of being.⁷⁴ The process of becoming and existing, reality, and existence itself are specific aspects of ontology. For this paper, the concern of ontology and the ontological argument proposed by Anselm relates therefore to the nature of, or more likely the question of identity.⁷⁵

Sociologist Steph Lawler begins her work, *identity*, by posing identity as a question rather than an answer. The purpose of this is to establish the difficulty of identity and to develop the perspective that identity and "all identity-making is an accomplishment."⁷⁶ In her work, Lawler uses the term identity to account for both the public manifestations - roles or identity categories, and "the more personal, ambivalent, reflective and reflexive sense that people have of who they are."⁷⁷ Accounting for both the external and internal ways individuals make meaning, Lawler, addresses the performance, or reality and existence, of identity and the understanding, or conceptions, again, of one's reality and existence.

Narrative

One aspect of identity is rooted in the stories we tell. Stories are rooted in perceptions of reality and are derived through the reflexivity of one's existence. Stories can be generated through reflection and are then formed in a positive or negative relation to another person,

⁷⁴ Tom Gruber, "A Translation Approach to Portable Ontology Specifications" in: *Knowledge Acquisition*, 5, 1993, pp. 199-220.

⁷⁵ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 1.

⁷⁶ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 2.

⁷⁷ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 7.

object, or being. This does not mean that the story one produces is a positive or negative story, although it certainly can be. Instead, it means that individuals articulate aspects of their identity positively by claiming roles and categories that they feel accurately define their experiences in relation to elements of reality or negatively by denouncing roles and categories that they feel, after introspection, do not precisely define their experience in relation to other beings. This negative construction is similar to the negative theology, or Apophatic theology, described by Moses Maimonides. Apophatic theology attempts to define God as a "simple being...unlike other creatures," void of complexity or composition, by using language to "ascribe properties to [God]" and, "via negation" allows individual beings to understand God through language that is limited by what can be perceived.⁷⁸ In turn, the individual or community describing God knows their perception of the divine reality is limited because they cannot construct language beyond the realm of their attainable perception. In other words, by attempting to describe the "simple" nature of God, individuals actually come to understand the vastness and complexity of the Divine. Furthermore, individuals root themselves in unattainable comprehension by using story and narrative as a medium to generate meaning and construct relationships with the incomprehensible. This creates external factors which then aid in the formation and construction process of "identity-making."⁷⁹

Because it is nearly impossible to fully articulate, express, or perform all aspects of one's identity at any given time it is safe to say that identity is complex and like the stories told of the Divine, identity can be rooted in spatial and temporal places, constructed through conceptions of

⁷⁸ Moses Maimonides and Chad Meister, "Divine Simplicity, Negative Theology, and God-Talk," essay, in *The Philosophy of Religion Reader* (Routledge, 2008). 100.

⁷⁹ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 1-2, 10.

existence or essence, and can be distinguished by socially constructed attributes. The reaction between negatively constructed stories, of God and individual or collective identity, lies in inadequate language as a result of ontology. Ontologically "we can only employ inadequate language"⁸⁰ to describe our reality. Stories, therefore, offer a lens to simplify our being. They give us an opportunity to articulate what we are and also what we are not by developing "a complex web of relationships" to the metaphysical world that "confounds the notion of the atomized individual."⁸¹

Stories

Stories are the way individuals make sense of their essence in the world. Stories are not merely auto-biographies that reflect and share of one's identity. Instead, stories are curated, in partnership with autobiography and auto-ethnography to help produce one's identity. The product of stories is narrative journeys of how individuals have become and how they have come to be. Five characteristics define these narratives:⁸²

1. "Textuality in which written texts are seen as social products rather than as unproblematic and transparent reflections of reality"
2. "Questioning of the sharp distinction between structure and agency and between individual and collective action"
3. Referentiality and lives, or "attention to questions about the relationship between representations of lives and the lives themselves"

⁸⁰ Moses Maimonides and Chad Meister, "Divine Simplicity, Negative Theology, and God-Talk," essay, in *The Philosophy of Religion Reader* (Routledge, 2008). 101.

⁸¹ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 26.

⁸² Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 27.

4. Increasing attention to time which compresses certain periods within the narrative over others
5. Intertextuality which explains the explicit and implicit dependence individual narrative has with other texts, stories and narratives

These characteristics are all contained within the framework of the hermeneutic tradition.⁸³ For theologians, hermeneutics refers to the study of the translation of scripture as a story, and for Lawler, it relates to understanding how people understand and make sense of their lives, and how analysts can understand that understanding.⁸⁴ Either way, narrative journeys are shared as stories in a way that helps achieve some sense of understanding one's existence in relation to reality, or, identity.

Fundamentally these stories are told after events take place and experiences occur, or after there has been time for reflection. The stories shared are ways individuals construct and create meaning for themselves and then share this meaning with others. As such, the stories in and of themselves, like identity, are fluid. They can be reconstructed, retold, and re-interpreted to highlight new knowledge, or interpretation, of one's reality, being or identity and likewise, can also be interpreted differently from different receivers, hearers, or learners. The fluidity of a story rests in the understanding that narratives contain action and transformation of characters through which the overall plot develops.⁸⁵ Recurring themes in the narrative journey of one's life may be used to construct positive or negative identity markers through which an individual anchors their identity.

⁸³ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 27.

⁸⁴ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 27.

⁸⁵ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 24.

Narratives develop through increased attention to time and are shared and interpreted from earlier events or memories. Because one does not have "unmediated access to the 'self who was,'" narratives and the act of storytelling are both interpretations engaging those more static memories and the events that comprise the story.⁸⁶ "The narrative then is only completed (if it ever is!) in the interaction between teller and audience."⁸⁷ This transmission creates an opportunity for an individual to hear their story out loud, to practice their story, and to see how their story sits with a listener. Storytelling is an opportunity to test out identity markers against external factors by creating brave and vulnerable space for the act of storytelling to transform both the teller and the listener. In sharing significant plots, the narrative begins to take form, and one's identity begins to be produced and revealed through self-awareness or becoming. "According to this perspective, then, identity is profoundly social and is continually interpreted and reinterpreted."⁸⁸ Therefore, it is safe to assume that identity is dependent on others and can only be articulated in retrospect and interpretation of significant events and experiences. Furthermore, storytelling highlights the importance of community and relationship development between teller and listener and "identity cultivation through stories [occurs] as a gift of emotional connection." This development cultivates a deeper understanding of self and of the sacred art of becoming which transforms identity-making into "an expression of social emotion" and reflexivity.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 29.

⁸⁷ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 28.

⁸⁸ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 17.

⁸⁹ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007). 85.

Stories as Gifts

Lewis Hyde wrote in *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* "that all things owe their being to God."⁹⁰ While Lawler would probably argue against this by stating that "identity is not something foundational and essential, but something produced through narratives people use to explain and understand their lives"⁹¹ it is a significant opportunity to jump back to the theological realm which articulates the importance of being first and foremost, a story beginning with creation. Hyde argues that, "God's initial gift to [human] is life itself and those that feel gratitude [or are compassionate toward the story of creation]...direct their lives back to God."⁹² In so doing, individual stories constructed through and alongside the narrative of God are an opportunity to return one's identity to its root plot found in the Garden at the time of creation. Thinking of stories as gifts creates an opportunity to position external factors associated with "identity-making"⁹³ as communal possibilities because "gifts...have the power to join people together." This is a notable shift in identity construction because it lifts the importance of community. Just as God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit represent the reality of the Triune God, individual identities are also "obliged to others..."⁹⁴ in a way that relates comprehension to the nature of being in community.

⁹⁰ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007). 69.

⁹¹ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 30.

⁹² Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007). 69.

⁹³ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 1-2, 10.

⁹⁴ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007). 92.

Habitus

Stories seem to be the "meaning making" portion of the habitus. While the habitus is more than mere habit, it is still the "product of...systematic application of principles coherent in practice."⁹⁵ In other words, habitus is the generated practice that develops from overarching, and redundant input that culminates as a perceived understanding or social action. Habitus, in this instance, seems to correlate to one's positionality, or unique understanding and interpretation of self, their position in the world and relationship to external factors. This culmination of understanding turned to action is where story and narrative come into the equation.

Lawler writes that narratives "challenge the idea of the atomized individual."⁹⁶ While Bourdieu may not use the term, "atomized individual," it does seem as though the generation of the habitus is, to some degree, atomized in that there is often an unconscious aspect to its generation. It is, therefore, the work of the story, to socially locate the importance of the habitus through context and memory. Even though memory is generally unreliable narrative naturalizes the occurrence of the habitus by "making later events seem natural and inevitable culmination of earlier ones" and "what looks like a natural, casual relationship" actually produces a coherent plot.⁹⁷ In other words, the input that generates habitus enables narrative to link these inputs and their transmission in a way that cultivates purpose and meaning "through stories we tell (to ourselves and to others)."⁹⁸ This is a particularly important point when thinking about religion

⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). 72-87.

⁹⁶ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 33.

⁹⁷ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 32.

⁹⁸ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 25.

and reverence for scripture and tradition. Both of these aspects of identity are forms of storytelling. Scripture is storytelling that shifted from oral storytelling to the Canonized Bible and even though the stories have been captured and written down, the history of oral storytelling has not been lost. The traditions of bible study, preaching, evangelizing, et cetera are acts of modern-day storytelling and identity affirmation because the "first great mark of the church,⁹⁹ which alone constitutes the church's being, is the Word." Peterson emphasizes the importance of the Word and its relevance in ministry and identity construction by reminding readers that the "Word [of God] comes to God's people externally, through proclamation.¹⁰⁰ The Word then, is the first signifier for rostered ministers within the ELCA, and it presented itself in the social actions of worship as both storytelling from scripture and proclamation through preaching.

Synaptic Self

In addition to the social formation of storytelling and gifting, the nature of being and constructing identity also takes place through natural processes that occur in the brain. As a way for the self to be realized, Joseph LeDoux, the author of *Synaptic Self*, says that the self is a sum total of what an individual knows consciously and unconsciously. This totality includes the culmination of physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors as explicit awareness or as implicit aspects not immediately available.¹⁰¹ Elaborating on mere story and narrative, LeDoux believes that the self is synaptic. In other words, learning, or the articulation

⁹⁹ The church is an institution comprises of people and is therefore formed, and informed by the identities of the individuals comprising it.

¹⁰⁰ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>.

¹⁰¹ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 28-31.

of one's self-awareness, takes place in the brain through synaptic transmission. Through encoding and storage, the learnings that become plot determiners are synaptic results of memory processes. These two synaptic realities -- learning and memory -- allow individuals to "transcend [their] genes" and present the self through personality.¹⁰² The systems responsible for personality, or the self, are shared as performances of WHAT an individual does and HOW an individual does it. The self, therefore, is the essence of who an individual is and "reflects patterns of interconnectivity between neurons in [the] brain."¹⁰³

Nature and nurture are two different ways of making deposits in the brain's synaptic ledgers.¹⁰⁴ Recognizing the evolutionary roots of the human body, mainly, what occurs in the brain, is an opportunity to more fully understand the self as a unit that represents all input and external performances of self. This relationship to the outside world reinforces the notion that the self is not static, but "is constantly added to and subtracted from" as life changes.¹⁰⁵

According to LeDoux the synaptic organization of the brain is a primary factor for realizing self because "people don't come preassembled, but are [instead] glued together by life."¹⁰⁶ As the brain receives and responds to genetic composition, and psychological, physiological, and social stimuli, synaptic transmission occurs and through conscious and unconscious transmission behaviors of the mind and the body manifest. These results are encoded as "patterns of

¹⁰² Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 9.

¹⁰³ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 9.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 4-6.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 29.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 3.

interconnectivity" generating the self both physically and mentally.¹⁰⁷ LeDoux describes this process of encoding, transmitting, and responding as learning and memory. He writes, "without learning and memory processes, personality would be merely empty, impoverished expression of our genetic constitution."¹⁰⁸ In other words, nature and nurture are both significant factors in synaptic organization and performance of the self.

Cultural Evolution

Cultural evolution is an interdisciplinary field¹⁰⁹ that explores the intersection between the social and biological creation of identity, or self. Cultural evolution theory serves a bridge between Lawler's emphasis on narrative and story, Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, and LeDoux's synopsis of neuroscience. As the bridge, it links the importance of natural processes and transmission to the environment of curation. In other words, the inherent biases an individual is born with, are also subject to the preferences of the community, or collective identity into which it is born. This means that at any given moment the influences of the external environment and the predisposed biases are seeking equilibrium in an effort to generate individual patterns, habits, and tendencies. As mentioned above, some of these generations are conscious, and some are not. Some can easily be articulated, and others are so enmeshed within the brain that their origin cannot be articulated.

The frequency of a cultural trait is based on the presence of that trait in the parents. If a parent performs particular cultural traits, it is likely that the child would hold, or perform, that

¹⁰⁷ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 2.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin, 2003). 9.

¹⁰⁹ Nicole Creanza, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W Feldman, "Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters," April 29, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/114/30/7782.full.pdf>. 7782.

trait as well, thus showing the transmission of not only genetic information but also the transmission of social learning. "Like genes, [these] cultural traits can be more or less adaptive depending on the environment." Highly stable environments favor the genetic determination of behaviors and performances whereas in spatially varying environments cultural transmission of those behaviors and performances is varied. This is important because in "many models of social learning, new information enters a population via trial and error, learning or individual interactions"¹¹⁰ with external factors. This reinforces the notion that identity is dependent on external factors but also suggests that the internal factors are responsible for performance as well.

The favorability of equilibrium is interesting given the nature of Complex Systems and the dependence Emergent Self-Organization has on disequilibrium. While stable environments are favorable for transmission or preservation of a cultural trait such as identity performance, disequilibrium is actually the "tipping point"¹¹¹ for sustainability. Sustainability within systems assumes that "systems are parts of hierarchies where systems of higher levels are made up of subsystems from lower levels." Reconciliation, or the quest for equilibrium, within systems can be observed by the interplay among them as they respond to "internal and external pressures."¹¹² What cultural evolution anticipates, however, is renewal. Reconciliation in some capacities jeopardizes sustainability because "sustainability... is about appropriate rates of change for

¹¹⁰ Nicole Creanza, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W Feldman, "Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters," April 29, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/114/30/7782.full.pdf>. 7783.

¹¹¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point* (Little, Brown, 2014).

¹¹² Alexey Voinov and Joshua Farley, "Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting," working paper, *Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting* (National Science Foundation, n.d.). 1.

different levels in a system hierarchy."¹¹³ This means that renewal can only take place by deciding which hierarchical level in a system should be sustained... and accepting [then] that lower level subsystems must have shorter life spans.¹¹⁴ In other words, sustainability can only be achieved in the constant cycle of "death and resurrection."¹¹⁵

What is particularly important in the theory of cultural evolution then is the role of selection and direct or indirect innovation. Unlike genetic evolution, "where mutations are the source of new traits, cultural evolution, or [emergence], can occur via multiple processes and at multiple scales," meaning that not only are new social learnings influencing identity formation but the re-learning, remembering, and re-organization of old cultural traits "can lead to exponential rates of 'cultural accumulation' as well."¹¹⁶ In other words, narrating WHY and HOW can develop new understandings of old ways or alternative applications that can result in innovation which then leads to a resurgence or "groundbreaking" WHAT.

One such strategy employed in cultural evolution is Human Niche Construction. Human Niche Construction is a process in which organisms modify their environment in a way that alters the selective pressures that they experience. In the narrative of a dying church, the dying church can alter both the story and the environment causing the decay. Even more specific

¹¹³ Alexey Voinov and Joshua Farley, "Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting," working paper, *Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting* (National Science Foundation, n.d.). 17.

¹¹⁴ Alexey Voinov and Joshua Farley, "Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting," working paper, *Reconciling Sustainability, Systems Theory and Discounting* (National Science Foundation, n.d.). 1.

¹¹⁵ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: St. Luke's Lutheran Church, April 21, 2019).

¹¹⁶ Nicole Creanza, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W Feldman, "Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters," April 29, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/114/30/7782.full.pdf>. 7783.

alteration of the environment through cultural practices is Cultural Niche Construction. In Cultural Niche Construction, individuals embrace the complexities associated with the cultural practices themselves and create space for not only the culture to evolve but for the practices themselves to evolve. Both of these models demonstrate how intentional innovation can change the parameters, and therefore the dynamics, framing one's narrative, and furthermore, give permission to cultures to apply new understandings as a result of social learning, or becoming.

Cultural evolution is a complex, non-linear process and when implemented creates the opportunity to predict individual behavior as well as possible intervention strategies that might alter identity performances at the societal level.¹¹⁷ It is essential to understand cultural evolutionary theory as one approach to generating self-awareness and to evaluating the factors at play in identity construction and performance. Cultural evolutionary theory suggests that it is imperative to be integrating novelty or interpreting performance for survivability continuously. By applying the principles of cultural evolution to systems and structures of an institution the individuals that construct the identity and performance of the institution can proactively shift the narratives to create possibilities and replace survivability with sustainability.

Summary

In order to understand the landscape it is important to understand each of the parts. By bringing all of these different parts: The Golden Circle, Complex Systems Theory, Emergent Self-Organization, the Ontological Argument, narratives and stories, the habitus, the Synaptic Self, and Cultural Evolutionary Theory, together a framework for understanding HOW identity is

¹¹⁷ Nicole Creanza, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W Feldman, "Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters," April 29, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/114/30/7782.full.pdf>. 7786.

constructed and then performed is developed. This framework builds an ontological web of relationships as each part of the landscape interacts with another, or others, inside the framework. Each part of this landscape comes together in a way that suggests interdisciplinary and interconnected cohesiveness. Bringing these theories together in one landscape creates the framework and constructs concerning the nature of identity-making, and in so doing, language for understanding this landscape has been created. Examples of this language include: understanding the community as a complex system, understanding sustainability as a result of novelty introduced into a system of cultural evolution, understanding thrive-ability as intentional novelty, empowered emergence and self organization which results in transformation, and understanding that WHY and HOW are more important than WHAT.

It is not enough, therefore, to address the narrative of a dying church by trying to control lower level systems or productions of WHAT. Instead, an organization can embrace the trajectory of decline as an opportunity within disequilibrium to introduce novelty by returning to belief and deeper meaning. In an effort to align WHY and HOW, organizations like the ELCA can embrace the promise of the resurrection and the possibilities of transformation¹¹⁸ that exists in and on the cross, as a core identity marker of the institution. This shift would reposition the organization in the "Non-Profit Life Cycle,"¹¹⁹ or in continuing to create language to better understand the landscape of this research, the sustainability curve.¹²⁰ Returning to WHY and HOW of identity construction time and time again would better position the ELCA for thrive-

¹¹⁸ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: St. Luke's Lutheran Church, April 21, 2019).

¹¹⁹ "Organizational Life Cycle Stages," Organizational Life Cycle Stages | NH Center for Nonprofits, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.nhnonprofits.org/content/organizational-life-cycle-stages>.

¹²⁰ An image of the sustainability curve can be found in the Appendices.

ability over sustainability. In other words, by relinquishing control of WHAT and creating space for authentic identity performance rooted in purpose the ELCA can emerge and organize for thrive-ability.

Theological Education and The Rostering System

This research is centered around two identity performances, or WHATs, or even, lower-level systems, within the superstructure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The research was structured in this way to address two main external factors influencing identity construction and identity performance. Because Theological Education is a leading opportunity to form leaders within the institution, it is imperative that its content and curriculum focus on WHY the Lutheran identity and Lutheran perspective are essential, and above all, meaningful. Similarly, it is important for Rostered Leaders within the institution to be confident in performing and transmitting this WHY by being mindful and intentional about HOW they approach their ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Service.

Theological Education

In 2013, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began work to fulfill a mandate from the ELCA Church Council. This mandate directed the Theological Education Advisory Council "to consider how [the] interdependent network of theological education providers can best serve the church as it seeks to address holistically, issues of leadership development, theological education, candidacy and call, and the roster of this church."¹²¹ The Church Council instructed the Theological Education Advisory Council to complete this work because of a need for theological language in the world. As an institution rooted in the ontology of God, an institutional hope for Theological Education is to prepare leaders to meet "the loudest voices [of]

¹²¹ Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

fear, exclusion, legalism, and violence," by speaking "a theological language of hope, grace, inclusion, reconciliation, and compassion."¹²²

The language of fear, exclusion, legalism, and violence is rooted in cultural shifts threatening many mainline Protestant denominations.¹²³ According to the Pew Research Center, the religious landscape in America is changing. In America, researchers note a three percent decrease in Protestants and Catholic religious affiliation, or identity, between 2007 and 2014, an increase in non-Christian faith traditions likes Hinduism and Islam, and a notable rise in those that do not identify with any particular religious affiliation.¹²⁴

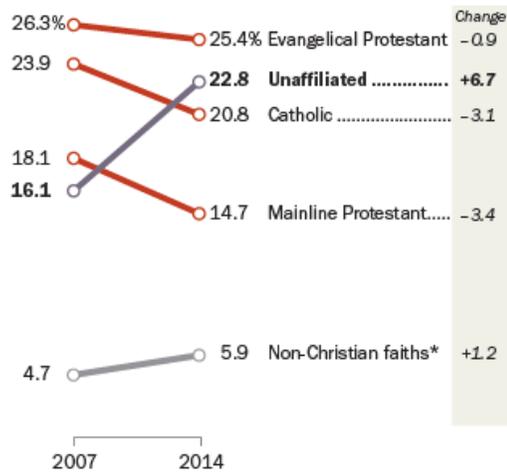
A Declining Share of Americans Belong to Mainline Protestant Churches

A variety of denominational families within mainline Protestantism have seen declines

% of U.S. adult pop. in mainline tradition	2007	2014
Mainline Protestant churches	18.1	14.7
Methodist	5.4	3.9
Baptist	1.9	2.1
Lutheran	2.8	2.1
Presbyterian	1.9	1.4
Episcopalian/Anglican	1.4	1.2
Nondenominational	0.9	1.0
Congregationalist	0.7	0.5
Restorationist	0.4	0.3
Anabaptist	<0.3	<0.3
Friends	<0.3	<0.3
Reformed	<0.3	<0.3
Other/Protestant non-specific	2.5	1.9

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



¹²² Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

¹²³ Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-Protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

¹²⁴ Michael Lipka, "5 Key Findings about the Changing U.S. Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/5-key-findings-u-s-religious-landscape/>.

The Theological Education Advisory Council's work was an expression of listening to the various ways the ELCA, as an institution, constructed through the lens of mainline Protestant identity, is affected by these trends. Part of the work of the report was to offer insight to aid in narrative reconstruction by naming a vision of life together that "illumines God's intentions for God's people."¹²⁵ The advisory council's work focused on the importance and necessity of Theological Education as an effort to "equip and sustain" leaders that are both fluent in articulating the theological narrative of hope, grace, inclusion, reconciliation, and compassion¹²⁶ and also in transmitting those themes in their communities. Theological Education includes:¹²⁷

1. Critical questioning of current knowledge and values
2. Freedom for expression and protection of learning
3. A liberating foundation in the liberal arts
4. Learning and research within the community
5. The intrinsic value of the whole of creation
6. Discerning one's vocation in the world and
7. Service to the advancement of life, health and wholeness

¹²⁵ Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

¹²⁶ Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

¹²⁷ "Core Elements in Lutheran Higher Education | Lutheran Studies," Pacific Lutheran University, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.plu.edu/lutheran-studies/core-elements/>.

Lutheran Theological Education then is a commitment to training leaders through a scope of Lutheran Higher Education in a way that prepares them for ministry in the church and "for the life of the world."¹²⁸

The Rostering System

Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Services are called rostered leaders within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Rostered leaders "carry out the work and mission of this church, sharing God's love with the world through the good news of Jesus Christ. Every rostered leader goes through theological training and a candidacy process. The candidacy process raises, prepares, certifies, and places public leaders in the ELCA."¹²⁹ This means that each rostered leader in some capacity is a product of Lutheran Theological Education.

Expanding on the research problem stated in the introduction, it is important to understand this current ecclesiology of the ELCA.¹³⁰ To carry the thread of storytelling into this space of ecclesiological identity, the narrative begins with the Reformation, Martin Luther as the tag, and his 95 Theses as the novel catalyst.¹³¹

¹²⁸ "About," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019, <https://www.elca.org/>.

¹²⁹ "About," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019, <https://www.elca.org/>.

¹³⁰ As a reminder, in this paper, the term ecclesiology refers to the metaphysical systems and structures of the ontological reality as well as the relationship of possibility and actuality rather than the architecture of church buildings, decorations and relics.

¹³¹ While the Catholic Church was not the only church on the European religious landscape by the 16th century, it was certainly the most dominant. The church had a great deal of political as well as spiritual power. The church's power brought with it a fair degree of corruption and Luther (a monk in Wittenberg) found himself disillusioned by the practices of the church he loved. As the tale is told, on October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door. He intended to spark a debate within the Catholic church and instead, introduced novelty which sparked the emergence of The Protestant Reformation, and ultimately, Lutheranism. Although Luther can be said to have started the Reformation, he was one of many reformers. Switzerland saw the rise of John Calvin, and Calvinism and John Knox founded the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. To date, each denomination of Protestantism has its own specific theology and approach, but nearly all share Luther's original objections and theological ideals relating to sin, justification, and good works.

As the Reformation emerged, it decentralized the authority of the Catholic Church and established "something that significantly changed Western culture."¹³² The Reformation, which started as a theological inquiry, was fed by disequilibrium in the political, economic, and technological systems. The spatial variance¹³³ in the European environment during the 16th century enabled a "global revolution"¹³⁴ because the local agents within the broader systemic construct interacted with each other and those interactions produced unintended outcomes without the intervention of a central controller.¹³⁵

Clergy, ministers, preachers, and teachers were therefore socially dependent, rather than intra-dependent after the Reformation because everything had been uprooted. In an effort to establish and sustain their newly reformed church, communities depended on social authorities to evaluate and produce a particular ontology. Through this social reliance, particular conducts, disciplines, and obediences were established as norms. In all outward matters, these norms were used to construct a newly visible church. Clergy were expected to teach the people, and more specifically their people, what forms of conduct, discipline, and obedience were theologically

¹³² Tara Isabella Burton, "500 Years Ago, Martin Luther Changed Christianity - and the World," Vox (Vox, November 2, 2017), <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/2/16583422/the-Protestant-reformation-explained-500-years-martin-luther-christianity-95-theses>.

¹³³ Nicole Creanza, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W Feldman, "Cultural Evolutionary Theory: How Culture Evolves and Why It Matters," April 29, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/114/30/7782.full.pdf>. 7784.

¹³⁴ Tara Isabella Burton, "500 Years Ago, Martin Luther Changed Christianity - and the World," Vox (Vox, November 2, 2017), <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/2/16583422/the-Protestant-reformation-explained-500-years-martin-luther-christianity-95-theses>.

¹³⁵ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

sound and which were not,¹³⁶ and thus the term "Good Order," which refers to the metaphysical systems and structures of the ontological reality of individual and communal identity construction as well as the relationship of possibility and actuality of the system's, or institution's, emergence, surfaced. Today, ecclesiastical orders render that no one should publicly preach or administer the Sacraments unless they hold a regular call.¹³⁷ In the Lutheran church, the two expressions of this reality are narrated by the Rostering Systems which categorize ministry into one of two rosters: Ministry of the Word and Sacrament and Ministry of the Word and Service. Both realities of the rosters emphasize the importance of scripture, evangelism, and narrative storytelling while also adding an additional, but different, opportunity to link ministry of the Word to the community.

For Ministers of Word and Sacrament, the additional extension of ministry is emphasized through the celebration of the two Lutheran Sacraments, Communion and Baptism, in the community identified through their call. For Ministers of Word and Service, the additional extension of ministry is through service in community with one's neighbor and the world. The narrative distinction can be understood by thinking in terms of structures and systems. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are considered pastors by the positionality of their call to congregational ministry while Ministers of Word and Service are identified as deacons and the positionality of their role in communities outside the walls of any visible congregation. Unlike pastors, deacons are individually responsible for linking their performance of call to occupation, and it can be

¹³⁶ Gerhard Brendler, *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). 327.

¹³⁷ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 333-334.

accomplished in a variety of ways. The distinctions between the two rosters of approved ministry can best be represented in this way: both rosters are associated with teaching the Gospel, but only Ministers of Word and Sacrament are eligible, according to Good Order, to preside over the sacraments.

Conversely, the Book of Concord¹³⁸ states that "the power of the Church grants eternal things and is [to be] exercised only by Ministers of the Word and the power of the Church has its own commission: to teach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments."¹³⁹ This statement is particularly important because it reemphasizes Ministers of the Word and allows a hermeneutical, rather than an ontological¹⁴⁰ understanding of the narrative of ministry, while simultaneously defining the commission of the faithful.

Despite calls for interpretation, Luther above all attests that "the church exists wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, and the church is a spiritual community oriented to and shaped by this Word in its life by the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴¹ And so, instead of separating the elements, they should be freely celebrated with any and all that ask for them¹⁴² -- especially in

¹³⁸ The Book of Concord contains the Lutheran Confessions which include: Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord.

¹³⁹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 66.

¹⁴⁰ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 1.

¹⁴¹ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 1.

¹⁴² Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 511-516.

communities outside of the system because the Lutheran theology and historical markers of identity support an open system. A purpose of the Word and Service Roster is to form communities outside of the visible church in a way that parallels Luther's efforts to locate the power of the church with the people through the priesthood of all believers.

The narrative is complex, and it seems that, in organizing, the church had neglected its proper calling, or identity of proclaiming the gospel of justification to comfort afflicted consciences.¹⁴³ The hiddenness of the church, therefore, "does not apply so much to the persons of the 'faithful' themselves as to their orientation in faith and the spirit, which are intangible entities, and yet whose possession leads to a way of life that is actually quite visible."¹⁴⁴ This means that structures and institutions are not blown away, but instead can become instruments in service of the Spirit.¹⁴⁵ And so, because Luther employs the work of hermeneutics, the bridge between ontology and identity is rooted in the ability to interpret the nature of church formation. Interpretation, however, must consistently and continuously align with the Word of God and the promise of the Gospel¹⁴⁶ revealed through the theology of the Incarnation and the Theology of the Cross. It is safe to offer this interpretation then, that "as long as faith is nurtured through the Word or promise of God, the faithful can exist in any community,"¹⁴⁷ including those, and

¹⁴³ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 4.

¹⁴⁵ http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Worship_and_Service.pdf?_ga=2.250962182.1226770195.1557779943-1106857410.1555093916

¹⁴⁶ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 3,7.

¹⁴⁷ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 4.

especially those, communities that are formed by the nature of call to the Ministry of Word and Service. This is because wherever a rostered leader of Word and Service performs their identity in community, their belief in the power of the invisible church manifests in that community.

It is unfortunate then that the current interpretation of ecclesiastical orders separates Ministry of the Word from Sacrament through the Word and Service Roster, because Luther's notion of the priesthood of all believers still exists within the current theological narrative of the ELCA. Since all Christians assume the same duties and rights as those set apart for formalized ministry the duties and ministerial offices and rights, including ministry of the Word, baptism, and consecration, [and] administration of the sacred bread and wine,¹⁴⁸ which Luther extends to all Christians, should definitely and specifically be extended to the Roster of Ministry of Word and Service as well. In other words, the identity performance that Luther makes accessible to all Christians seems to be stripped from those on the roster of Word and Service because the institutional hierarchy has structured ministry as an either-or: either an individual is called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, or an individual is called to the Ministry of Word and Service. In other words, an individual contemplating public ministry must choose between feeling called to ministry in a community constructed by the nature of call, or feeling called to build community as their ministry. This hierarchy of choice elevates Good Order over the power of the church or institution as people, and furthermore, it incriminates the nature of Lutheran identity, affirmed in baptism. The dichotomy of the Rostering Systems does not allow for

¹⁴⁸ Martin Luther, Concerning the Ministry, trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in Luther's Works, vol. 10: Church and Ministry II, ed. Conrad Bergendoff and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 4-44)

paradox. Instead, it insists in compartmentalizing ministry and identity as an "either-or" rather than a "both-and."

The implications of this are therefore far more detrimental to the communities formed by and with leaders performing their identity in relation to called and rostered ministry of Word and Service, than it is to those actually comprising the rosters because, as the Book of Concord asserts, "the Sacrament of Holy Communion should not be divided. Both Bread, the Body, and Wine, the Blood, should be made available to the laity and the Sacrament is not solely reserved for...priests, clergy, or ministers."¹⁴⁹ While this understanding refers to the literal notion that the elements should not be divided, it suggests a compelling argument for the decentralization of institutional authority which intentionally, or unintentionally, constructs differentiation between those that are identifying through a specified call versus empowering ministry as a result of identity affirmed through baptism, and differentiation between those on the inside and those on the outside of the visible church.

Instead of creating opportunities for those that are called by God to do something which ultimately builds upon their faith,¹⁵⁰ like forming communities of invisible church in order to meet people where they are, the process of institutionalization has too rigidly structured its hierarchy around Good Order, over the social and relational authority of Lutheran theology which rests in the Incarnation of the Word and transformational nature of the cross. In other words, through the current Rostering System, the ELCA has built a hierarchy not based on

¹⁴⁹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 511-516.

¹⁵⁰ Amsalu Tadesse Geleta to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, May 6, 2019.

Word, but on the administration of the Sacrament[s]. The priesthood of all believers is the marker of identity, and yet, the constructed hierarchy of rostered ministry does not currently allow a performance of identity that makes the Sacrament of Holy Communion and identity affirmation through baptism easily accessible to those positioned outside the collective, even though there is space for them inside the institutional bounds. Asserting this invitation time and time again does not shift the burden of belonging or change. The burden continues to rest on those the system has structurally excluded rather than on the priesthood, or institution, despite the belief that the elements should be accessible and freely celebrated with any and all that ask for them.¹⁵¹

Why then did we, as the institution, reverse and reserved the role of sacramental celebration only for leaders on the Roster of Word and Sacrament? Would not a more authentic performance of identity cultivate and empower community formation and emergent, self-organization in invisible and visible ways? For instance, as the faith community is sent out from the confines of the visible church, the individuals carry the creative work of the Holy Spirit. As such, the church becomes invisible, and these ministers are encouraged to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.¹⁵² Living out the performances of identity through word and deed specifically encourages the priesthood of all believers, and Ministers of Word and Service explicitly, to embrace the theology of the Incarnation in a way that proclaims

¹⁵¹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 511-516.

¹⁵² "Annual Report 2017," rep., *Annual Report 2017* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017), http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/2017_Annual_Report_cover_pages.pdf?_ga=2.186460201.1226770195.1557779943-1106857410.1555093916.

Jesus' tactile and tangible presence within and among communities from the table,¹⁵³ meaning that the scattered church,¹⁵⁴ or invisible church, is empowered to do the work to which God is calling it.¹⁵⁵ In other words, it is not only by the call that individuals are invited to perform their identity as baptized children of God, but the institutional division of ministry also should not diminish the identity of the priesthood or the transformational nature of the gathered community. Because the "institution is always less than the sum of its people, the Christian holy people, those marked [in their baptism], who encounter Christ as they serve [their] neighbor" should be able to "re-member Christ's broken body" through sacramental celebration because Luther defined the church as the people and the activities God gave and gifted them to do, and that definition of church depends less on places of visibility¹⁵⁶ and more on places of belonging, and relationships.

Report and Recommendations from the Theological Education Advisory Council

The work, the Theological Education Advisory Council (TEAC), conducted was helpful in beginning to think about the markers of identity which exist for individuals and the collective. Their work was similar to this research in that they spent time listening to the voices of 152 leaders within the ELCA to generate their recommendation. The main difference, however, is

¹⁵³ Kim, CCG - Interview - KB, personal, April 5, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Martha E Stortz, "Gathered and Scattered: Worship and Service as What It Means to Be the Church," December 17, 2002, http://download.elca.org/ELCA_Resource_Repository/Worship_and_Service.pdf?_ga=2.250962182.1226770195.1557779943-1106857410.1555093916.

¹⁵⁵ "Annual Report 2017," rep., *Annual Report 2017* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017), http://download.elca.org/ELCA_Resource_Repository/2017_Annual_Report_cover_pages.pdf?_ga=2.186460201.1226770195.1557779943-1106857410.1555093916.

¹⁵⁶ "Annual Report 2017," rep., *Annual Report 2017* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017), http://download.elca.org/ELCA_Resource_Repository/2017_Annual_Report_cover_pages.pdf?_ga=2.186460201.1226770195.1557779943-1106857410.1555093916.

that rather than focusing on HOW these individuals articulated their individual or organizational identity, the TEAC asked questions concerning WHAT. TEAC members asked the following questions:

1. WHAT is the vocation of the Lutheran movement in our North American context?
2. Into WHAT forms and context of public witness and service is God calling this church for which we need to prepare
3. WHAT kinds of forms of education and contexts will best create the learning and equipping communities need to live faithfully into God's mission?

An opportunity was missed to create novelty by redefining WHY and HOW the ELCA makes meanings because the recommendations were presented as advice in the form of controlled, systematic action steps. These steps primarily addressed the method and approach to oversight of theological education within the ELCA. The results of their listening culminated in structural emergence rather than creative transformation. Their recommendations were based on restructuring according to the following models as reactions to the narrative of a dying church:¹⁵⁷

- A. Central System
- B. Limited Central System
- C. Regional Systems
- D. Formal Network - Joint Systems
- E. Informal Model - Current Systems

Unfortunately, "advice is how [institutions] surrender...sovereignty," and it assumes that the collective "does not have the capacity to create the world [or meaning] from their own

¹⁵⁷ Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

resources." Peter Block offers in his work, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, that "advice weakens relatedness" and even if advice is requested, the request should be met with a question: "WHY does that mean so much to you?"¹⁵⁸ In this case, the recommendations of the TEAC serve as a method that seeks control in a complex system. Instead of allowing curiosity to transform the WHATs, what the TEAC has unknowingly done is cultivate an environment that "increases the likelihood that tomorrow will be just like yesterday."¹⁵⁹ In other words, the recommendations from the TEAC extinguish possibility in an attempt to solve problems. The TEAC has tried to simplify the complexities of the ontological web influencing the organizational identity of the ELCA by approaching their work as complicated issues in a complicated system when reality suggests otherwise. This oversimplification prohibits the creativity that rests within the institution as a community of co-creators¹⁶⁰ with and alongside God, and therefore limits the possibility of emergence and novelty which then also limits thrive-ability.

One way to increase the possibility of thrive-ability is to change the conversation.¹⁶¹

Despite the opportunity missed by offering complicated recommendations back into the institution, the TEAC did reintroduce one learning from their conversations. The learning that emerged was that, "God is calling us as Lutheran Christians to claim our distinctive theological

¹⁵⁸ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009). 109-110.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009). 176.

¹⁶⁰ Alex, CCG - Interview - KB, personal, April 9, 2019.

¹⁶¹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009). 52-54.

voice in the world," and that "the work of renewing theological education [is] far more than finding solutions to specific organizational, financial and pedagogical challenges." Instead, it is "a deeply theological matter."¹⁶²

¹⁶² Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

Theology of the Cross

In 1519, Martin Luther asserted that "the cross alone is our theology." At the time, he was speaking in rebuttal to the collective¹⁶³ understanding that the cross was something to be figured out or understood. Putting the cross at the center of Lutheran theology was an attempt to reconfigure "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment." The particular environment Martin Luther was particularly concerned with was, of course, that which was "regulated" by the Catholic Church. In other words, after posting his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, and arguing his Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, Martin Luther made yet another attempt in 1519, to recreate a systemic influence to conceptualize the influence of The Church over society. Martin Luther took on the established system of operation in an attempt to develop a new habitus. This new habitus was rooted in the assertion that "the cross alone is our theology."

Martin Luther's assertion propelled the reformation further and established the roots for what is now widely known as the Theology of the Cross. The Theology of the Cross is in direct opposition to a Theology of Glory. Unlike a Theology of Glory, the Theology of the Cross proclaims that whatever we think we know about God is in fact limited by our own wisdom, or in this case, foolishness, because to be wise, thinking we can see through the cross, is to support a Theology of Glory. In other words, "what is revealed in the cross is precisely that we don't know God. And yet, a Theology of the Cross lives into relationships with the crucified and resurrected Jesus."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Martin Luther, *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*, trans. Martin Bertram, 1519.

¹⁶⁴ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518 (Eerdmans, 1997).

For Lutheran Christians, the cross, therefore, is a paradox. One side of the spectrum symbolizes the "invisible essence" of God, that of virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, et cetera,¹⁶⁵ which, according to a Theology of Glory, one hopes to find in oneself. On the other side of the spectrum, "the cross draws us into itself so that we become participants in the story" of Christ.¹⁶⁶ The narrative of the cross is, therefore, simultaneously interwoven into the narrative of a Lutheran Christian and furthermore, as Luther might argue, is meant to be the center of one's identity. The Theology of the Cross gives Lutheran Christians language to articulate their narrative, and in doing so assists in identity construction, as the understanding of self and of God are revealed by looking at and placing the cross in the center of meaning-making.

The cross's meaning has transformed throughout history, and to better understand its impact on identity today, it is important to understand its historical significance, use, and symbolism. In the time of Jesus, the cross was used in Roman execution through crucifixion. Roman crucifixion was a form of capital punishment. The guilty were tied or nailed to a large wooden beam and left to hang for several days until eventual death from exhaustion, asphyxiation, or other physiological factors. Historical crucifixion was not something to be glorified. Crucifixion was usually reserved for slaves, the lower class, criminals, and rebellious foreigners. Of course, when the Romans crucified these types of individuals, the motive was more than penalty, punishment, or deterrent.¹⁶⁷ Crucifixion was an opportunity for the socially

¹⁶⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997). 77.

¹⁶⁶ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997). 7.

¹⁶⁷ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," *Bible Archaeology Society*, 2018.

elite leaders to strip other individuals of their glory. In this sense of the meaning, crucifixion was a way to move someone farther and farther away from God, thus moving them farther and farther away from the "human ability to 'see,' know, and please God."¹⁶⁸ Roman execution on the cross can be interpreted to showcase a stripping of one's glory in a way that distinguishes a Theology of Glory from a Theology of the Cross. Because a Theology of Glory emphasizes human performance before God, the humiliating process associated with crucifixion would diminish any work, or performance, completed by the condemned, toward justification.

It is no surprise then that in medieval Rome, the very word "cross" was used as a curse,¹⁶⁹ and crucifixion, therefore, was the most humiliating method of capital punishment. In fact, first century Christians, called Gentiles, sympathetic toward Jesus, his disciples and their teachings, narrate in three of the four gospels that at the moment of Jesus' deepest agony on the cross, the soldiers and people in the crowd mocked him by saying things like, "If you are really king of the Jews, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"¹⁷⁰ The soldiers and the crowd intended to strip Jesus of his glory. They wanted to remove any notion that Jesus was a king, the Messiah, or in some way, God's Son, or the Incarnate.

Despite the efforts of Rome's political elite, the gospel writers were able to craft a narrative contrary to "a crucified Messiah and son of God who did not have the power to save

¹⁶⁸ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Theology of the Cross and the Experience of God's Presence: A Lutheran Response to Pentecostal Wonderings," *Dialog* 55, no. 4 (2016): pp. 316-323, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12277>.

¹⁶⁹ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Mark 15:30; Matthew 27:40–44; Luke 23:37–39

himself from the cross."¹⁷¹ The gospel writers were able to frame Jesus' death on the cross in a way that invited their followers to insert themselves into the story. One specific example of this merged narrative is relevant in the story of Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus. In this story, Paul, or Saul at the time, was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus when the resurrected Jesus came to him. According to the book of Acts, Saul was struck blind for three days because it was God's will for Saul to change his ways of persecution. Through repentance and transformation, Saul's vision was restored. As a transformed man, Saul changed his name to Paul and began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth, the man whom the Romans crucified, was the Messiah and the Son of God. This example illustrates the ability of the cross to "draw [individuals] into itself, so that [they] become participants in the story" as well.¹⁷² The story of Paul's transformation narrated in scripture paves the path for a continued invitation, of individuals and communities, such as the church in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica.

Inevitably, Paul's letters were canonized as parts of the New Testament during or by the end of the first century. His letters deliberately explored the modality of Jesus' death on the cross for two primary reasons. First, Paul knew that his message about the cross, while unappealing to them, would gain the attention of Jewish and Greco-Roman audiences. The

¹⁷¹ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

¹⁷² Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 7.

second reason Paul took up the cross in his letters was to transform the "gruesome subject" of Jesus' crucifixion into a narrative of selflessness, humility, and abundant love for humanity."¹⁷³

Thanks to Paul and his traveling, writing, and persistence, some early Christians began to view the cross as a significant marker of their identity. For example, the author of the Book of Revelation referred to the mark of the cross in the seal that the servants of God receive on their foreheads.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the Book of Revelation refers to the cross as a Christological identity¹⁷⁵ marker that has been carried into the Baptismal Sacrament of today's churches.

Throughout the second and third centuries, the knowledge that the founder of the Christian movement suffered the most shameful death spread enough that even poorer social classes, the ones for whom the cross had initially been reserved, criticized the Christian belief in the crucified Jesus with sarcastic enjoyment.¹⁷⁶ By identifying, reframing, and retelling the narrative of pain, early Christians like Paul, were able to identify with the cross by putting themselves into Jesus' story. In other words, early Christians embodied Steedman's suggestion of self-construction by transitioning the cross's previously ascribed symbology of death, penalty, punishment, humiliation, and above all else, shame, into a narrative of the divine attributes of invitation, transformation, and resurrection. This transition, marked by theologians like Paul, was studied by theologians like Luther.

¹⁷³ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

¹⁷⁴ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Revelation 7:2-3

¹⁷⁵ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

Luther quotes Paul's letters to the Romans in the Twenty-Fifth thesis of his Heidelberg Disputation to explain that there "is really nothing other than...justification by faith alone without the deeds of law."¹⁷⁷ For Luther, Pauline theology is the foundational proof for a Theology of the Cross. Gerhard Forde writes this of Luther's synthesis of Paul in response to a world that tries to ascribe to a Theology of Glory:

What he says certainly seems meet, right and salutary. We learn to play the piano only by practicing, we learn a skill only by doing. This is the wisdom by which the world runs. It is what lawmakers try to inculcate. But not here. The righteousness before God comes only by hearing and believing. God makes us who we are. Such righteousness can only appear absolutely shocking...Works performed on the premise that one was going to become righteous thereby are not good to begin with. They defend us against the goodness of God. They are done not for the neighbor but for the glory of self...The cross has reversed everything! The foolishness of God in the cross is wiser than the wisdom of the world. The righteousness that avails God is being claimed by the crucified and resurrected Christ. It is not like accomplishing something but like dying and coming to life. It is not like earning something but more like falling in love. It is not the attainment of a long-sought goal, the arrival at the end of a process, but the beginning of something absolutely new, something never before heard of or entertained.¹⁷⁸

By the cross, and Luther's developed Theology of the Cross, Lutheran Christians are invited into relationship with the crucifying and resurrecting symbol of the cross, and by extension, Christ. The narrative of the cross "is seen as the focal point of God's revelation of [God]self and therefore, as the foundation and center of...Christian theology. In the Theology of

¹⁷⁷ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 104.

¹⁷⁸ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 106.

the Cross, the cross becomes a methodological key to Christian¹⁷⁹ identity by "naturalizing the plot and making later events[, such as God making us who we are,] seem like the natural and inevitable culmination of earlier ones."¹⁸⁰ Thus, what had once been universally a repulsive image in the ancient Mediterranean world has transformed into a preeminent symbol of selflessness, humility, and abundant love for humanity according to Lutherans today.¹⁸¹

The meaning and value of the cross for Lutherans today is rooted in their understanding, and the teachings, of Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross. Without this fundamental rootedness, Lutherans would be unable to articulate a sense of salvation that is rooted in "grace through faith," or an act "not of [our] own doing" but a gift from God.¹⁸² This sense is both an interpretation of identity, and a formation of identity. Without this interpretation of scripture and the cross, Lutherans would be unable to comprehend identity construction and make meaning. The Theology of the Cross asks individuals and groups to place themselves within the narrative of the cross, thereby extending the transformation power of the cross to all of humankind -- for example, the criminals crucified next to Jesus on crosses of their own. Again, this reference reinforces the historical habitus of cross symbology, yet reimagines the narrative of the cross because Jesus says to the criminal, "today, you will be with me in paradise."¹⁸³ This verse in

¹⁷⁹ Rosalene Bradbury, *Cross Theology: the Classical Theologia Crucis and Karl Barth's Modern Theology of the Cross* (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2012).

¹⁸⁰ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 32.

¹⁸¹ Steven Shisley, "Jesus and the Cross: How the Cross Became Christianity's Most Popular Symbol," Bible Archaeology Society, 2018.

¹⁸² *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Ephesians 2:8.

¹⁸³ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Luke 23:43

Luke creates space for all criminals, or sinners, to identify with the pain, suffering, and redemption of Jesus' own death on the cross.

Because Lutheran Christians ascribe to the notion that human nature repeatedly moves individuals away from God and that evil, in some sense, is the absence of God, Lutherans believe that humanity, by nature, is filled with sin.¹⁸⁴ Lutherans hopefully believe that, though we are destined to repeat our humanness, it is by the power of the cross that our human nature is destroyed and replaced with forgiveness, mercy, and love. The power of the cross is, therefore, transformative and formative. Rather than solely defining their identity based on what the cross is, Lutheran identity is formed by what the cross can be because the cross is powerful enough to turn death and destruction to a new life filled with faith, hope, and grace.

As Forde argues in On Being a Theologian of the Cross, "the cross is not transparent; it is a mirror."¹⁸⁵ In this vein, Forde's articulation extends the notion that Lutheran identity is formed by what the cross can be because the mirrored image of the cross calls Lutherans, and all Christians, according to the Theology of the Cross, to accountability. It asks the onlooker first to acknowledge and then submit those sins, flaws, and earthly realities over to Christ and the transformative power of the cross for the sake of new life, new beginnings, and a new reality.

Ironically, the historical meaning of the cross is transformed into a realized potential of the cross where those doomed to the cross are freed to, by, and because of the cross. The

¹⁸⁴ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Theology of the Cross and the Experience of God's Presence: A Lutheran Response to Pentecostal Wonderings," *Dialog* 55, no. 4 (2016): pp. 316-323, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12277>.

¹⁸⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 77.

narrative that Lutherans enter is one that suggests Jesus' sacrifice was for them, and by extension, all of humankind.

The impact Luther's Theology of the Cross has on identity for Lutherans as a group and as individuals is vital for cultural workers because this is only one understanding or interpretation, amongst many, of the symbology of the cross, despite its general association as a universal symbol of Christianity. This means that even within the common narrative of Christianity, diverse narratives rooted in different theologies exist. These different theologies encourage Christian groups to self-sort based on shared understandings of stories. For instance, Lutherans self sorted into a group that affirms a Theology of the Cross over a Theology of Glory.

The interesting realization within the collective, however, is that even Lutherans interpret the Theology of the Cross, and therefore its meaning, differently. Despite these differences, the impact the cross has as an external factor in identity construction is as a universal opportunity for emergence. This realization makes it vitally important to engage in dialogue and narrative exploration for one to definitively define their sense of identity based on their own interpretation of the cross. Regardless, the cross is an invitation to look and see one's self, as an individual, as a community, as an institution. Upon looking, what one sees is not only their identity but also their possibilities and their becomings, and rather than answers, or solutions to the complex nature of becoming, the cross tells a story.

So what is the cross telling us? If we looked honestly, what might we learn about ourselves, about God, and about HOW God is calling us to be in the world? Both as individuals and as a collective institution?

*"I assure you," Jesus replied, "before Abraham was, I Am."
John 8:58*

Interview Analysis

While, "the cross alone is our theology,"¹⁸⁶ it is not the only marker of identity for individuals comprising the institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As such, interviews became a method of research for this thesis. Interviews were conducted to hear, first hand from community members, about the reflexivity between individuals and the collective, or institutional, identity. Ten interviews were held for this research. Nine of the ten interviews were conducted with participants currently active in leadership roles within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. One interview was held with a participant outside the realm of current ELCA leadership; however, this person was contacted because of their relationship to an ELCA affiliated college and their own experience with theological education and leadership in the Methodist church. The table below represents the demographics of the research participants.¹⁸⁷

Interview Participant	Regional and Synodical Relationship to ELCA	Theological Education	Current Roster Status
Alex	Region 2, Southwest California Synod	Duke Divinity	Local Pastor
Jayson	Region 1, Montana Synod	PLTS	Word and Sacrament

¹⁸⁶ Martin Luther, *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*, trans. Martin Bertram, 1519.

¹⁸⁷ I wrestled with whether or not to include their past, present, or future leadership positions within the institution and ultimately decided not to as some roles could too easily identify participants since their current regional and synodical relationship is listed. I felt it was more important to include the relationship context to show the range of participation. The column Theological Education represents the specific institution rostered leaders attended. This table does not account for relationships of lay leaders that intersect with institutions of Theological Education.

Interview Participant	Regional and Synodical Relationship to ELCA	Theological Education	Current Roster Status
John	Region 8, Delaware-Maryland Synod	n/a	Lay Leader
Katie	Region 2, Rocky Mountain Synod	n/a	Lay Leader
Kim	Region 2, Rocky Mountain Synod	Chicago	Word and Sacrament
Leila	Region 8, Metro-Washington DC Synod	United	Word and Sacrament
Melanie	Region 8, Delaware-Maryland Synod	n/a	Lay Leader
Micah	Region 8, Delaware-Maryland Synod	United	Word and Sacrament
Quinn	Region 5, Northwest Wisconsin Synod and Region 3, St. Paul Area Synod	n/a	Lay Leader
Tommy	Region 8, Delaware-Maryland Synod	Boston University	Lay Leader

Question 1: How do you define and understand the term identity?

Because this research is fundamentally rooted in the understanding that institutions are the individuals that construct them, this question was crafted to get at the heart of identity. I wanted to know how the people of faith I interviewed were understanding and interpreting the

term "identity." The shared answer for this question is that identity is always rooted in a larger narrative. For some, this means that identity is rooted in a place, or a variety of places. For others, the larger narrative of one's identity is connected to community while others articulated how identity intertwines with the things we create and how the things we create are expressions of our identity, and furthermore, expressions of self.

1.1 - Identity	
John	<i>If there's a new way. Does that mean what we've been doing is bad. And if that's bad does that mean I as a person am bad?</i>
Kim	<i>...If my sense of who I am is just created within my own internal landscape I think that's smaller than when I am honed in to the holiness, the divine, the sacred that is all around me.</i>
Leila	<i>Identity is who I believe I am.</i>
Melanie	<i>They recognized my gifts and were willing to speak those to me and show me where those gifts could be part of what they were doing. I think probably people in my life had told me about those things before but having people who didn't know me from early on value them helped me accept that they were valuable... So being able to see that there's value in that... you value yourself differently.</i>
Tommy	<i>The way that I've come to think about identity in general in my own life and then particularly in the lives of other disciples and leaders is that I think we need to recover a much deeper sense of our identity as a people of God and as a community of faith...</i>

This confirms that identity is complex. Identity is not a complicated system. Instead, it is a web of interactions, experiences, performances, and parts and pieces of all of life coming together to form an understanding of one's self. The complexity of identity allows individuals to make sense of their belonging in the world while knowing that belonging is deeply connected to becoming, and therefore that identity construction can be messy, ambiguous, and open-ended.

There is freedom in the fluidity of "identity-making"¹⁸⁸ that allows individuals to practice becoming and generating awareness of self by testing possible identities against external factors.

Sometimes the test allows individuals to define their identity by process of negation or elimination. For instance, Micah explained it this way:

Micah: There are all of those perceptions of you internally and I was trying to decide what was true and what wasn't. So understanding identity of the church by saying what I liked and what I didn't like was similar to understanding my own identity by listening to what others said about me and identifying what I liked and what I didn't.

Defining self by what doesn't fit, feel at home,¹⁸⁹ or maybe even feel like a "well-worn baseball glove,"¹⁹⁰ is equally important as finding what does. That self-awareness helps individuals claim or reject identity markers both in the public and personal manifestations by allowing individuals to project their identities on to, or into, an environment that can reflect for them what they are producing. The "direct and indirect"¹⁹¹ external factors act as a mirror for one to view and aid in actualizing individual identity.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the notion that identities represent realities and these realities are the way of "identity-making"¹⁹² and becoming. In the process of becoming, one's self-awareness begins to increase, and the parts of one's identity begin to make sense in a narrative whole. Since the pieces of one's identity work together, they cannot be

¹⁸⁸ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 1-2, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Micah, CCG - Interview - MK, personal, March 28, 2019.; Melanie, CCG - Interview - MG, personal, March 29, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ John, CCG - Interview - JN, personal, April 5, 2019.

¹⁹¹ Alex, CCG - Interview - AP, personal, April 9, 2019.

¹⁹² Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014). 1-2,10.

compartmentalized.¹⁹³ There is a choice in how one performs their identity, and there isn't just one version of self that individuals can articulate at all times because identity is "what happens when others receive or perceive our identity."¹⁹⁴ "Many different realities inform personal realities"¹⁹⁵ and therefore may create a distinction between identity performance and a reaction to external factors influencing our behavior.¹⁹⁶ In other words, there may be a distinction between one's true or authentic identity and an inauthentic identity, so it is important that one doesn't get too comfortable with what they assume to be their identity as they encounter identities that are representing other realities.

The realities represented through identity performance are relative to the individual, and therefore, it is important for individuals to understand what external factors are working to generate the landscape for one's identity construction. In this case, examples of external factors may include traditions, values, or shared likeness with others.¹⁹⁷ A shared likeness with others is a key factor in narrating a collective identity but is also equally important for understanding biases of an individual's reality that is represented through identity so that individuals can authentically receive, understand, and have sympathy for the performance or reaction of another's identity.

¹⁹³ Leila, CCG - Interview - LO, personal, March 27, 2019.

¹⁹⁴ Tommy, CCG - Interview - TS, personal, March 24, 2019.

¹⁹⁵ Leila, CCG - Interview - LO, personal, March 27, 2019.

¹⁹⁶ Alex, CCG - Interview - AP, personal, April 9, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Jayson, CCG - Interview - JN, personal, April 4, 2019.; Katie. CCG - Interview - KB. Personal, April 2, 2019.; Quinn. CCG - Interview - QS. Personal, April 4, 2019.

Many factors must be accounted for when defining identity, and these interviews have shown just how complex the notion of identity and identity-making are. To simplify the complexity, interview participants were asked to share about their individual identity.

Question 2: Share about your identity?¹⁹⁸

The themes and narratives expressed in the answers to this question will be presented in a chart to best show the direct answers each individual offered.¹⁹⁹ Interpretations and implications for how these individual identity markers come together to form a collective understanding of identity will follow some tables.

2.1 - Identity Markers; Faithful Expressions	
Alex	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Uniquely created by God.</i> 2. <i>Co-creator as a create-ed of God.</i> 3. <i>Parent</i> 4. <i>Christian</i> 5. <i>Peacemaker</i>
John	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Follower of Christ</i> 2. <i>Lay Leader</i> 3. <i>Participant in a dying church</i> 4. <i>Happy with the Lutheran theology</i>
Jayson	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Pastor</i> 2. <i>EMT</i> 3. <i>Navy Chaplain</i>
Katie	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Child of God</i> 2. <i>Currently relying on the hospitality of others</i>

¹⁹⁸ Sub questions included: What makes you, you? Why do you identify that way? How did those features develop? How has this community, or more specifically institution, shaped your understanding of who you are?

¹⁹⁹ The offerings represented in the chart are compiled from understanding each individual interview as a whole and therefore may be a generalization rather than a direct quote. Likewise, the identity markers defined do not correlate to the numerical order in which they are represented.

2.1 - Identity Markers; Faithful Expressions

Kim	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Part-time Pastor</i> 2. <i>Spouse</i> 3. <i>Parent</i>
Leila	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Follower of Jesus</i> 2. <i>Disciple</i> 3. <i>Luthercostal</i> 4. <i>Storyteller</i>
Melanie	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Child of God</i> 2. <i>Created by God to be exactly who God created</i> 3. <i>Collectively rooted in reformation</i> 4. <i>Leader in this institution</i>
Micah	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Vulnerable</i> 2. <i>Pastor</i> 3. <i>Minister</i> 4. <i>Alcoholic</i> 5. <i>In recovery</i> 6. <i>Child of a pastor</i> 7. <i>One in a long line of Lutheran Pastors</i>
Quinn	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Straight male</i> 2. <i>Physical, Mental and Emotional Disabilities</i> 3. <i>Who I am is different to each person I encounter or with whom I share relationship</i> 4. <i>God is central to who I am and what I do because of my experiences at camp</i> 5. <i>Bipolar</i>
Tommy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Disciple of Christ</i> 2. <i>Follower on the way</i> 3. <i>Companion with people on their journey of faith</i> 4. <i>Humble Servant</i> 5. <i>Student (not an academic student but rather a student studying and learning more about God, always)</i> 6. <i>Farmer and Faith Practitioner</i> 7. <i>Bridge Builder</i>

When I began this research, my committee chair asked me, "which is the chicken, and which is the egg?" I had a hard time distinguishing how I knew the markers of my identity to be true until I had the realization that I have a hard time identifying my self outside the realm of the institution that has been an external factor in my identity formation. Looking at the list of descriptors in the chart above, I see a similar narrative shared by the interview participants. All, in some way, linked their being to an expression of faith generated through their learnings of identity under the framework of religious dogma. Of course, there were other key factors that were formative in their understanding of identity such as their education and their family roles and even socio-economic status.

2.2 - Identity Markers; Secular Expressions

Alex

There were so many people and mentors and friends and interactions that have led me to a place to be able to pursue ministry as my profession and partly my vocation and that same thing applies to things like being a parent and you know I parent in similar ways. My default parenting is similar to how my parents parented me and even if I'm intentionally trying to parent differently than them there's going to be pieces of me that are going to react as my parents would have reacted or did react when they were raising me... The ways in which they raised me the interactions that we've had and they've obviously had more influence over my identity than most other people because we've had so many more interactions and so much more time spent together. And I also trust them and appreciate them. And so that allows me to be more open to them than other people...So because I am a parent that is part of my identity now and that has everything to do with right. I mean in some ways I'm responsible. But in other ways it's because I have two girls, like because I have children that I am a parent, and that is part of who I am. And that's part of who, what, how I strive to live. Like I am choosing to be a parent. But I also am a parent. So it's part of my identity. Same as a spouse or partner. Same with friend.

2.2 - Identity Markers; Secular Expressions**Melanie**

You know, I think all of these, all of the combined experiences of my life, combined with how I was born... I was thinking the other day one branch of my family that is very that my parents generation is very, very well off. So my cousins grew up in that environment of affluence. My parents were teachers. We were fine. We were not in poverty. Absolutely solid middle class. We did not have everything. And it was often that my aunt thought that we just weren't trying hard enough. And at the same time [they] were so generous with what they had but what witnessing now in my cousins who lives have not taken the track of a particular wealth is that they are constantly miserable. Because their experience was that that's normal. In spite of the fact that they both have really nothing that they're missing. And I had no control over how they fall into that family situation. But I do think obviously my parents have something to do with this. Because of choices that they made and the way that we didn't live in like, "oh gosh, we're not going to make it," or we don't have enough," or "should we be making this," like we didn't have that perspective... And on the other side of my family my Mom's side of the family, my grandparents never made enough money to pay taxes... I'm actually really just grateful for that perspective. You know I had one cousin. She's so unhappy. All the time. And hard things have happened but she just cannot be satisfied. And I like my little house and it doesn't bother me that I'm still renting. And I don't care that my kids share a room. I'm not stressed out about it. So all of that combined with I just have a different perspective of what enough is...

2.2 - Identity Markers; Secular Expressions

Tommy

So it's funny that I've almost come full circle again in a way because I went to my grandparents' Lutheran Church at the beginning that's how I first experienced church and God. Did some confirmation I guess and my Sunday School stuff there but then after my mom passed and then my journey of faith kind of really became real to me and I was going to this nondenominational church with my friends and his family. And so that was where a lot of my early theology and understanding of God was developed I was in this non-denominational pretty conservative bible type of church and then Villanova was such a eye opening thing as a Catholic institution but one that was very ecumenical. And so the whole idea of humanism became really important to me because I did my time at Villanova... And I was so encouraged and inspired and challenged by the beautiful people of faith that I saw at... Villanova both campus ministers and priests and students and so I did really come to understand in some way shape or form my identity as a Christian and as a disciple and particularly in my calling as one who was going to be a bridge. That was an image that often became very central to me. I felt that I wanted to be a bridge that was going to help people overcome the divides and the divisions that have so destructively entrenched themselves in our Christian history. And so you know I was blessed to be a part of such a rich community of people of many different denominations and faiths at Villanova. So then I was in seminary and I went to a UCC seminary and then a Methodist Seminary and then I had the race in between which was like super charismatic wild crazy Pentecostal and I actually served for a year at a Pentecostal Church my first year on the farm. So just to kind of name all those different worlds and circles that it's there's so many. It was Villanova was where I really began to understand my calling and identity is one of a bridge.

The reliance on defining the self in relation to God, Jesus, or the institutional structures comprising significant roles or job titles cannot be overlooked and begs the question, "chicken or egg." The identity markers presented in the chart also make me wonder about the influence the research framework had on interview participants as they answered question two and if there is truly a shared difficulty in defining self outside of religious belief or if this is a natural articulation for people of faith.

In terms of collective identity, the themes that emerged from this question, however, are a shared sense of belonging and shared accountability for the institution that fosters the religious dogma. Though not presented here, this was evident by the use of the third person pronouns, "we" and "our," which research participants switched to outside of their individual storytelling. This language fostered a shared commitment to each other, and the institutional identity rooted in those relationships assumed in the "we" and "our" language. Even in my interview with Alex, there was no "us versus them" language unless specific distinctions were being made which required separating the Methodist tradition from the Lutheran tradition. At other times, the universal "we" was assumed under the broader category of Christianity.

In further understanding the collective identity represented in the interviews another theme that emerged that accurately describes how this universal "we" and "our" language develops a collective identity is linked to the position of individual identity within a larger narrative that aligns with the biblical narrative. As noted in the first chart, most research participants positioned themselves at the beginning of the biblical narrative as a creation of God, or even as a co-creator alongside God. Other's positioned themselves in the New Testament as followers of Jesus. It was interesting to see how individuals defined themselves because of who they know God and Jesus to be:

John: [Jesus] was love in relation. He was a relational and loving and not condemning. He accepted the hypocrites.²⁰⁰

Tommy: In Genesis and the first thing God tells Adam to do is to till and to keep the soil the garden.

Quinn: Mercy, grace, generosity, humility, and then God's promise. Community. And then how those four things lead into God's promise. Community is stated I think it's Acts 2. And so specifically discusses everybody gets along everybody supports each other.

²⁰⁰ John, CCG - Interview -JN, personal, April 5, 2019.

Everybody loves each other. Nobody goes hungry. Everybody's fed. Everybody is loved. And that's the promise community that we have.

Finally, the idea of ideal or identity arose. Quinn was the first to use these terms as a way to distinguish between what a group or individual claims as identity versus what others feel they should become. Quinn talked about how the tension between ideals and identity exists in the secular world through stereotypes surrounding mental health, and he also articulated that the church world is not immune to stereotyping either. Quinn shared stories that he's gathered and received from leaders in the congregations he's visited as part of his current role, or job:

Quinn: I feel like [they] are stuck in that ideal. They're stuck in that like, "we can't be bigger because we're not in the cities. We can't be bigger because there's only 20 people here." And so their identity is completely cut off and very much like, "we've made it. This is it and we're not going any further." And so it's been kind of interesting and difficult to see that and also see how my identity plays into that. Seeing the energy I find myself to be more charismatic if that's the right word. I know, energetic. I really enjoy meeting new people and being in new situations and stuff like that. And I've been able to preach and everything. So it's a different energy when I'm there than when I'm not. It's so often I talk to pastors afterwards and I hear so much of that like we've stagnated. Like our identity as a church our identity as individuals in the church is just that we've peaked. And the biggest problem I find is nobody's willing to come down the other side. To then try to peek again or try to find a new identity or version of themselves like everybody is just content.

There is a sadness heard in this narrative as the congregations wrestle with what they claim to be their true identity and the ideal or standard marker of success which affirms large, affluent, and growing congregations. This narrative offers a critical look at how ideals may hamper external affirmation of one's understood identity which may cause feelings of unbelonging, doubt, or not being good enough or valued for what feels most "at home"²⁰¹ or most authentic.

²⁰¹ Micah, CCG - Interview - MK, personal, March 28, 2019.; Melanie, CCG - Interview - MG, personal, March 29, 2019.

Another theme embedded within the narrative of ideals juxtaposing identity is what assumptions and connotations, both positive and negative, lie within the identity marker and title, "pastor."

2.3 - Identity Marker; Pastor

<p>Alex</p>	<p><i>So like all the other pieces in the system of the church there's the pastor and the pastors position holds certain things that allow people to trust me in ways that they don't trust other people. For example being extremely vulnerable in hospitals and conversations in our home for some of those boundaries that the pastoral position allows me to be in, even teaching just the fact that I'm 60 years younger than some of my members. And the fact that they're listening to me teach on a normal basis, that all comes with my positions. And so that's part of it which I think is set up. And then there's other pieces which I think mostly have to do with their understanding of pastor that also limit me. So for example based on their other experiences with other pastors, "Well my my other pastor didn't do this," or 'most churches to do this," or other things. So just by title alone that allows some things to be easier and some things to be more difficult in this translation.</i></p>
<p>Micah</p>	<p><i>We have to make it look like we have it all together and I feel like that is just so directly contradictory to the Gospel. Right. Like it's. It's not, "quick, look we have it all together." It's, "we're all so frickin' messed up." And if we share that Grace becomes exponentially more meaningful and powerful and it actually makes sense that we come to church. It honestly, half the time, I don't understand why people are coming to church. Because they come in and they're just like, "I just want to be told that the world is fine." I'm like, "why are you here. Go elsewhere. Go anywhere else." But this is the place where you should be told the world is broken that we are broken. But thank God that God is a God of grace. And I mean that's ultimately right. I find myself and I'm pushing, I keep pushing myself, saying, "I'm not interested in being a host anymore. I'm interested in embracing the areas of my life that are broken and seeing God in those places helping me through." The communities that surround me with love, grace and strength in times when I don't have it. Like that what I'm looking for. Where God is acting. Where God is embracing us.</i></p>

2.3 - Identity Marker; Pastor

Quinn	<i>Like in the last week I've heard three different pastors say I'm not a mental health professional but I wish I was because so many people come to them with, "I'm depressed. I have anxiety. I've got OCD. I've got this going on. What do I do. I want help from God. And you're gonna be the person that's gonna do that. But I'm also going to unload every other problem that I have because you can handle that, right." And so a lot of them come in unprepared or get burned out because they don't have the opportunity to really experience that situation that amount of trust that that person has and allowing them to be vulnerable and to so affirm their identity</i>
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Other issues that cause tension with the ideal or identity juxtaposition are when the ideals are imposed as the singular method for identity performance at both the individual and collective levels. Melanie referred to these ideals, as "should." When "should's" are imposed as the preferred method of identifying or through performances they begin to raise ethical concerns encompassing evaluation and judgment as identities and expectations meet rather than an openness to the affirmation of differences, awareness of the larger narrative at play, and the possibility of transformation. The following quotes are examples of this intersections:

2.4 - Expectations

Jayson	<i>When I was on internship I was repeatedly told like, "Hey just keep your mouth shut right now and stay out of trouble until you can get involved and be a part of the organization." But if I had done that then I would have allowed myself to be conformed to their standards. And I refused to stop speaking up when I felt that there were injustices presented in front of me and that I still continued to. Because I think that was just the institutional way of saying, "just play good until you can become just like us. You'll understand this all later after you become just like us."</i>
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2.4 - Expectations

<p>Leila</p>	<p><i>So in my preaching I kind of invite people into the story into the narrative of the Bible story. But I usually tell the story truly from my perspective. What are my questions what is happening here. Why is Jesus saying this why are people doing that. Well I walk into the story when I tell the story from the inside... My theological education did not have any storytelling classes beyond homiletics. Which was the preaching class and my professors were very much manuscript professors and the expectation was for us to be manuscript preachers. And I learned to be that and I became dependent on the manuscript when I come from a tradition that never even used bullet points. We just studied read, prayed and showed up. That was the method. I can say now that I am a lot more fearful to go off the cuff and to just go because I was trained to be a manuscript preacher. So now, it depends on the text, if I'm even willing to engage without a manuscript.</i></p>
<p>Micah</p>	<p><i>I don't want my identity as pastor to be the person who just gets up and tells you what to do on Sunday mornings. I want my identity as pastor to be sharing vulnerably and inviting others to be vulnerable... Going through the candidacy process there was a time when I had to make a decision of whether or not I was going to disclose my problem as often as I did as I was going through that process. My intuition, my gut said I have to. I have to share this. I had several people, higher ups in the church, people who are gay and people who you could describe as heavily marginalized in the church, say, "absolutely not. Do not disclose your alcoholism because they will be gunning for you as soon as you do." I ignored them. There were very few people that told me to be honest. But that's what I was. I knew I needed to be and in doing so, I can't speak for everyone, but my candidacy committee was absolutely blown away by my transparency.</i></p>
<p>Quinn</p>	<p><i>But the biggest issue that I see in all of them is God isn't the center. Us as humans being, flawed, sinful creatures. We tend to think about ourselves and the immediate response instead of God's everlasting response. And so so many of these organizations, these buildings these places, get worshipped over God and that's where a lot of the fighting comes from, that's where the ideals come from, that's where the lack of identity comes from as they identify as whatever they think is right. Instead of identifying as God's chosen people or the loved one's that God brought into the world specifically to have an identity that is individual and separate and not the same as that megachurch or not exactly as you were when you grew up so. The ideal and the identity I feel like are opposing forces.</i></p>

2.4 - Expectations

Tommy	<i>I thought it would be good to just kind of see where my sense of calling began. And so I think what's important for me is that I was wrestling early on with what will it mean for me to answer this calling and what's it going to look like. And I think I, as probably most people, felt like well, the obvious answer is that I'm gonna be a pastor someday. And I think that the institutions I had been a part of and the education that I had experienced up until then had created that sense in me that well that is the answer. But I don't think I ever felt fully at rest with that.</i>
Tommy	<i>What are you going to do and how is that going to be using your education. How is that going to be doing something with your master's degree. And I think I I had to continue to dig, in to use the farming term, to dig in to my identity as a disciple to know that part and parcel to being a disciple often entails paths of resistance and decisions that will inevitably bring about criticism and perhaps persecution and I felt that like.</i>

There seems to be an underlying assumption that there is a model individuals and groups are supposed to fill. In a sense, it is as if the juxtaposition of ideals and identity rests in the notion of whether or not identities can be affirmed if they don't conform to the status quo or perceived expectations. For the research participants, this seems to be the opportunity of linking their narrative to the biblical narrative. By defining themselves as Children of God, Disciples, or Follows of Christ, it is as if they are permitting themselves to reject efforts of conformity. Instead, each interview participant articulated an opportunity to break the mold, or stereotypical boxes of what one is supposed to be or should be, in order to become what one feels is an authentic representation of their reality positioned within a framework congruent with the Biblical narrative and historical narrative of the Lutheran faith tradition.

2.5 - Faithful Narrative

John	<i>Love in relation. [Jesus] was relational and loving and not condemning. He accepted the hypocrites.</i>
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2.5 - Faithful Narrative

John	<i>Short of our theology. What would differentiate us from anybody else in a positive way. I mean I think we have a very positive theology.</i>
John	<i>I see actual tangible things happen, the Holy Spirit's working through some of these things in ways we can't explain short of God at work that builds momentum that builds peoples buy in...talking about the stories and talking about what's going on and saying here's how God's at work and think about joining us in that in that in that journey.</i>
John	<i>Well again if you go to you know 1 Corinthians 12. Well it's like the Body of Christ. Right. And so God has given us all these different parts. Right. And I think leaders are specifically called out. Right. We were just in Bible study this morning with this mens group I get with on Friday's talking about Peter at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked him, "Who do you say I am," and he says, "Christ son of the Living God. And on you I will build my church." Right. There was the first leader that was set out and leadership was important.</i>
Katie	<i>Grace. We are not God. We are imperfect and the goal should never perfection. Instead we should see our places of brokenness as places where there is room for improvement, opportunity and creativity.</i>
Kim	<i>God's love is for me is an experience that keeps unfolding and building.</i>
Kim	<i>God is always coming to us first. Everything that I know to be true about God or that I have experienced in my relationship with God is because somehow God initiated it.</i>
Leila	<i>If I'm honest I strive consistently that my own my identity be first and foremost in Christ because of my, and from the moment of my baptism right, that I belonged to Christ and therefore I am a follower of Jesus. And what does that mean. Who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow this Jesus beyond that as the umbrella of who I am?</i>
Leila	<i>So when these two traditions meet inside me I'm like oh, so I know what daily discipleship looks like.... I know what it is to pray I know what it is to have a time of intimacy with Christ and I know what it means to be free in my spirit and in my discipleship in how to respond with gratitude and not from a place of fear.</i>
Melanie	<i>My identity is as a child of God. So like at the core there is nothing else that can change that. And sometimes I forget that. And sometimes I think that identity is in a particular job or in activity or some kind of efficiency or productivity or thing that I could do. But at its core my identity is as a child of God.</i>
Melanie	<i>At my heart I feel like we have been called to reformation like okay we don't just walk away [because] the gifts we have to bring to the world are worth bringing.</i>

2.5 - Faithful Narrative

<p>Tommy</p>	<p><i>...We would be seeking to create a community of discipleship with those that were here working on the farm that were buying into the vision of why it's important to be practicing regenerative agriculture for our world and that in and of itself is a way of nurturing and growing as people of faith because working with God's life and creation will inevitably deepen our relationship with God and with one another.</i></p>
<p>Tommy</p>	<p><i>Yeah that made a lot of sense to me too and helped confirm that this was where my calling was leading that it wasn't normal or considered accepted and hat's very much the character of Jesus. His whole mission was always and in almost every way I think challenging and resisting the dominant forces of culture and empire and religion that existed in his day. And so yeah I think I should say too that as much as the ecological climate change, like food system stuff was deeply formative to how I was shaping my identity and calling and reading, the Bible as a story of resistance to empire was perhaps theologically maybe the most exciting and for me I would say like starting to understand how the narrative of God and faith throughout the Bible so much dealt with this identity of God's people in relation to empire. That was perhaps what put the whole puzzle of my faith and understanding of God together and was the final piece that I felt brought so much into harmony. I saw I was really beginning and had for a long time, been understanding Jesus more and more as one who was the prophet in the wilderness outside of the powers that be and calling forth prophetically an alternative and embodying a new way in a way that was very much resistant to the often identified powers of culture and empire that have forever I think dominated human civilization. If I didn't say something about that I would be missing a big part of my identity. Theologically and as a person of faith and I think that very much also informs why I'm here on this farm and how I am a farmer because of the way that we're trying to grow food and care for this land is very much resistant to the dominant accepted way of agriculture.</i></p>

The interviewees raised key aspects of identity construction within this community by relating the institutional beliefs to their own identity. This link influenced how interviewees articulated aspects of their identity and even structured HOW they approached the conversation concerning identity. They were open, vulnerable, and honest as they articulated pieces of thier identity. In addition to the easy to articulate links captured by this particular analysis, there also

exists inconspicuous, or unconscious, links as well. Many of those go unnamed due to the nature of their origin however, the liturgical season of Lent, which was an over arching thread to the field research, is another narrative of the interviewee's identity stories.

Field Research

In addition to interviews, I also completed research in the field. My field research consisted of gathering publicly assessable information from congregations located within the Delaware-Maryland Synod. I paid particular attention to the preaching moment²⁰² to see what story was being shared by the pastor to the congregations. In other words, I was interested in the language and narrative used to describe the collective identity, or the WHY. The proclamations that were offered consisted of not only identifying who we are, but also consisted of identifying WHO God is, and HOW God is at work in the world.

These narratives were rooted in the liturgical season of Lent which began on Ash Wednesday with the imposition of ashes. As the sign of the cross was marked on each individuals forehead, it served as a reminder of their individual and collective identity in Christ, and also of their mortality. During this liturgical season, mortality is not something to be feared. Instead, it is something to be embraced because of the transformational power of the cross narrated in Jesus' death and resurrection. As a sign of hope, the cross reminds those facing it, that "God is not in the punishment business" but is in the "forgiveness business."²⁰³ The cross tells the truth of what God is able to do with death as the story ends with an overturned tomb

²⁰² Micah, CCG - Interview - MK, personal, March 28, 2019.

²⁰³ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Fallston: Holy Communion Lutheran Church, March 24, 2019).

stone and overturned expectations.²⁰⁴ Rather than embracing death as the end, the narrative affirms God's creativity through death, dust, and change.²⁰⁵ The dust then is not only a reminder of Lenten mortality transformed to hope, it is also a reminder of one's origins in the garden when God breathed life into the dust of the earth²⁰⁶ and invites individuals to listen for the voice of God and to "reawaken to the morals" of their true identity.²⁰⁷ The narrative of the transformational creativity of the cross and of the open tomb serves as a reminder that when individuals pay attention to the narrative journey, to, on, and after the cross they open themselves up to God and God's possibility of resurrection, new life, and transformation.²⁰⁸

Question 3: How has your calling shaped your understanding of your identity?²⁰⁹

This third of questions came from my desire to better understand the distinction between call and identity. Since identity can be constructed, in part, through the roles individuals hold, it was important to investigate the ways those roles affect identity. As I mentioned above, one of the more personal realizations I came to early in this research was my own difficulty in constructing identity outside narratives of the institution, and so this question was deeply

²⁰⁴ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: St. Luke's Lutheran Church, April 21, 2019).

²⁰⁵ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: New Light Lutheran Church, March 6, 2019).

²⁰⁶ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. Genesis 2-7

²⁰⁷ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Ellicott City: Beloved Community, March 16, 2019).

²⁰⁸ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: St. Luke's Lutheran Church, April 21, 2019).; Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Fallston: Holy Communion Lutheran Church, March 24, 2019).; Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Ellicott City: Beloved Community, March 16, 2019).

²⁰⁹ Sub questions included: How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of identity? What role did Theological Education play in this formation? Was it helpful? Was anything missing?

personal to me. I wanted to see how others articulated their understating of identity in relation to the roles they hold in the institution. This is also the place where I invited research participants to reflect on Theological Education and the external influence it had in supporting their identity formation as well as the internal arrangement that took place in claiming, producing, and performing the learnings and meanings explored during Theological Education. Not all of the interview participants have first-hand experience with Theological Education because they have either chosen not to attend seminary or have chosen not to perform their identity through the role of rostered ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or the United Methodist Church. That being said, I did not renounce the perspectives shared by those interviewees because I believe their etic perspective of Theological Education is equitably valued especially because of the relationships those individuals have to and with rostered leaders in the institution and with the institutions of Lutheran Theological Education in general.

Before I offer the themes and narratives that emerged from this question, it is important to provide a clear explanation of the term, "call," and how it is used in the Lutheran faith tradition. The following excerpt, "Luther on Vocation," comes from the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* and was written by Marc Kolded:

The popular view of Martin Luther's teaching about Christian vocation is that it has to do with one's occupation. That is, when one is "called" to follow Christ one's occupation becomes the "calling" in which one serves God. This is not a completely wrong interpretation of Luther [however]...it is one-sided and incomplete...[instead] 'vocation' refers to more than mere dedicated service in one's occupation. It refers above all to the whole theater of personal, communal, and historical relationships in which one lives. The loss of Luther's meaning may be due in part to Luther's interpreters, who frequently consider vocation in Luther's theology as a subtopic under the "Orders of Creation." Here the standard treatment is to see life in this world as life under natural law, linked to various institutions in society, in which the Christian is understood to be called to service in a particular "station" or "office" or duty. In terms of activity there is said to be nothing

which distinguishes the Christian's involvement in an office from that of a non-Christian. Again, this is not a completely wrong interpretation of Luther as much as an incomplete and finally misleading one. And in its insistence that one's calling is related to life in the world it retains a very important part of Luther's teaching, especially since Luther developed his understanding of vocation in opposition to the medieval Roman Catholic view... Given the difficulty of constructing a doctrine of creation which is persuasive in our secular age, it is easy to see why a view of vocation dependent on a sense of God's ongoing creative involvement in the dynamics of history would go into eclipse. If the world is assumed to be basically godless, then the best one could do with vocation would be to consider it as a way of working for the good of others. That is no small gain, for it is considerably better than looking at life simply in terms of autonomous humans pursuing their own personal careers with no obligations beyond their own families. Yet it hardly gets at the much more comprehensive understanding which Luther has of vocation. His view is grounded in a richer view of God's creative work and the expression of God's law as permeating creation... The call to follow Christ leads not to any religious vocation removed from daily life, but instead it transforms the attitude and understanding one has of the situation in which one already is... The call comes from Christ, but it locates one in a calling in the creation doing works for one's neighbor... "vocation" [therefore] refers not only to one's occupation but to all one's relationships, situations, contexts, and involvements (including, of course, one's occupation, if one is employed). It is true that Luther often speaks about specific occupations, but the purpose in doing so is not to restrict vocation to occupation but to affirm that even the most mundane stations are places in which Christians ought to live out their faith; [in service to other people]... The gospel invites us to see our vocation as a concrete way of expressing our faith - not as a limitation on love but as a channel for it.²¹⁰

With Kolden's description in mind, I want to clarify a distinction that I learned through these interviews. Rather than asking about the relationship between call and identity, I should have been asking about the relationship between the trifold of call, vocation, and identity. Part of my learnings and understanding of my own identity is how I've too often confused call with vocation, and furthermore inextricably linked my personal identity to my call and vocation. It wasn't until I was pushed by my thesis committee chair to think about that "chicken and egg" scenario and my reception of Katie's challenge, "love the institution or Jesus," that I began to

²¹⁰ Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, October 1, 2001, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015>.

work through the process of "extracting"²¹¹ my sense of self and being from how I show up in the world through a specific call to a moment, time, place, setting, et cetera. I am just at the beginning of this learning and offer the themes and narrative responses in this section as an opportunity for institutional reflection surrounding the unintended consequences associated with too closely aligning call and vocation to identity through both Biblical narrative and role fulfillment within the institution.

It is important to remember that I didn't have, or know, this distinction at the time of the interviews, so the responses offered here reference the relationship between identity and call only. As such, some interviewees articulated the difference as an action from God directly into their lives:

3.1 - Call	
Alex	<i>My call is not only from God but it's also been affirmed and taught and raised up by other people.</i>
Jayson	<i>So I think that as Christians, to oversimplify it, we are called by God to be children of God. As one of our primary if not the primary vocation of our lives. I think our identity as Christians has less to do with with God and more with culture and society. What are the expectations that are put upon us or we expect from ourselves when we put on the title Christian.</i>
John	<i>And I think God calls us for a certain time and a certain place for a purpose.</i>
Katie	<i>I don't want to get too semantic but the word call is really interesting and we are ultimately and foundationally called in baptism to be a child of God. Full stop period. That's our call like that is who we are called [and] what we are called. That is our name. That is our identity. And yet it's easy to spout off those words and know that from my education, my background and whatever. It's a totally different thing to wrestle with what that means as call to a place a job a career a vocation.</i>

²¹¹ Melanie, CCG - Interview - MG, personal, March 29, 2019.

3.1 - Call	
Kim	<i>Our vocational calls are rooted in our baptism. And they're nurtured and fed and challenged by Eucharist and the table.</i>
Leila	<i>God calls those that have eyes to see, and those that have ears to hear.</i>
Melanie	<i>But at its core my identity is as a child of God and my call flows out of that identity and it might change but my identity won't change. And I might have more than one call at the same time. I have a call to be a mom. Called to be a sister and a daughter...</i>

Still some articulation of the difference was done by relating call to an occupation, and even to the rostering system:

3.2 - Call; Occupation	
John	<i>I'm called as any rostered reader to the role I have.</i>
Katie	<i>My understanding of the relationship between call and identity evolved because it had too. I had to break beyond the ideal of rostered ministry and music and church work because those setting were not where I was serving best and because I know that grace can fill up any space I'm in, but they're still so intertwined. What I am doing is okay, and is enough and what the church, or camp, or campus ministries, are also doing is right. All of that is serving God's purpose.</i>
Kim	<i>When I entered the whole process I began at Word and Service because that felt authentic and comfortable right. That the right place. I knew that there was that piece of me that wanted to be in service to people and to the good news of God's love. I couldn't have said it that way then but. And while I was in the theological formation part of that I wrestled mightily and had many conversations with people because I was aware then that I don't know... Or to continue with word and service would limit how I was able to live out my call. Right. And yet also at the same time really not having a sense of being able to find my identity in the role of pastor of Word and Sacrament as I understood it. So what happened then was when I was consecrated and had a call in a congregation that was good. It was in that context of living out my Word and Service call in a congregation that space was created and I could see myself as a pastor. And then I had an unexpected, unanticipated, wasn't an intellectual thought process but a very visceral bodily felt experience of, "Oh my gosh. It turns out I am called the sacraments." And so then I had to spend some time exploring. Once that notion caught me then I had to figure out how my how I fit in to that sense of being in the world.</i>

3.2 - Call; Occupation	
Kim	<i>My job as a pastor and my call as a pastor are intertwined. The security of one gives me freedom for more.</i>
Leila	<i>But in what I do, I want to invite their curiosity. Like, "Yeah. Why don't I do this? Why why haven't I had this relationship?" I mean it happens all the time that I share my story right. I'm really animated about faith and people are just, "I don't. I want that. I want to feel what you feel but it just doesn't, it's not natural to me. I've never seen it before." I don't know right so then again I get to hear their story right and I invite people into those particular experiences.</i>
Melanie	<i>Sometimes I think that identity is in a particular job or in activity or some kind of efficiency or productivity or thing that I could do.... While my call flows out of my identity what I'm called to do at any given time is not what defines me... My call is with people. And so I have been involved to really deeply push forward to do that in a variety of different ways over the years and I will do that after I'm not being paid anymore.</i>
Tommy	<i>So my understanding of my calling began with a very powerful like monumental experience. I don't know if I share that with you before but when I was in college I basically was asked to join this leadership team for a small group of faith sharing, Bible study kind of thing. And when the first topic I was given to speak on was the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted," I just felt God heavily put it on my heart that I was going to be needing to speak about the loss of my mother as a child and how that was. So it was the first time that I actually sat down and began this reflection upon that life changing experience of losing my mother at age 12 and how I came to know God and began this journey of faith really from out of that pain and that suffering. And although I'd share that story before with people I'd never done it in a setting like this where I actually was going to create a message and a lesson out of that. And so that experience, long story short, with a lot of really amazing things that God did through other people in response to that, was kind of where I felt my my sense of calling began when I could I responded to that by saying, "yes God, I want to serve you with my life and whatever that means. I trust that you're going to show me that." And so my initial decision in response to that calling was to switch my major to theology and continue to deepen my experience in the campus ministry there and all the different things that that involved.</i>

What I gather from these two thematic expressions is that God is directly involved in both identity formation and the articulation of call, and that call in this particular faith tradition is

most closely linked to occupation. The tension arises in the institutional use of the term "call." By expressing call as one who is "a called and ordained minister," the term takes on new meaning and too closely links calling to the public or private authority of those in rostered ministry instead of those comprising the priesthood. Rather than an act of curiosity and of becoming, it turns calling into something that can be achieved through role status, when instead calling can be as flexible or as complex as identity. Similarly to the tension expressed by Kolden, when confusion arises²¹² in trying to authentically understand Luther's reality presented in the term vocation, the expression of church is limited.²¹³ When the institution of the church forgets that it is first and foremost the people, or complex human systems²¹⁴ and not a building,²¹⁵ the method of identifying and performing gifts in relation to the community of faith is too closely linked to the dualistic rostering system and the only language to capture this rests in a complicated, rather than complex question like "when are you going to seminary."²¹⁶

The second focal point of this question was the influence Theological Education had in forming identity. This question was specifically included to understand the link Theological Education has in supporting identity construction of the individuals passing through seminary, or the more complex ways their sense of self, purpose and WHY influences those with whom they interact as congregations, committees, and institutions. I asked interviewees to reflect on their

²¹² Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Translated from the Original Languages, with Analyses and an Exhaustive Index* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911). 61-67.

²¹³ Melanie, CCG - Interview - MG, personal, March 29, 2019.

²¹⁴ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

²¹⁵ Quinn, CCG - Interview - QS, personal, April 4, 2019.

²¹⁶ Melanie, CCG - Interview - MG, personal, March 29, 2019.

time in seminary, specifically in terms of its helpfulness in forming them as a leader. The reflections they offered fell into three main categories: Word, accessibility, preparedness, and formation.

When it came to reflecting on the word, specifically through preaching, interview participants offered these reflections:

3.3 - Word	
Kim	<i>I'm very aware of looking at the Gospel not as an intellectual pursuit but looking at scripture to say what does this mean for the living of life today... So...we do worship lab because it's just an opportunity to explore a different way of being together of learning and being in the presence of God... I mean we still we do liturgy right. We get there we do the word we do meal we do sending... We do it all. We just chuck the sermon and we replace one person in the front preaching with the whole body together preaching to one another through what we're doing in our activity.</i>
Leila	<i>I get why our folks are not comfortable articulating their faith. Well it makes perfect sense if you're only talking about your faith for an hour a week and you're only listening to a 12 minute sermon on Sunday. Any well will go dry with that right...</i>
Micah	<i>We're told in seminary [that the] preaching moment is the pinnacle moment. You only have so many minutes before you lose people's attention. You only have 30 seconds to capture them before they'll lose interest. You only have so much amount of time before. Your words mean nothing to [them]. We were taught to craft a sermon that would capture attention and ensure people heard the grace of God. That's what we're taught. Not by all professors but primarily that's what we're taught. We have only so much time to capture their attention. And I have to tell them that they're loved by God at some point. So the misconception I believe is actually all the way back at the preaching moment is the pinnacle of our faith. I think what I have learned in just a year and a half of being out of seminary is that the preaching moment is almost a throwaway moment of my week. I craft my sermon I take a lot of time because I do post it on Facebook and I want to make sure that those who are outside of my congregation are also hearing a word that's important but the most important work that I do has to be outside of Sunday mornings... So the I mean the biggest misconception I think was taught in seminary is that we're still told that worship is the most important thing to do and of course it's important of course worship and God is important of course gathering together as community is important. But it is not the culmination of our theology the culmination of our theology is what we are compelled to do once we have experienced that grace of God which is in service to our neighbor.</i>

3.3 - Word**Quinn**

Other pastors in the area as well have really taken to preaching specifically on the fact that you need to get your head out of your butt and realize that you are loved. You need to know this. And so it's not necessarily for the pastoral aspect or the institutional aspect it's more so for the aspect of the disconnection between the people in the congregation everybody has their own separate ideas and again like I said with being a youth director every parent wanted me to do things differently. Every parent said okay he doesn't want to go do this but he does want to do this you better make sure this happens and they weren't willing to listen to each other and work together. And so that to me is the biggest kind of thing with this ideal and this identity and not being affirmed is they're not affirming each other. The church is a place where you come you sit in the same pew every Sunday you sing the same songs you say the same things like most people have the services memorized and so to me I feel like that's where more of the issue comes from. As our pastors aren't being given the opportunity theologically to branch out the liturgy and branch out of the specific, "this is how we do it," to create pathways in which the community can better support itself.

What I gather from these reflections on the Word is that while "scripture is the cradle that holds Christ,"²¹⁷ sermons are not the only time to preach. Instead, preaching can be done through service, and through HOW one performs their identity. This is specifically notable because sermons are only a moment within the cooperate gathering and there is too much reverence for "the way it used to be done."²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," in *LW* 35:236, 1523.

²¹⁸ Quinn, CCG - Interview - QS, personal, April 4, 2019.

When it came to accessibility interview participants had these things to say:

3.4 - Accessibility	
Alex	<i>Ideally this is how I am intending to do it. By first understanding [and] loving individuals that I'm trying to teach and to spend time focused on our relationship because learning, there's always trust in learning. If we don't trust the people who are teaching then we're not open to learning from them. So the more trust that we have with individuals and trust comes through love through us loving others. So my first goal is to really love them and then the second goal is to open their eyes in a way. My main source of doing that and the way in which I was taught that is through the gospel.</i>
Alex	<i>The barrier of entry seems so high for Theological Education and it doesn't need to be. It doesn't. People can understand the atonement theory you know if they understand what the word atonement means. And so there's just like defining a few terms and then you can understand what's happening in these places. So it's my cue for everybody to go to seminary. Everybody should. It should be free it should be for everyone [and it should] be taught at the church.</i>
John	<i>There was a very implicit directive that God has gifted this these priests or these these pastors with skills that the common person doesn't have right. And as a result they will come and they will tell you what you need to know about your faith and they will educate you. But only they have the knowledge right. And then you know with the enlightenment then the common person who read the Bible and goes you know I don't see that in here. Where did God say you are the guys that have all the mark on all this. Why don't we have a say in this. And I think some of that still exists. Why else would we send our pastor to a four year seminary. And I look at the model like with Wesley and they initially didn't have enough pastors so they would roam around. They would maybe show up at your place once or twice a year. And they said once they started to put pastors in every church is when attendance declined because you've kind of outsource your faith work or outsource your church work to a professional instead of the churches.</i>

3.4 - Accessibility

<p>Katie</p>	<p><i>Why does that have to be somewhere else far away. Why do we have to uproot my life and my work and my family and my whoever's to go there. That's not the way it should be happening anymore and it really isn't the way it should have been happening for decades as we've shifted culture and technology. These things are available. And yet I think [what] I see as an institution wrestling with the difference between this is how it's always been done so just buy in and give it up. Open your door restrict your call just trust Holy Spirit. Verse like this idea [that] by opening it up to the masses will somehow...belittle the institution as a whole to release that to the masses. And that's so incredibly frustrating as Lutherans who translated the Bible and hymns into the common language like the German language and [for] accessibility and regular humans. What are we doing with our education and really church in general to put it over here somewhere far away at this particular time and you have to come to it. That's not how Jesus works. That's not how our theology is lived out every day in our vocations and every moment. So why is our education not following our own theological values.</i></p>
<p>Melanie</p>	<p><i>There have been times where I have sort of yearned for gosh, I wish I could take like just a concentrated subset of classes that could be, I don't know...a certificate. Call it a million things but where I'm in kind of a specific ministry context. It's not real common. But is about empowering God's people to do God's work... I would love to take some homiletics classes I would love to take something like. No. There's probably a set of classes that would give me additional tools to do what I'm doing without frankly the time and expense and additional things that would not necessarily be helpful in my context because I don't think I am being called into a congregational context I think I'm in the right spot. But there are things that I would love to be able to take.</i></p>

Katie's statement, "What are we doing with our education and really church in general to put it over here somewhere far away at this particular time and you have to come to it. That's not how Jesus works," captures the movement within the system nicely. The way the ELCA is currently structured, it does seem that the burden of belonging is on individuals. Yes, there is an open door, an invitation, and a place for others²¹⁹ within the systems. However, it is as if the

²¹⁹ "About," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019, <https://www.elca.org/>.

institution has lost its ability to translate the practices of accompaniment in its performances of identity.

The notion that the institutional agreements of WHY, HOW, and WHAT should be easily accessible is not new. It is language that Luther articulated as critical to our being. Luther said, that "God's mighty word...belongs to all people and therefore, sets 'Ministers of the Word' among the people"²²⁰ not apart from the people. Why is it then that the ELCA "built a hierarchy not based on Word, but on administering the Sacraments?"²²¹ If "everyone is a preacher"²²² then Theological Education is a means to more deeply develop an understanding of the particular lens through which Lutheran's understand scripture, and more specifically Christ who is held within the cradle of scripture²²³ and as the word made flesh.²²⁴ It is imperative that the word, and the elements symbolizing the word -- water, bread, wine -- be accessible.

It seems it is no longer enough to ask others to "uproot their lives,"²²⁵ in order to reach Jesus. Instead, the collective identity, the institution of The Church, should be accessible "by the Word of God, the promise of the gospel, given through proclamation and sacrament"²²⁶ by coming alongside communities in a way that is transformative and encourages identity affirmation and creates possibility for a contextual shift from the profane to the sacred.

²²⁰ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 9.

²²¹ Amsalu Tadesse Geleta to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, May 6, 2019.

²²² Amsalu Tadesse Geleta to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, May 6, 2019.

²²³ Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," in *LW* 35:236, 1523.

²²⁴ *The People's Bible* (Fortress Press, 2009), p. John 1.

²²⁵ Katie, CCG - Interview - KB, personal, April 2, 2019.

²²⁶ Cheryl M. Peterson, "Martin Luther on the Church and Its Ministry," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.362>. 7.

When it came to preparedness and formation interviews shared these stories:

3.5 - Preparedness and Formation

Jayson

I'm going to add a little bit of context as I just passed my EMT national industry competencies process on Monday [and put] survivability versus possibility in a medical context. So as an EMT I arrive on scene to a motor vehicle accident with a victim who's survivability is questionable. Without medical intervention they will not survive and that is clear. But as an EMT my only concern at that point is to make sure that they stay physically alive... For their blood to profuse throughout their body and so they get enough oxygen through their blood to keep their body physically alive. For me survivability is an emergency situation. What can we do right now just to make sure that this does not die. And for me that possibility comes, my wife is in medical school and she gets to sit down with people and develop whole life care plans and looking at stuff long term and saying that there is a variety of options because they're not concerned necessarily with that person just bleeding out. But there's a variety of directions to go. So for me survivability is looking at the here and now. And institutionally what I hear is is we're hemorrhaging blood at an unsustainable rate. And so we have to stop that hemorrhage and that's what people are focused on seemingly in a lot of my conversations. But instead of being an EMT who always see blood and needs to stop that blood. I think we need to look more like a surgeon or a physician. We get to sit down hopefully in a non-emergency situation and say look we can go in this direction, this direction, this direction, in this direction if we go in there's associated risks. You might not survive you might physically die. If you do survive it the outcome is going to be the best or we can do just comfort measures. We can put you in hospice which will keep you alive for a little bit longer but what that life looks like is just prolonging the inevitable death process. Is that a fair analogy.

3.5 - Preparedness and Formation

<p>Jayson</p>	<p><i>I think I was better prepared for my training with the Navy as a naval officer. And through my training as a naval officer and as a Navy chaplain candidate I've been coached and I've been trained and indoctrinated, in fact they use that term, to recognize that yes you will have these people who are going to make your life difficult. But as a leader in your court you can't just say that that's no longer your problem. Their problems become your problems. And all of a sudden when when their problems become my problems I'm called into relationship with those people. And I'm called not to look at them as just troublemakers but as people who are thinking differently than I am. People that I can learn from. And so that way I'm not just the only purveyor of information but it's a two way street. We're sharing ideas we're sharing information and through that relationship that we've been called into a new possibility might arise that neither one of us had ever thought of or ever occurred to us. That was my training as a Navy chaplain.</i></p>
<p>John</p>	<p><i>I asked what's our leadership ... or curriculum. And I got like basically hand puppets that we do a little thing on budget and we do some of management. And then the leadership there was just nothing. You know it's almost laughable... We spent all this time on learning Greek. Why don't we spend that time learning how to be leaders.</i></p>
<p>John</p>	<p><i>I get frustrated when I especially go to like our church wide functions like the vice president meetings and then when we're in there with the bishops and I see it's small thinking. I see... not modern leadership approaches I see you know kind of shotgun approaches [and] things that really are not hitting the true heart of what we need to be doing.</i></p>
<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>Both as a deacon and as a pastor has been very very deeply shaped by my first vocations. As a spouse and a parent. I was never going to be a 20 something who went to seminary and knew that that's what I was called to do. I had no concept of that. I had to be a spouse and a parent first.</i></p>
<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>I think my theology is really much more out of my lived experience. Informed by learned understanding rather than beginning at learned understanding and becoming lived. Yeah. And so I guess I've always had this notion that a good Lutheran is, you know, we're so systematic about our theology. And so I should be able to explain all of you know, first use of law, second; I don't do that very well. And yet what I really want to talk about is how is my life changed by knowing that God's love is the source of all I am and that's for other people too.</i></p>

3.5 - Preparedness and Formation

<p>Leila</p>	<p><i>I have often thought that part of field education which is 10 hours a week should not be in Lutheran settings. But should be with denominations that are charismatic and alive. And who have worship opportunities beyond Sunday morning. [So] that our students can envision what we mean by church family because we're together all the time. Right. Conservative fundamentalists, charismatic communities are often together more than Sunday morning and they build a bond where because they're so united the spirit happens in very interesting ways that allow for vulnerability and no shame and no guilt. It's just like we're here. We're gonna face plant and just pray and cry and be present right. So I wish that there was an element of our theological education especially in Lutheran settings for both. From pastors that requires them to to experience a denomination other than their own. And it can't be the internship but it can definitely be the field site.</i></p>
<p>Micah</p>	<p><i>A huge part of my ministry was formed by my recovery journey and it is also one of the most important things that I have to keep up with and maintain.</i></p>

What these narratives articulate is a deep respect for the formation that occurred outside of institutional Theological Education. It emphasizes the nature of narrative construction and the interconnectedness, or web,²²⁷ of all things. What these narratives suggest is that there may be a gap in Theological Education, that while Theological Education is great at teaching WHY it is not as influential in teaching HOW. This learning creates an opportunity to see the reflexivity between factors influencing the identity formation of the institutional leaders. Rather than shying away from unique experiences, it may be helpful to broaden the scope of learning and use Theological Education as a tag, or method to generate, or re-generate, meaning,²²⁸ thus allowing

²²⁷ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

²²⁸ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

the WHAT to become without controlling the product toward some self-serving²²⁹ interpretation of the institutional systems, with specific respect to the Rostering System.

The final category of reflections concerning the relationship between call and identity reflects the ambiguity of ministry. What was apparent was the emphasis that ministry can happen outside of the institutional structure, especially the structure of the Rostering System. In other words, interviewees longed for an articulation of ministry that does not currently exist or is not currently validated as ministry under the current expression of institutional order. The desire for these intentional spaces can create opportunity for non-typical ministries to emerge, leaving the collective with a choice between empowerment and control.²³⁰ By re-negotiating the agreements²³¹ the collective can re-define ministry and the validity of ministry by narrating God's work in the world, for the life of the world, through the hands and feet²³² of the collective as an extension of one's identity rather than through the buildings, structures, or limited role performances associated with a rostered call.

²²⁹ Micah, CCG - Interview - MK, personal, March 28, 2019.

²³⁰ Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., "The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-Organization," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): pp. 341-356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.004>.

²³¹ "Resource Zine," *Resource Zine* (AORTA: anti-oppression resource and training alliance, 2014).

²³² "Home," ELCA.org, accessed May 10, 2019, <http://www.elca.org/>.

3.6 - Ambiguity of Ministry

<p>Katie</p>	<p><i>What we talk about with some of our clients is really thinking about these big heady thoughts and hat's going on and the changes they're trying to make in speech therapy and then this idea of bringing them back to Earth and grounding them in what is that going to look like when you do that tomorrow, when you open your mouth and talk to this person. And I think about call and identity sort of in that way. And it's this both heady deep intrinsic identity values conversation up here. And it's also like boots on the ground right here, in this moment, and I think one doesn't exist without the other. I think it's the two feet of justice and the individual actions. I think that my pursuing this particular field, in this job, and the mix of really technical skills and also like relational counseling, supporting people through the process of making a change, really expresses that same thing that I have been learning and studying and living in this academic world. And through all that I have been doing and living that practice of bringing myself down and grounding again in, what does this look like when a real human being who is seeking these services questions, what does this look like when a real human being starts to think about Jesus and some of the theologies you can pull out of that meeting and know about Jesus. You want to talk about falling in love with Jesus I think still to this day [of the moment] when I really deeply understood that God is too abstract and too much and too big and too beyond anything that humans can conceive of. So we have Jesus that we could touch and feel and understand in these human terms. Like that kind of expression of, "I know exactly what you people need and it's something that you can wrap your head around- this form." Yeah I think it's the way that I will always understand and sort of conceptualize Jesus as God in human form.</i></p>
<p>Katie</p>	<p><i>I was in a ministry setting at camp that pushed back really hard against [the rostering system] and really said we are Lutheran and ministry is what every one of us was called to do in every setting and we refused to acknowledge that ministry is only a thing that happens in a church building in a set time on a Sunday morning et cetera.. And I see so much grace in that because it's so hard to fight that limited, really warped notion, of who where and when ministry can be done or happen more often.</i></p>

3.6 - Ambiguity of Ministry

<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>Jim really wrestles with the limits that he has in recognizing the roster status of people in different contexts and so wanting to have more flexibility in his role in saying this person is clearly formed and ready and [they] have been ordained or consecrated and their call, or their opportunity, for living out their vocational identity is not within what we would normally say is a call whether it's in the congregation or another setting. And so what, that person just isn't recognized as a pastor or a deacon in our system. Right. So you're working in an insurance company because that's what's right or that's your previous identity and it's the right thing for you to be doing. We as a church aren't going to say, "hey why don't you go ahead and be the chaplain while you're there." I'd like, I don't, I don't quite. It'd be lovely if we had a system that allowed for recognizing people living out their call as a pastor or a deacon in another context and actually naming that. Rather than saying, "no, in these walls or in this expression that's the only place you can be a pastor or deacon."</i></p>
<p>Melanie</p>	<p><i>But I have often felt like, Gosh I don't feel like I'm being called to a full ordination track. I mean I'm not even really sure what I'm being called to because people are like you should be a Deacon and you can do the job you have now. I'm like so, okay but why would I do it...but where [I am is] in kind of a specific ministry. It's not real common but is about empowering God's people to do God's work.</i></p>
<p>Micah</p>	<p><i>The pinnacle of my role should not be 8 to 15 minutes in a pulpit in which I tell people what they're supposed to hear from an ancient text that they have no context for. It is an important moment. It can be a very powerful moment. I have had many people tell me how much they appreciate those moments. But they're not going to truly understand the Lutheran understanding of theology based on those 8 to 15 minutes and then wait a week for the next time they hear it in 8 to 15 minute speech. The disconnect is that we think that's sufficient. The disconnect is that we think 8 to 15 minutes of preaching is enough to convey the Lutheran theology which is one of the most abstract theologies of Christianity. We live in paradox and yet we think we can preach that in 15 minutes. The most important thing I should be doing is what I do in the community. The most important thing that I should be conveying to my people is that I am outside of the church doing something and I should be inviting them to come with me to do that. That would be a truer expression of the Lutheran theology than anything else that I could say from the pulpit inside our four walls, behind closed doors, behind closed windows in a ritual setting that the majority of the community can't understand unless they have been a part of us for many years before. The truest understanding of Lutheran theology is that I would be doing the work outside of [The Church] because I have been compelled by grace to continue to show God's love.</i></p>

3.6 - Ambiguity of Ministry

<p>Quinn</p>	<p><i>And for me that's a lot of the big reason that I work at Camp because it does give me a place to affirm the identity of those that come through these walls. It does give me an opportunity to affirm the identity of the counselors so that they can go and spread God's love to the kids that come here, whatever situation they're in...And so working at a camp in that aspect to me is very interesting because we offer theology, we offer religion, but we offer it in a space that's not a church. It's not on Sunday. You know our kids show up Sunday afternoon but it's an entire week experience and it's your identity for that week, or that part of it is you are at camp or a camper. And so you kind of take away all those notions of, "I go to this church, I do this thing. We go every Sunday." And we kind of step back from everything and you get an opportunity...to step out of the typical church setting. I feel like a lot of the time it's what sets kids on fire for wanting to be a part of their church because they know it doesn't always have to be the same.</i></p>
<p>Tommy</p>	<p><i>And I was so encouraged to read about some theologians and then like practical examples of people that could talk about farming and growing food and serving food as a real ministry. And that was like mind blowing to me. But so freeing to me to think that ministry isn't just helping people grow in their faith as a spiritual thing but that taking care of God's creation, which truly is the the first commandment that we all have, right, in Genesis and the first thing God tells Adam to do is to till and to keep the soil and the garden. And so I really began to feel that like, yes caring for God's creation for instance specifically like growing food was going to be this really awesome and alternative way that I answered this calling that I had experienced or had started experiencing I guess I should say, so long ago and that it would be totally outside of an institution or ordination in particular.</i></p>

In addition to citing the need for an articulation of ministry that affirms individual ministry as a reflection of identity and not of polity or ecclesiology, interviewees also shared the importance of creating intentional spaces where communal transformation can move the community toward a future distinct from the past.²³³ For the interviewees, the possibilities of

²³³ Peter Block, *Community: the Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009). 5.

community aligns with their theological understanding of community as the "kingdom."²³⁴ They believe that it is worth showing up in particular ways that speak life into the present as if it is the future they are creating.²³⁵ This intentionality of creating space is not a means to an end, it is not a WHAT; instead it is a HOW, and an end itself.

3.7 - Creating Space

Alex	<i>I think that our world doesn't spend very long helping people understand their identity in positive ways and ways in which they can be claimed and accepted. And so I tried to do that work with people and interact with them based on that understanding.</i>
Jayson	<i>I stood up and asked..."So you keep talking about how we need to walk in the way of Christ and live like Christ. And that's what a lot of my classmates went into seminary thinking and believing in and convinced that they could do that because that is the only way that the world will ever look a little bit more like the kingdom of heaven and yet the seminary beat that out of them." And she came back and said, "well, no matter what we do and above all else we always have to go back to the creeds." And I think you need to be willing, and this is part of the willing to be heretical, we need to be willing to throw out those [because they were used] to define insiders and outsiders hundreds of thousands of years ago. And I'm not saying that they don't have value and they don't inform our understanding of our beliefs but maybe we shouldn't always start with the creeds. We shouldn't start by defining who is in and who is out, who's heretical and who's Orthodox. Maybe we should sit there and say, "hey all of us are beloved children of God. All of us are miserable sinners saints and sinners simultaneously. And let's work through this together instead of defining who is in it who is out." If we limit who can be in and who can be out of an organization then we're going to only allow those people in that look and think like us. Which may or may not be the full image of God.</i>
Katie	<i>Grace can fill up any space.</i>

²³⁴ Tommy, CCG - Interview - TS, personal, March 24, 2019.

²³⁵ Peter Block, *Community: the Structure of Belonging* (BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. a BK Business book., 2009).

3.7 - Creating Space

<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>And so creating space isn't so that God will show up, it's so that I know what's already happening that God's already there. It's interesting I've had to pay attention to my own language when I welcome people to worship and I invite them before we begin to take a moment to let the thoughts in their head quite, feel their heart open, not to invite God into that space and time because God already is there. But for us to be aware of, like you and I set an intentional time to meet right now. Right. So we set an intentional worship setting, in an intentional time to meet with God. And with one another. In a similar way and we cheat ourselves if all we do is show up and worship and go through the motions and leave. Then we've not ever actually seen God or heard God in that time.</i></p>
<p>Melanie</p>	<p><i>...then you value yourself differently. But also just see how all those things can be used to bring God's kingdom into the world everyday. Ya know, heaven is here.</i></p>
<p>Quinn</p>	<p><i>In my mind the community is there to support and help...on a very very basic level saying OK is the way we do Sunday services helping to affirm the individual identity?</i></p>
<p>Tommy</p>	<p><i>I think that there isn't necessarily an end to view but that the end is all is very much as much now as it is to come and that we should be more aware of how the fullness of God's kingdom and love and grace and salvation is now and forever. And that when we as disciples are embodying the love of God in the way that we do everything from eat food every day to how we might serve in our church or help a loved one or a stranger in need that all or all of these things is the end. This is what it's about and we're not necessarily learning, studying and doing all of this stuff to somehow reach some distant future like end a.k.a. heaven. I would say because I have been deeply transformed by the understanding against simple but hugely transformative idea of Jesus's prayer that let that your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. That when we are living as disciples and communing with God and one another and practicing these things that the end, the heaven, all that God has for us is being experienced now. And I think it's in our practice and our love and our relationships as disciples that we will continue to see the kingdom heaven. However we wanted to find that grow and expand and take root more deeply in our world. So yeah I think that keeping that sense of like there isn't some and that we're just going to shift to or like end up in some time but that we are creating that space every day around us is really important to identity.</i></p>

3.7 - Creating Space

Tommy

...for institutions of faith to think about how nurturing people's relationship with nature with how God is alive in all of these things around us the trees, the shrubs, the soil, the plants, the animals that we're trying to embody and practice like a way of like engaging God that I think has always been a deep part, an essential part, of human life but that we have strayed pretty far from as a dominant culture where most people's relationship with nature is maybe perhaps really only tied to like having a lawn, if that, or maybe not even that for a lot of city dwellers.

Question 4: How do you perform your identity?

The last question generated for response in the interviews was, "How do you perform your identity?" Again, most notably, the answers stemmed from the complicated relationship between call and vocation. Therefore, most identity performances were articulated very similarly to the identity markers in Table 2.1. What was more compelling in terms of this specific research, however, was the critical lens research participants used to reflect on the institutional and collective identity performance. The most notable institutional performances of identity mentioned were surprisingly articulated with concern. Interviewees presented these institutional performances as inauthentic expressions of the collective identity known by individuals. In other words, the institutional performances mentioned were in tension with the theology and beliefs of the Lutheran faith that interviewee participants claimed as identity markers. It seems that these performances are inauthentic reactions²³⁶ to the realities that threaten the collective identity such as the narrative of a dying church.²³⁷ This is a narrative that

²³⁶ Alex, CCG - Interview - AP, personal, April 9, 2019.

²³⁷ Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-Protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

seems to have infiltrated the institution, its leaders, and the individuals that comprise it and therefore the most common inauthentic reactions²³⁸ articulated were predominantly fear and scarcity or failure, barriers, and hubris.

4.1 - Fear, Scarcity, and Failure

<p>Jayson</p>	<p><i>I have a less positive view on why the ELCA requires [three years of service in a congregation before serving in a specialized role]. I think that it made sense back when there was a lot of pastors and an overabundance of pastors or more pastors and congregations. Because it gave people, once again, time to form the pastoral identity in supportive environments. Or more somewhat supportive, hopefully. But now we have a shortage of pastors within the ELCA and our congregations are getting smaller and smaller and the stresses are higher and higher upon the congregation, the pastors, to a financial standpoint. And so we're sending new pastors into high stress environments. Sometimes to close congregations. And we're rarely called into multipoint parishes where we have a support system and in Montana that many pastors are in far flung places without colleagues even... They give these smaller struggling congregations a cheap pastor.... my bishop told me that she would not typically send a first call Pastor into a situation like she is sending me into it. This is after I took the call, the day of my installation, [when she said she] wouldn't normally send a first call Pastor into a situation like this. I think that you have the skills and the ability to handle it. But they wouldn't be able to if they as a congregation can barely afford me let alone a pastor who has more experience and theoretically therefore more skills and ability to handle difficult situations and in complex relational dynamics than a first call Pastor.</i></p>
<p>John</p>	<p><i>I think there's just too much security in the old way. I guess I would say somewhere older pastors just reach a point where they don't want to change. I like to use the term holding on, you know, treading water until retirement.</i></p>
<p>John</p>	<p><i>Why are we not keeping our finger on the pulse of what modern leaders do and how we adapt to this culture that has changes around us. You know again, what's the definition of insanity doing the same thing and expecting different results? I kind of think it's this institutional inertia or viscosity that causes us to not change and then folks that step up and start to change frequently get ostracized or ignored or even personally attacked.</i></p>

²³⁸ Alex, CCG - Interview - AP, personal, April 9, 2019.

4.1 - Fear, Scarcity, and Failure

John	<i>You know just the dying church you know why we're not reaching the next generation we're not even reaching our own generation for baby boomers are we even relevant and being inside the church as a lay leader I see the many many ways that we are relevant we are living out are calling as followers of Christ or disciples yet it just doesn't seem to be going past those of the immediate touch. I've seen failures in leadership in all different contexts and I've seen success and leadership in different contexts and I think it's just the failure of leadership.</i>
Kim	<i>Every congregation deserve [to have the best pastor for them]. Because they can't afford it does not mean that they should not get the best pastor for them... [and] It matters that leaders are justly compensated for the work they do.</i>
Melanie	<i>There's a lot of fear and perhaps unconscious shift within the institution from the church of, from being a people who know that they serve a God of abundance where there's a little too much a sense scarcity. And that makes us make poor decisions broadly speaking as people which is not helping us at all.</i>
Quinn	<i>We're 20 pastors short of what we need because no pastors want to come out here. One because it's rural two, because everybody is stuck in the mud and, "this is how it's always been," has been the nail in the coffin for some of the churches around here.</i>

Individuals described fear, scarcity and failure in these ways:

4.2 - Barriers and Boundaries

<p>Alex</p>	<p><i>Every organization and systems are slow moving right. They're slow changing and that seems to be part of being in the system especially an organized system. Right. Like an extremely organized system such as a church or denomination. And because of that I'm not sure they are able to perform their true identity. I think there is something that hinders. There are things that we can identify as part of systems and those might be hindrances to the way in which that organization performs because I have never I've seen individuals, I know of individuals, who I believe perform their true identity much more authentically for longer periods of time than I have seen any system do that for most of their life. And I'm also speaking from a system that is breaking down right now so it's hard to have that [and] that might be influencing me because the United Methodist church is going through a difficult time right now [and] that might be influencing me because there's some hurt, there is a lot of hurt that's happening from that and I believe the system that we started out with was based on legitimately three rules and the first one is do no harm. So clearly if that's what we're trying to accomplish, that's part of who we are and how it was set up, I don't believe we're doing a good job. In fact I believe we're doing the opposite of that. Let me say one more thing. I think I would push for making the system or the organization as fluid as possible and that's what I mean by large system like large organizations. I think we need to understand them as always being small, a collection of small systems. So like for example a collection of local churches. But as soon as you start to identify the structure as soon as the structure gets big enough then it turns into a system a big system that is extremely slow moving and has some of these characteristics- resistant to change. Right. Some of that stuff in systems theory that become problematic and identity and remaining true to their identity.... I just think looser structure is mandatory and if the response in the system to that is OK we'll build a structure that will allow for you to have a looser structure. That's kind of counter-productive.</i></p>
<p>Alex</p>	<p><i>Whiteness is my understanding is a lens in which I view the world which I was taught to view the world and that lens came from a white male perspective. It was mostly influenced by a white male perspective. And so it left me blind to other people's realities who weren't white males.</i></p>
<p>Alex</p>	<p><i>I just have a hard time with systems leading structures because they seem to always get bigger like the natural progression is for them to get bigger until there's a breakdown and so how do you do that. Because if you break down there's a ton of harm done.</i></p>

4.2 - Barriers and Boundaries

<p>John</p>	<p><i>I get frustrated when I especially go to like our church wide functions like the vice president meetings and then when we're in there with the bishops and I just I see it's small thinking I see ... thinking I see you know not not modern leadership approaches I see you know kind of shotgun approaches of things that really are not hitting the true heart of what we need to be doing. And even when we raise issues like that I feel like Bill and I we kind of raised it in a different model a year or so ago at one of these meetings to the entire call of bishops and vice presidents and I think we were looked at as kind of like, "What the hell's wrong with them, right. I mean how can you work together like that." Some of the question Bill got was, "how can you share leadership like that." Right. And these are things that just frustrate me to no end and why we feel we have to be cool around who has leadership or who has authority. Just the term authority is a negative term and we're trying to empower and get all of us to be disciples and you can't do that with a model that says you know I am the leader and only [I] can do this or do that. And I'm sure you feel the same way of not being on the roster. I mean you can do a certain amount of things but because of the the bounds of the institution against you you're not allowed right.</i></p>
<p>Katie</p>	<p><i>What it makes me think about is this expectation, again outside of the roster, vision and expectations set and named boundaries and ways in which we're expected to show up in our ministry role and show up with our whole selves and the ways that that relational, professional, personal, gray area can be both and it can be this boundary and a barrier. I think about my relationship with my camp director and the ways that when I started dating I did not talk about and I did not say like, "this is why I'm going into town tonight." And that was an expectation in that relationship, like my professional supervisor role also had an expectation that I would share about my dating life. And that's a really personal specific anecdote but I know that from other anecdotes that I've heard from other friends that's not the only person in a ministry when [there was] an expectation that you're sharing and being vulnerable and bringing your whole self to a level that is no longer an open invitation of vulnerability but an expectation and a sort of social pressure of the role.</i></p>

4.2 - Barriers and Boundaries

<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>Why should small congregations get the pastors who can't get a call in a large congregation. Right. What if the best pastors said I want to be in a place that is small and is excited about their ministry and their congregation in their community. I feel like I'm not putting good words on this but I wish that part-time-ness income was not the barrier to the right pastor or the right deacon being the right call in the congregation getting the right pastor or leader that they need. And often it is. Or you get pastors who stay beyond where they should be in a call because It's comfortable. Maybe they've done all that. They've given it everything they have but for three more years until their youngest child graduates from high school or until they retire or until their spouse is in it in a logical transition time they're going to just hang out a while longer. I wish there was a different way... At the same time that I wish there was some more flexibility or fewer barriers to good matches and living out a sense of call and in a setting. I don't know that having a job that paid my living wage in one place and then kind of like doing ministry on the side, I don't know that I would either be able to or would want to give to at the same amount of my being as I do now. So bizarre. But it does matter to me after, and part of it is after the formation it took for me to get here. It does matter to me to know that I am being compensated for what I do.</i></p>
<p>Kim</p>	<p><i>When it's a community of faith and community building and faith forming sacraments are inextricably linked. So I mean we're asking all of us, our vocational calls are rooted in our baptism, and they're nurtured and fed and challenged by Eucharist and the table. The sacrament and the table so I think they're inextricably linked. I think that. Yeah. OK. All right. Here. Here. Here we go. So right my sense of call to sacrament was because of serving in the congregation where I was doing pastoral care and when my pastor colleague was on vacation we called in a supply pastor to preside at the table because I couldn't. And my realization that if I am meeting with people in their places of need and struggle and grief and pain, being able to also proclaim the words of grace from the table, from the meal matter and in that place and time it mattered that those words came from me... It was when we had to call in a quote outsider, that it became really clear. The other part of me like struggles with that, right. Like part of me says no I feel like they're inextricably linked. And I don't want there to be barriers either to people's experience of that link.</i></p>

4.2 - Barriers and Boundaries

<p>Melanie</p>	<p><i>It stems from the intersection of white male privilege. Am I allowed to say that? I mean I think that it's likely not the only factor. [But] I think it is a factor in the church overall. That tends to value disproportionately some of those traditional gifts and skills and sort of set apart. Basically Lutherans have this, one of our core tenants is this idea of vocation right which extends far beyond ordained or roster ministry. And yet, traditionally has been narrowed really really narrowly. When we get down to this level of leadership to be only ordained or rostered ministry. And so it's the classic, "what we've always done it that way," without thinking about, right, it's just much easier not to think about it. But the fact of the matter is... That's who framed the system is right to even if you will with the best of intentions and some awareness implicit bias is unavoidable. So without that being super conscious of identifying and attempting to dismantle some of those assumptions we stay stuck in the framework that's not serving anyone. And it's hard to even articulate why because it's so ingrained we don't think about it that way, especially the ELCA which you know is relatively progressive. But the truth is is that even with those steps in that direction we know it's not in a perfect place. There are plenty of people who are marginalized there are plenty of leaders who are still not represented, or heard, or acknowledge. And I think it's easy to think, it's easy for us, as an institution to look at those as progressive values and say we've arrived without maybe taking a critical look. But have the systems really changed, has the structure really changed, has the approach changed or are we just. Are we just broadening the scope of who we include in the circle without considering whether the circle is still the right shape.</i></p>
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Barriers to authentically performing institutional identity were articulated in this way:

Finally, these thoughts were offered about hubris:

4.3 - Hubris

<p>Alex</p>	<p><i>The pastor and the pastor's position holds certain things that allow people to trust me in ways that they don't trust other people. For example being extremely vulnerable in hospitals and conversations in our home for some of those boundaries the pastoral position allows me to be in. Even teaching just the fact that I'm 60 years younger than some of my members. And the fact that they're listening to me teach on a normal basis that all comes with my positions. And so that's part of it which I think is set up.</i></p>
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4.3 - Hubris**Jayson**

So in the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Episcopal Church when you are ordained there is an ontological change that occurs. The Lutheran Church denies that and yet we function as if there is. And so there is something that changes when you are ordained and a functional perspective that allows us to consecrate the elements and do all the fancy God stuff with our magic fingers, right. And when you either teach or act as if there is an ontological change that occurs upon ordination that separates you from the people that means it sets you above and apart from people and makes you holier than thou. And if you're ever challenged that almost challenges not just your identity but [also] about who God created you to be when you think that there is an ontological change that occurred in ordination.

4.3 - Hubris

John	<p><i>Some of our pastors are too egocentric. Right. In fact that happened at the Bishop and Vice President meeting. Right. When Bill and I got up there and talked about how we worked together almost finishing each others sentences. The bishops went up there and said, "how can you share power like that?" Right. In other words how can you empower somebody else. You're the leader right. You should have all the answers. So I think it's making sure that we don't elevate some of our pastors or other leaders to a level where they think they're above the rest of us or the lay people. And I think our best leaders look like a Mike or something like that. I mean we all get egos right but It's not about me. It's about making disciples. If somebody comes along stronger than me I always said in the business world I'm never the smartest guy in the room. But dog-gone-it I got a bunch of smart people in the room and that's kind of my calling I think, would be to surround or get people on board that are smarter than myself that then come up with much better solutions and better direction and a much better implementation than I could ever do by myself. So I get my my thrills and I think this kind of leader we need is is not out about what they do in fact it's almost embarrassing to say something like, "Colleen you're just like the best leader I've ever seen in my life." You don't want that you want to say man your team just did unbelievable. How do you keep generating all these additional leaders that just take it on from there and go on and do much more than you could do by yourself. That's that's the kind of leadership mindset. And sometimes I think in the seminaries, maybe it's intentional and maybe it's not intentional but they come out sometimes thinking that they're quote The spiritual leader of that congregation and as a result they have all the answers. And as a result there's a little bit of insecurity around somebody that maybe comes alongside them. And I've seen this practice with a pastor that arms council president and became intimidated by having a strong leader alongside them instead of being, "Thank God. Thank God every day I get a strong leader beside me."</i></p>
John	<p><i>Gods called us to be effective in how we use our resources and how we go about our work and it doesn't excuse crappy work. I've seen crappy work in the church be excused under the, "Well, we're not a business." Yeah but that doesn't give you the freedom to be bad at your job. Right. I don't think Jesus is calling us to that.</i></p>
Micah	<p><i>We more interested in ourselves. In like the self of the church then we are actually being the church in the world. We are more interested in ensuring our doors are open and actually ensuring that than that we matter to the community around us... I think this is where it's really interesting. We're fine hearing that God loves us [but] it starts getting really complicated when I started hearing that God loves others and that our focus needs to be on that rather than just how much God loves us.</i></p>

The themes and narratives presented as answers to the question about identity performance support the notion that there can be an inauthentic representation, or reaction, of identity and more so, may even support the idea that inauthentic representation is rooted in the tension between identity and ideals. What is apparent, however, is the conviction through which the research participants expressed their concerns. It's not that they were concerned with the "dying church," but rather, they lamented in the retreat from the promises of the cross. Rather than staying open and allowing new life to emerge, it is as if the institution has put up walls to protect WHAT it has produced rather than WHY it exists. It is as if The Church, again, is living too much into its visible self as systems and has forgotten that its foundation is personal. The institution is unintentionally using the walls as barriers by settling with the status quo of invitation when the burden of participation should not rely on any one individual to come in, but rather on the collective to go out. Unfortunately, that possibility is also capped by the illusory boundaries imposed by The Church. The buildings and structures are over-protecting by not only creating barriers within but also creating barriers outside, and rostered leaders are stuck in the loop as well because they have not been set up for success. Their Theological Education has taught them WHY and provided them with a context for WHAT, but it has not offered a clear understanding of HOW so there is a sense of stuck-ness that is cultivated through a desire to survive²³⁹ and to be in control. What seems to be forgotten, however, is that it is not about any one individual. The Lutheran identity does not claim a Theology of Glory because it believes in

²³⁹ Jayson. CCG - Interview - JN. Personal, April 4, 2019.

the complexities of the cross that are powerful enough to transform death into life. By letting go of fear and scarcity and embracing courage and abundance, leaders within the institution can empower others by encouraging individuals to embrace their identities and to bring their gifts to the community. Asking individuals to show up in meaningful ways creates accountability and sparks transformation from within which then impacts the rest of the system. This significant impact causes emergence, and this is beneficial for two reasons. The first is that it generates sustainability within leadership. As others are empowered to use their gifts to create meaning, foster emergence, and find purpose, accountability to the community increases. The second is that it creates deeper connections among individuals within the community, and those bonds continue to expand outward in a ripple effect to shrink feelings of separation and distance by strengthening relationships and belonging. Both of these examples suggest thrive-ability over sustainability because the concern is not in a temporal WHAT, it is in a complex, ever-changing, constantly adapting HOW focused on the ways individuals come together to form a community always rooted in purpose and WHY.

Summary

The interview analysis supports the reflexivity in the relationship between individuals and the collective institution. The nature of individual identity is as complex as the identity of the institution and the systems and structures supporting identity construction. In an effort to simplify the complexity it is important to offer back some narrative conclusions drawn from the interviews.

- The collective identity is rooted in relationship to the Trinity and individual identity is rooted in this belief as well as the secular roles and communities in which one participates.
- The use of third person pronouns shows a sense of belonging and accountability to this group; however, there seems to be a disconnect about HOW that accountability transitions to responsibility. In other words, WHO is responsible for making sure WHY and HOW align? Where does this knowledge live and who is responsible for it? Some interviewees articulated a sense of this gap and brainstormed about HOW to solve it. Some thought it could be addressed through Theological Education, some through the Rostering System and others through non-traditional ministry and job descriptions.
- There is a need for an interdisciplinary and interconnected approach to all aspects of translating the story. The story, and the characters within the story, should be accessible through head knowledge and through tangible, tactile, experiential knowledge.
- The privilege of Rostered Ministry lies in being able to model aspects of organizational identity that includes, but is not limited to, vulnerability. Leaders can empower the collective to embrace mistakes as learning and fear as opportunity.
- Ministry does not equate to worship, and worship does not equate to ministry.
- The Lutheran community of faith is committed to relationships with others, and with creation.
- The collective does not create space for God to show up because God is already there. Instead, it creates space so that awareness of HOW God is at work in the world can be known.

- New life only becomes possible when the system and individuals are open to the Spirit of transformation.
- This conversation is meaningful, cathartic, and in some ways, therapeutic. More than not, this conversation topic served as a restorative approach to WHY individuals have chosen to align their identity with the organizational identity of the institution. Likewise, it constructed a notion of HOW one understands and constructs their own identity in relationship to the institution they are creating.

This research only offers a particular image that is reflected from the cross. As such it cannot be considered the full image of organizational identity. However, what has been offered is a particular lens of individuals within the institution articulating a longing for a more intentional performance of collective identity.

Conclusion

The nature of this research is that it is complex and cannot be understood through one lens. The best approach to answer the question, "If the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America looked in the mirror of the cross, would it need to change?" is an interdisciplinary one. It is for this reason that a vast number of theories, field research, and interview analysis were brought together to create language and develop a framework for better understanding identity, sustainability, and thrive-ability within complex and emergent systems. By expanding the research to include theology, cultural sustainability, and systems theory a more comprehensive understanding of how the ELCA informs individuals' identity and how individual identity reflexively informs institutional identity has been created. The different theories: The Golden Circle, Complex Systems Theory, Emergent Self-Organization, the Ontological Argument, narratives and stories, the habitus, the Synaptic Self, and Cultural Evolutionary Theory, have established an understanding of HOW this reflexivity works and the interview analysis has given meaning and purpose to WHY reflexivity is important. Because individuals cannot be separated from the institution and the institution cannot be separated from the individuals that comprise the institution,²⁴⁰ individual and organizational identity construction is both a parallel and intersecting process. Individual identity hinges on the belief systems transmitted through institutional leaders but also depends on unique internal and external factors that aid in individual narrative and storytelling. Similarly, institutional belief hinges on shared understanding and narrative storytelling within the community as it organizes and emerges into a collective institution. Understanding that culture can be learned, modeled, and sustained through

²⁴⁰ Mike Murawski, "The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums," *Journal of Folklore and Education* 3 (2016). 48-49.

institutional systems and then transmitted to individuals and groups, and vice versa through complex structures, systems, and processes of organizational identity is one step in embracing the nature of change that enables sustainability. Simultaneously affirming individual identity in a way that fosters possibilities within inevitable disequilibrium produced by adapting to change is the opportunity that rests in revising the roles Theological Education and the Rostering System play in fostering emergence and thrive-ability.

Limitations

In this research, there are limitations of two varieties: those of which I am aware and can, therefore, articulate and, those of which I am unaware and, therefore, cannot articulate. This section serves as an opportunity to name the limitations I can and to own the power of knowing there are other limitations outside of my own conscious awareness. The limitations I can name fall into three categories. Those categories include: current ecclesiastical structures, representation, and positionality.

Current Ecclesiastical Structures

This research fell outside the reach and realm of the ELCA Churchwide organization because it was a step in completing a degree outside of Theological Education and service in Rostered Ministry. While this was a benefit in many cases, it was also a limitation because as the researcher I was not privy to the resources and network the organization has institutionalized and reserved to those filling normalized roles. As such, this limitation predominantly manifested in reflection while noting the discrepancy between the content interests of this research and the practical expectations of academia. For example, this research focuses on institutions as the sum of people that comprise them, yet it became a product of one researcher. Despite a desire to be collaborative, the work in this research was more removed from the community because of limitations concerning the academy of the institution.

Another limitation realized in reflecting on this research concerns the liturgical season during which the research was completed. This research coincided with the liturgical season of Lent which is observed by mainline Protestant churches as a time of reflection and introspection. I am confident that the vulnerability and landscape for narrative construction by interviewees

was influenced by this particular church season. Since Lent focuses on the relationship between life and death, and death and life, research participants seemed more willing to share and speak bravely about their own experiences, insights, and critiques concerning sustainability and thrive-ability. This particular limitation, therefore, is specifically vital to the processes involved in analyzing and interpreting interviews.

There is an awareness that this research allows communities to react to it, and therefore might have emerged differently had it been produced from within the community. Likewise, the stories and narratives shared in interviews might have changed if this research took place during a different liturgical season. Neither of these particular limitations represent a malady within the research; however, they highlight the existential limitation associated with the Ontological Argument. Therefore it is important to note the influence these two realities had in establishing and creating this particular work, as compared to work that might have been produced under different circumstances.

Representation

As a researcher I paid close attention to and sought after diverse perspectives known by participants identifying across the spectrums of race, religious doctrine, color, national origin, ancestry, physical disability, mental disability, medical condition, marital status, sex, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender, gender identity or expression. However, my own conscious and unconscious biases influenced the demographics of the research participants. I am aware of this limitation and its' perpetuation of a dominant discourse influenced by my perspectives as an insider looking out, and an outsider looking in.²⁴¹ Specific examples of how

²⁴¹ Gisela Schulte Agyeman, "White Researcher Black Subjects: Exploring the Challenges of Researching the Marginalised and 'Invisible'" (Regent's College, 2008).

this research is limited because I did not take a more direct approach to recruiting interview participants include: a lack of intersectional identity narratives, a lack of representation from across all eight regions within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and a lack of insight from the Word and Service Roster. Reiterating the pattern mentioned above, this work could have yielding different understandings and themes and narratives had I cultivated a more intentional methodology concerning recruitment and resourcing.

Positionality

My positionality as a researcher holding both emic and etic space within the subject organization limits this research because I cannot not separate my own biases from my processes of analysis. My interpretations are biased by the belief structures of the institution that have informed my own sense of self and identity, and are constantly influencing how I receive and interpret knowledge to create meaning. The meaning derived from the resources, theories, and interviews are all products all of my own positionality, and therefore my role as participant researcher must be noted. In other words, my research lens is subjective.

The primary manifestation of this subjectivity was revealed in the nature of my research question. When this research first began, the research question was, "If the ELCA looked into the mirror of the cross, would it need to change?" While the foundation of this research rested in understanding institutions as the people that comprise them, and remembering that I am part of this particular institutional community, this proposed research question was limiting for two reason. The first is that the language of the question neglected accompaniment.

As stated multiple times, I am a participant research, which means my sense of belonging is rooted in this community and by removing myself from the pronouns of the research question I

was limiting the power of my experience as a researcher. This in and of itself is challenging because it emphasizes the grey space of validated research. The complexity of this work then is exemplified by my own becoming in and through the work. Again, because I am a participant researcher, my positionality, while steadfastly rooted, was also transforming due to the subjective nature of my positionality. The fact that I could not articulate this parallel prior to the research process limited the lens of the proposal and therefore initially structured this research as more closed than open.

The second way the initial research question was limiting is rooted in this structure of closing, rather than opening because the question came across as a challenge rather than inquiry. The limit here is that by seeking conclusions, evidence, and proof, to support my research question, I was shifting transformation to a system rather than to self that comprises the community. I learned that the better and more objective question to be asking was, "If the we, as the ELCA, looked in the mirror of the cross, what would we see?"

Both of these examples wrestle with the complexities of my positionality within the research and my own process of emergence through the work. As such, I must acknowledge the inherent limitation presented in even articulating these examples: my sense of the limitations are still biased. Not only is there a parallel between individual and organizational identity, and my struggle to differentiate my identity outside of the ELCA as a institution, but there is also a parallel construction between my positionality as a participant and as a researcher within the community. My role as both in this research cannot be compartmentalized and therefore I cannot easily separate my participation *in* the research *from* the research because they are both influencing the interpretations, analyses and final products emerging through this research.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this research creates a landscape and offers language to talk about the narratives within and surrounding the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, its Theological Education, and Rostering System, it does not offer concrete recommendations to the institution nor does it offer next steps. As a study, this research has taken on its own identity and therefore needs to be acted upon. In other words, it can be used to shift the conversation. In shifting the conversation, this work may produce unintended outcomes. To enable this emergence, future research could explore ways to apply and integrate the landscape and language constructed through this research into Theological Education and the institutional understanding of the Rostering System.

Curriculum Development

To apply and implement this research at the Theological Education level, further research would support curriculum development that focused on "more than one vocation." Administration skills, public speaking skills, social research, conflict resolution, community organizing, small business skills,²⁴² management and leadership, building partnerships, and communication are all aspects of identity performance that can be taught during Theological Education to better prepare leaders for ministry. The application of this research supports this implementation because it highlights the relationship between identity performance as WHAT to identity as WHY. Theological Education is uniquely situated to offer future learnings in a practical curriculum that teaches faithful leaders HOW they can align their purpose with their performance and leadership.

²⁴² Jacqueline Bussie et al., "Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council," *Report and Recommendation from the Theological Education Advisory Council* (ELCA, 2015).

Collaboration

The gift of emergence is that it is work that cannot be done in isolation²⁴³ and this research would be enhanced through collaboration. Future research therefore could include re-producing, or expanding the research, to include steps that integrate dialogue opportunities among research participants, as well as a methodology that enables partnership, team, or group-based research. This methodology would enable a more robust interpretation process as a result of different perspectives on analysis the data. A more collaborative effort would intentionally open the process, and therefore the products, to self-organization within the research system and would simultaneously support a methodology that integrates external validation of the data collected from interviews and field work.

Resistance and Change Theory

In some ways this work offers a romanced version of systems theory. This is possibly due to the markers of identity present within the community. Future research therefore might include theory-based research centered on system resistance and change theory. These theories would add to the landscape narrative and provide opportunities to develop language to encounter and redirect resistance. Similarly, exploring resistance and change would stage the possibility of conducting case studies that example both resistance and change as well as success. The conclusions of future research that captures learnings through theory and praxis could aid in the development of curriculum and could also develop evaluative processes through an individual's or organization's emergence.

²⁴³ Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007). p 104.

Reflections

When this research began, I had a hard time articulating my own sense of identity outside the organizational identity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America because, while I was aware of many ways this institution has influenced my own personal identity construction, I was still unaware of many others. For instance, I was unaware of the challenge this institution made me feel in relation to the way I have felt called to perform my identity. As such, all I could articulate at the time of the research proposal, was a challenging question back: "If the institution looked in the mirror, would it need to change?" What I have come to realize, is that the better questions has always been "what would we see?"

The structural change of the question invites rather than challenges. By asking, "what do we see," individuals are able to offer reflections and share about their narratives and identities, rather than react defensively. Additionally, because identity is complex, it is more than what we see, so the invitation invites deeper exploration into what we claim as truths about who others are, and about who we say we are.

In the same way, the cross invites opportunity. It gives permission for individuals and collectives to be aware of their constant state of becoming, transformation, and change sparked by complex interactions. What this research reinforces is that fluidity is not something to be feared; instead, it is something to be embraced as possibility for emergence.

In embracing the unknown, individuals and collectives can cling to the markers of their identity that signify meaning and purpose. By focusing on the reasons WHY community is coming together for self-organization rather than WHAT the community has done, is doing, or will do, transformation and the emergence of something new is cultivated through the gifts of

sight and interpretations that individuals bring to the communities. Because of the narrative of the cross, change can be non-threatening because it tells a story of life after death. Change, therefore, is not an indicator of an ill-constructed identity; instead, it is an opportunity to breathe new life into meaning-making.

As novelty enters a complex system, the system has an opportunity to construct a new narrative as it emerges into something not yet known, but something hoped for or promised. In this sense, the thrive-ability of the ELCA rests in embracing the narrative of a dying church as an opportunity not only to place the cross at the center of its storytelling but also to embrace the constructs of the Golden Circle. Relinquishing creative power to God and allowing natural processes like death of WHAT no longer seems an authentic representation of self. Rather, it allows individuals to assume their role as co-creators, rather than controller, further empowering emergence and becoming.

Sustainability in this sense takes the model of the cross in that it can only be achieved in the constant cycle of "death and resurrection."²⁴⁴ The shift from sustainability to thrive-ability rests in the urgency and conviction with which individuals pick up their cross, or mirror, and begin to reflect on WHY they see WHAT they see. Committing the self to the constant process of becoming, and using questions like WHY and HOW, are necessary in realizing the potential that Emergent Self-Organization has in embracing the possibilities of life after death, and producing a new WHAT.

This is the work that God has called this collective to in baptism and it is the collective's ministry. We cannot let our understanding of purpose and intentional methods for performing

²⁴⁴ Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, "Field Notes" (Dundalk: St. Luke's Lutheran Church, April 21, 2019).

identity be overshadowed by fear. Instead, we must proclaim the nature of God by believing that who we see in the cross is exactly who God is creating us to be.

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Appendices

Glossary	157
Informed Consent Packet	160
Final Informed Consent Release	166
Documentation Release Form	167
Sustainability Curve	168
Audio Logs	169
Audio Log Worksheet	169
Summaries	170
Audio Log	172

Glossary

Church Council	The ELCA church council is comprised of representative from around the nation. The church council serves as a legislative branch between the institutional body and the Churchwide staff.
Churchwide	The Churchwide organization is comprised of staff members working to advance the mission of the ELCA.
Complicated Systems	A relationship among infrastructure that enables patters and algorithmic solutions to predict becoming.
Complex Systems	A relationship among infrastructure that increases the interaction and increases creative influence in becoming.
Congregation	Congregations are the local churches housed within neighborhoods. Each congregation is unique and has autonomy over their organizational identity.
Cultural Evolutionary Theory	Cultural Evolutionary Theory suggests there is an intricate and reflexive relationship between cultural traits and genetics when it comes to evolution and cultural sustainability.
Ecclesiology	The metaphysical systems and structures of the ontological reality within church systems
ELCA	ELCA is an acronym for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Elements	Bread and Wine are the elements used to celebrate Holy Communion. The Lutheran church does not believe in transubstantiation, and therefore the elements serve as symbolic representation of Jesus body and blood.
Emergent, Self-Organization	Collective possibility within a complex system.
Eucharist	The tradition of celebrating the Last Supper and remember Jesus life, death and resurrection.
Golden Circle	A theory proposed by Simon Sinek that suggest organizational sustainability comes from WHY (purpose) and HOW (procedure) rather than WHAT (product).
Gospel	The Good News of Jesus Christ's narrative.
Habitus	Ingrained habits, skills and disposition constructing and influencing perception and reaction.
Holy Communion	The tradition of celebrating the Last Supper and remember Jesus life, death and resurrection.
Identity	Ontological production of the self. Identity is complex and relies on conscious and unconscious knowing as well as external and internal factors. It is subject to transformation but is ultimately rooted in belief and deeper meaning. Identity aligns with WHY and HOW a person approaches being in the world.

Identity Markers	Factors that produce and allow meaning to emerge. This include, but are not limited to: religious affiliation, group membership, political persuasion, nationality, ethnicity, personality type, belief, tradition, historical context, gender identity, sexuality, et cetera.
Identity Performance	Displays of identity performed as products of WHY and HOW. Identity performance is the transition from HOW to WHAT and is visible to onlookers. In organizational identity, identity performance is displayed in systems, structures, and models.
Institution	At the most fundamental level institutions are human structures produced by building communities and a collective identity. Institutions are performances of the collective identity.
Lent	A liturgical season which is observed by mainline Protestant churches as a time of reflection and introspection. It stretches from Ash Wednesday to Easter.
Liturgical	Public identity performance relating to worship.
Minister of Word an Service	Rostered leaders in the ELCA that are called to proclamation of the gospel and service to, and with, the neighbor.
Minister of Word and Sacrament	Rostered leaders in the ELCA that are called to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments in their community of call.
Narrative	The construction of story and meaning making which enables an individual or group to articulate their identity.
Ontological Argument	A philosophical argument proposed by St. Anselm that uses the nature of being to advocate for the existence of God.
Ontological Web	An image proposed by this research that captures the relationships between factors and complexities associated with identity construction.
Organizational Identity	Both the process of constructing identity in community and the expressions of that identity through institutional systems and structures
Polity	Polity is the medium through which community agreements are derived then captured to support identity performance.
Priesthood of All Believers	Luther's notion that through Christ all Christians have been given direct access to God and has equal potential to minister for God
Reformation	Movement within Western Christianity in 16th-century Europe that posed religious and political challenge to the Roman Catholic church – and papal authority. Martin Luther is deemed a tag of the Reformation and a catalyst of Protestantism.
Roster	The list of ministry which captures turns of ministry within the ELCA.

Sacrament	A religious ritual that is held sacred because it is made possible through the Holy Spirit. In the Lutheran church baptism and communion are the only sacraments.
Seminary	The institution through which Theological Education manifests.
Service	Deeds done with and alongside one's neighbor.
Sustainability	Sustainability occurs by introducing change to different levels within a system. As the system moves toward equilibrium, adaptation must take place. If adaptation does not take place the system is subject to dissipation. Sustainability is result of novelty introduced into a system of cultural evolution which produces adaptation.
Sustainability Curve	An image that represents an organization's life cycle.
Synod	The conglomeration of local congregations under one regional organization.
Theological Education	The school, or education of the church which primarily fosters an understanding of purpose.
Theology of Glory	A theology that emphasizes human abilities and human reason over the nature of the cross.
Theology of the Cross	A theology developed by Luther that posits the cross as the only source of knowledge concerning who God is and how God is at work in the world.
Thrive-ability	Thrive-ability is a result of intentional novelty, empowered emergence and self organization. Thrive-ability enables transformation and becoming by focusing on the alignment of identity and identity performance within the disequilibrium of a system.

Informed Consent Packet

Capstone Research; Informed Consent Packet for

Organizational Identity; How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory inform Institutional Thrive-ability

Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

Thank you for your interest in my research, *Organizational Identity; How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory inform Institutional Thrive-ability!* This packet and information that follows has been put together to better acquaint you with my interests and investments in this research. Please take some time to review the information that follows.

The foundational focus of this research is rooted in who we are as beloved Children of God, called and united by our identity in Christ which was made known to us in our baptism. As a child of God, reflecting and bearing Christ's identity, this work cannot be whole without acknowledging that God's work is transformative and collaborative.

Scripture reminds us that, "Where two or three are gathered..." (Matthew 18:20) so too is God and it is because of our connectedness that I not only invite your participation but I also invite your gifts, your being, and your unique witness to this project. Our commitment to the body of Christ makes the opportunity to discuss and discern together, how God is showing up in, and amongst, us and our communities possible.

As we reflect and create space for God, I invite you to offer constructive feedback to my approach and framework throughout this research, in addition to sharing any suggestions moving forward. I cannot promise your feedback will affect the direction of my research however, it may help frame my analysis and learnings. Throughout your participation I encourage you to share any hesitations, questions, et cetera. with me. This includes any apprehension to participate, desires to remain anonymous, requests to see final products, et cetera. I can be reached via email at cocar002@mail.goucher.edu.

For questions regarding the research project, please contact:

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For questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact:

IRB Contact: Provost's Office
410-337-6044

Research Description

The research of this capstone, *Organizational Identity; How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory inform Institutional Thrive-ability*, wrestles with the relationship between identity, culture and leadership and focus specifically on the impact an organization's identity has on the formation of individual identity which then informs the process of organizing, or institutionalizing.

As a leader that holds both emic and etic space in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I see a disconnect between the people, the process and the institution that prepares leaders to identify and nurture values, practices, and beliefs that inform this culture but not practices to sustain this culture. I believe that "How" and "Why" communities approach, things like leadership, is as, if not more important than "What," communities do.

In an effort to address one of the cliché expressions, "the church is dying," plaguing mainline Protestant churches I plan to apply the methods, process and practices of Cultural Sustainability to a religious institution to resurrect, return, and reframe, the focus of the institution back to its roots: the identity of Christ, presented in the body of Christ. (Murawski 2016).

In order to address these issues, this research will begin with identity. To better understand the term identity, the identity of individuals and the ways their identity was/is formed and performed in relation to the institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America research participants are asked to participate in a 1.5 hour recorded interview. Interviews will include a review of the Informed Consent Packet and conversation around the following sample questions:

Sample Interview Questions for Formal Interviews:

1. How do you define and understand the term identity?
2. Share about your identity? What makes you, you?
 1. Why do you identify that way? How did those features develop?
 2. How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of who you are?
3. How has your calling shaped your understanding of your identity?
 1. How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of identity?
 1. What role did Theological Education play in this formation?
 2. Was it helpful?
 3. Was anything missing?
4. How do you show or perform your identity?

Risks

Risks associated with this research may include psychological distress because this research in part, will ask participants to offer reflections on their own lived experience and meaning making in relationship

to their identity formation as participants (leaders, members, et cetera.) in the institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Some of this reflection may be offered as an assessment or critique of current practices within the ELCA and therefore research participants may be subject to known or unknown personal triggers and/or unknown responses from their peers and colleagues. The risk may be greater for current leaders within the institution yet, is no more probable than when brave and vulnerable opinions are voiced in current contexts associated with the institution of the ELCA such as Task Forces, Bible Studies, Churchwide Assemblies, Congregational Meetings, Church Council Meetings, Learning Seminars, Feedback and Evaluation Forms, Sermons, Living Lutheran Articles, et cetera.

Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research include, but are not limited to, a better understanding of one's own positionality within the institution, a deeper understanding of the relationship between the institution and one's identity, and developing an awareness for how identity markers and values influence institutional processes and organization. Other benefits of participation in this research include collaborative and creative brainstorming concerning the future of a dying church (Pew Research 2015). In this research, critique is not the only story. The other side of the research is a bridge that connects theology, cultural sustainability, and systems theory in a way that heightens the understanding of Lutheran cultural identity and developing an interdisciplinary approach to better educate leaders to build and sustain that identity in community.

Payments

Research participants will not be paid or reimbursed for participation. Nor will other form of payment, including educational credits, et cetera. be offered.

Confidentiality

Participants have the right to anonymity and/or confidentiality.

Anonymity means that either the project does not collect identifying information of individual subjects (e.g., name, address, Email address, et cetera.), or the project cannot link individual responses with participants' identities. A study should not collect identifying information of research participants unless it is essential to the study protocol (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 2019).

If you wish to participate in an interview for this research and choose to remain anonymous then no identifying information will be collected or reported. Instead, study codes will be used and assigned in ascending numerical order. Additionally, interview and field notes as well as transcripts and audio files will reference the participant by their study code.

Confidentiality means that only the researcher or individuals of the research team can identify the responses of individual subjects; however, the researchers must make every effort to prevent anyone outside of the project from connecting individual subjects with their responses.

If you choose to keep your identity confidential any information collected and reported in publications from this research will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. For example, second person and third gender neutral pronouns will be used in interviews, field notes, transcripts.

Additionally, only myself and the supervisors of this capstone will have access to the raw data via Google Drive sharing with the link sharing preference turned off. This means that only select individuals including myself as the researcher and my research committee will have access to the stored information.

At the conclusion of this research raw data will be downloaded and stored for a minimum of six months, or until grades are posted and a masters degree is awarded.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this research project is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw any time. Your right to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research project will be honored without prejudice.

Voluntary Consent

I have read the information above and freely volunteer to participate in this research project.

I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence and in a manner in which my rights as a human subject are protected.

I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and have had my questions answered to my satisfaction.

I am aware that I have the right to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time, without prejudice.

If I decide not to participate in this research project my performance and/or grade in any course associated with this research project will not be affected.

I understand that I must be at least 18 years old to participate in this project, or have a "Parental Consent Form for Research Participation" on file with the Provost's Office with my parent's or guardian's signature. I also understand that I must present a copy of this form to the researcher prior to consenting to this study.

My signature below may be taken as affirmation of all the above, prior to participation.

I confirm that I am at least 18 years old:

- Yes
 No

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Address _____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Final Informed Consent Release

Voluntary Consent

I have read the information above and freely volunteer to participate in this research project.

I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence and in a manner in which my rights as a human subject are protected.

I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and have had my questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I must be at least 18 years old to participate in this project, or have a "Parental Consent Form for Research Participation" on file with the Provost's Office with my parent's or guardian's signature. I also understand that I must present a copy of this form to the researcher prior to consenting to this study. As such,

I confirm that I am at least 18 years old:

- Yes
- No

I am aware that I have the right to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time, without prejudice.

I understand that my participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I have the option to participate with or without anonymity or confidentiality restrictions. As such,

- I would like my voice to be heard through this research and agree to participate without anonymity or confidentiality restrictions.
- I would like to participate in this research and ask to remain anonymous.
- I would like to participate in this research and ask that my confidentiality be protected.

My signature below may be taken as affirmation of all the above, prior to participation.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Address _____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Documentation Release Form

Documentation Release Form

I, _____, am a participant in *Organizational Identity; How Theology, Cultural Sustainability, and Systems Theory inform Institutional Thrive-ability*. I understand that the purpose of this research is to unearth intersections among theology, cultural sustainability, systems theory and identity, leadership, and management. I further understand and grant permission to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, a student in the Masters of Cultural Sustainability program of Goucher College to record, photocopy, review, photograph, videotape and otherwise document as a part of this research project.

I understand that Colleen Carpenter-Gonia plans to retain the product of my participation in the research, including but not limited to my interview, presentation, video, photographs, photocopies, statements, name, images or likeness, voice, and written materials ("My Collection") as part of her graduate school portfolio and that it may be used for the research purposes described above.

I hereby grant to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia ownership of the physical property comprising "My Collection." Additionally, I hereby grant to Colleen Carpenter-Gonia, at no cost, the perpetual, nonexclusive, transferable, worldwide right to use, reproduce, transmit, display, perform, prepare derivative works from, distribute, and authorize the redistribution of the materials in "My Collection" in any medium for educational, non-commercial purposes. By giving this permission, I understand that I retain any copyright and related rights that I may hold.

I hereby release Goucher College's Graduate Programs, and its assignees and designees, from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of "My Collection," including but not limited to any claims for copyright infringement, defamation, invasion of privacy, or right of publicity.

If I have any questions, I may reach Colleen Carpenter-Gonia at cocar002mail.goucher.edu

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

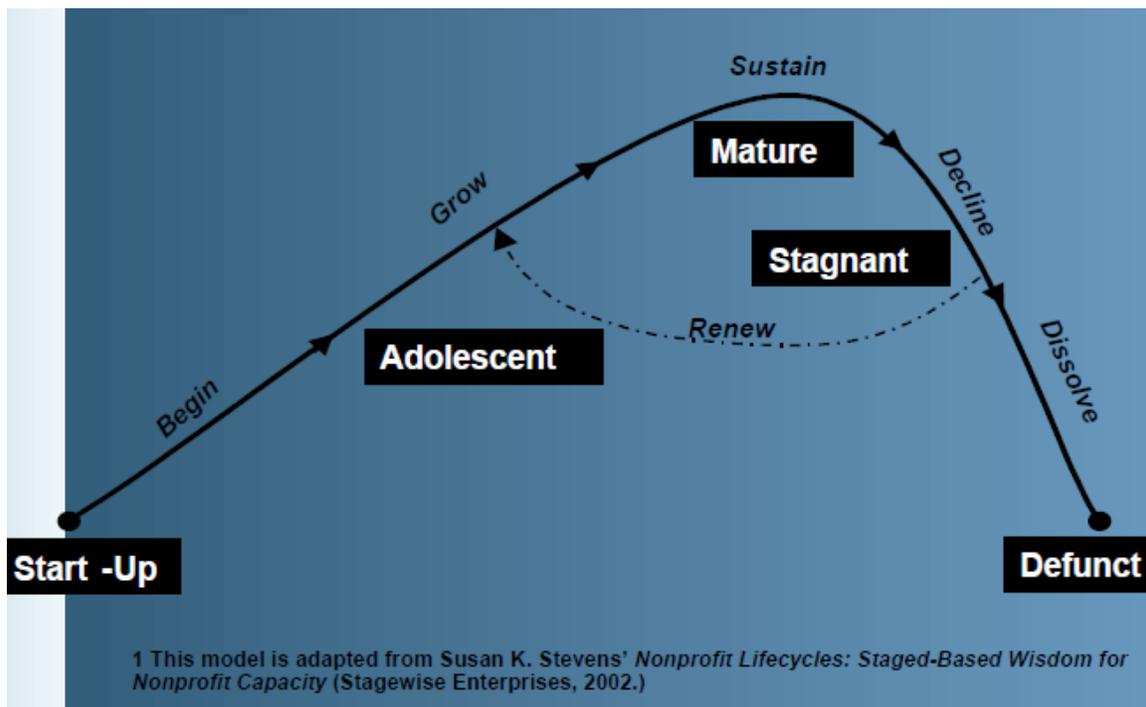
Address _____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Sustainability Curve

Organizations move through a non-linear process of becoming which includes several different stages of development – from "Start-Up" to "Growing" (sometimes called the "Adolescent" stage) to "Mature" and sometimes to a stage of "Stagnation" or "Decline." The Life Cycle categories used in this image focus on an organization's ability to achieve its mission as the key determinant of its stage of development rather than indicators such as the size of the budget, how many staff they have or how many years the organization has been in business.²⁴⁵



NH CENTER FOR NONPROFITS - STAGES OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONAL LIFECYCLE

²⁴⁵ "Organizational Life Cycle Stages," Organizational Life Cycle Stages | NH Center for Nonprofits, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.nhnonprofits.org/content/organizational-life-cycle-stages>.

Audio Logs

Audio Log Worksheet

Researcher: Colleen Carpenter-Gonia

Project Name: Organizational Identity: How Theology, Cultural Sustainability and Systems Theory Inform Institutional Thrive-ability

Date Logged: Tuesday, June 11, 2019

Format: MP4

Location: Various

Interviewee/Event:

File Name: 00001 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00002 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00003 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00004 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00005 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00006 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00007 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00008 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00009 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00010 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

File Name: 00011 - CCG - Thesis - 2019

Interviewer(s): Colleen Carpenter-Gonia

Subject: Identity

Interview Questions: 1) How do you define and understand the term identity? 2) Share about your identity? What makes you, you? 3) How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of who you are? 4) How has this community, or more specifically, institution shaped your understanding of identity?

Copyright Owner: Colleen Carpenter-Gonia

Restricted? No

Summaries

File Name: 00001 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:28:43

This is the recorded interview with Alex. It was held on 4/9/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Alex covered topics like the slow moving nature of systems and the grief and feelings of breakdown within their particulate institution of faith.

File Name: 00002 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:22:13

This is the recorded interview with John. It was held on 4/5/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions John covered topics like leadership including a distaste for rules and regulations that prevent good work from being completed. John also articulated a need for individuals, and leaders in particular, to define their purpose so that others can follow while simultaneously developing a self-awareness.

File Name: 00003 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:42:21

This is the recorded interview with Jayson. It was held on 4/4/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Jayson covered topics like survive-ability noting that sustainability and thrive-ability are not the same thing. Instead they are similar to the theological concepts of death and resurrection. Jayson also articulated that identity is rooted in tradition but we must evaluate and be self-aware about our decisions to carry on those traditions while raising a compelling understanding of the difference between identity and call.

File Name: 00004 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:18:49

This is the recorded interview with Katie. It was held on 4/2/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Katie covered topics like the distinction between boundaries and barriers specifically related to relationships, both intimate and platonic, within institutions of ministry. Katie also articulated that vocation and calling are not your only identity.

File Name: 00005 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:24:57

This is the recorded interview with Kim. It was held on 4/5/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Kim covered topics like experiential learning and knowing, the benefits and restrictions associated with part time ministry, and the importance of the table and Eucharist in faith communities.

File Name: 00006 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:58:53

This is the recorded interview with Leila. It was held on 3/27/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Leila covered topics like preaching, discipleship, and the intersection of two faith traditions: Lutheran and Pentecostal. Leila articulated that identity is parts of a whole and cannot be compartmentalized even if it can be selectively preformed.

File Name: 00007 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:14:15

This is the recorded interview with Melanie. It was held on 3/29/19 in person at a coffee shop. In addition to the interview questions Melanie covered topics like fear, abundance, the need for faith based managements practices, and a detrimental emphasis on recruiting rostered leaders to fill staff positions. Melanie also noted that the true identity for people of faith is as children of God and even if other things may change, that is the steadfast truth of one's identity.

File Name: 00008 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:57:31

This is the recorded interview with Micah. It was held on 3/28/19 in person at a coffee shop. In addition to the interview questions Micah covered topics like recovery and vulnerability. Micah's sense of identity exemplified the process of define one's self by deciding what they are not. As such, a theme of owning one's story was expressed. Even if it is hard it is especially important to be vulnerable because it is healing work and can be a model for others when done by leaders in their positions of leadership.

File Name: 00009 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:24:23

This is the recorded interview with Quinn. It was held on 3/29/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Quinn covered topics like change and the openness to change, as well as the struggle between negotiation one's identity versus the ideals, or expectations others place on individuals. This theme primarily related to the work Quinn does with small, rural congregations.

File Name: 00010 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:09:14

This is the recorded interview with Tommy. It was held on 3/24/19 in person on their farm. In addition to the interview questions Tommy covered topics like alternative ministry, service, ecology, and God's creation. Tommy also addressed the relationship between conscious and subconscious identity and how the subconscious aspects of one's identity formation may impact conscious storytelling and performance or choices.

File Name: 00010 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:7:30

This audio was recorded at the request of the interviewee, Tommy. It was recorded on 3/24/19 in person on their farm after the interview took place. Tommy thought of another story and wanted to make sure it was documented. This clip captures Tommy narration of his mom's struggle with her identity.

Audio Log

File Name: 00001 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:28:43

This is the recorded interview with Alex. It was held on 4/9/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Alex covered topics like the slow moving nature of systems and the grief and feelings of breakdown within their particulate institution of faith.

Key words, names, and places:

Christianity	Pastor
Identity	Systems Theory
Inauthentic Reactions	Teaching
Learning	White Male Privilege
Parent	Whiteness

Interview time code:

[00:00:41] Overview of research and informed consent
 [00:16:09] Identity is created by God and is tied to other people.
 [00:17:09] Identity can adapt and is dependent on both nature and nurture.
 [00:30:20] Christianity is the main theological perspective through which identity has been formed and that perspective has been taught in the midst of community.
 [00:31:18] Identity can also be defined by what it is not.
 [00:34:56] Base level of identity is first and foremost a compilation of desires, passions, callings, etc. "Because I am ____ that is now part of who I am."
 [00:36:29] Choosing to be parent but am also parent.
 [00:38:12] The difference between true identity and an inauthentic performance, or reaction.
 [00:46:44] Systems and organizations are slow moving and speed is a hinderance to change. Speaking from a system that is currently breaking down and so that might be affecting personal identity reaction.
 [01:01:36] Whiteness and white male privilege.
 [01:02:06] "If i don't know what impacts my identity I can't authentically receive, understand, or have sympathy for the performance of another's identity."
 [01:05:31] Teaching and learning happens both ways.
 [01:09:08] Ontology of pastor

File Name: 00002 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:22:13

This is the recorded interview with John. It was help on 4/5/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions John covered topics like leadership including a distaste for rules and regulations that prevent good work from being completed. John also articulated a need for individuals, and leaders in particular, to define their purpose so that others can follow while simultaneously developing a self-awareness

Key words, names, and places:

Adam Fairchild	Identity
Andy Stanley	John Maxwell
Atlanta	Leadership
Bill Gohl	Lutheran Theology
Church	Mark Parker
Colleen Carpenter-Gonia	Mike Louia
Grace	

Interview time code:

[00:17:26] Reflections on retreat in Atlanta.
 [00:17:58] Are Lutheran's even relevant?

[00:18:35] Failure of leadership
 [00:30:07] Grace
 [00:34:22] Church is not a business
 [00:36:18] Leadership is not secular
 [00:44:24] Co-leadership
 [00:50:26] Ontological change
 [00:55:16] Barriers
 [01:00:13] "Luther started to question -- is that why we ostracize? Is that who we are? Why do we judge the questioner?"
 [01:13:35] Vulnerability

File Name: 00003 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:42:21

This is the recorded interview with Jayson. It was held on 4/4/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Jayson covered topics like survive-ability noting that sustainability and thrive-ability are not the same thing. Instead they are similar to the theological concepts of death and resurrection. Jayson also articulated that identity is rooted in tradition but we must evaluate and be self-aware about our decisions to carry on those traditions while raising a compelling understanding of the difference between identity and call

Key words, names and places:

Berkely	Montana
California	Navy
Call	Naval Officer
Chaplain	Relationships
Identity	San Diego State
Elizabeth Eaton	Spain
EMT	Survivability
Firefighter	Theology
Michael Curry	White Male

Interview time code:

[00:00:00] Informed Consent
 [00:13:38] "White male within the church that's already rostered."
 [00:16:32] Background narrative
 [00:18:00] Institutional structures and obligations
 [00:19:29] Personal theologies
 [00:19:44] Candidacy approval process
 [00:21:45] Difference between survivability and possibility
 [00:22:05] EMT and medical context
 [00:32:10] ELCA seminary and Naval Officer Training training
 [00:34:26] Chaplain candidacy process
 [00:40:03] Stressors in congregations
 [00:50:20] Authentic and inauthentic public actions
 [00:52:48] Homiletics and sermons
 [00:54:50] Ontological change at ordination in Roman Catholic and Episcopal traditions
 [01:01:25] Priesthood of all believers
 [01:04:17] Campus ministry
 [01:08:20] Definition of call
 [01:08:27] Definition of identity
 [01:12:42] Moving from seminary into ordained ministry

[01:26:23] Internship experience
 [01:27:23] Relationships
 [01:29:36] Volunteer Fire Department and Volunteer Firefighter
 [01:30:17] Political pressure
 [01:32:03] Relationships transform the world
 [01:33:42] Holy Week
 [01:40:35] "Tradition never to be impeded by progress"

File Name: 00004 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:18:49

This is the recorded interview with Katie. It was held on 4/2/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Katie covered topics like the distinction between boundaries and barriers specifically related to relationships, both intimate and platonic, within institutions of ministry. Katie also articulated that vocation and calling are not your only identity.

Key words, names, and places:

Barriers	Ministry
Boundaries	relationships
Call	Seminary
Camp	Vocation
Identity	

Interview Time Code:

[00:00:49] Informed Consent
 [00:18:13] Access and freedom within and outside the rostering system
 [00:20:11] Relationships
 [00:24:15] Barriers
 [00:28:01] Boundaries
 [00:30:03] Expectations
 [00:34:10] The power of place in identity formation
 [00:36:46] Family Culture
 [00:40:25] Biblical Narratives
 [00:41:05] Jesus
 [00:46:54] Definition of Ministry
 [00:48:02] Vocation and Calling
 [00:54:05] "Ultimately and foundationally called in baptism to be a child of God"
 [00:56:59] Work with clients
 [01:00:54] Communion
 [01:05:28] Barriers
 [01:06:07] Theological Education
 [01:17:16] Camp study

File Name: 00005 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:24:57

This is the recorded interview with Kim. It was held on 4/5/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Kim covered topics like experiential learning and knowing, the benefits and restrictions associated with part time ministry, and the importance of the table and Eucharist in faith communities.

Key words, names, and places:

Brene Brown	Deacon
Compensation	Experiential

Identity	rocky Mountain Synod
Intentionality	Sacrament
Part-Time Ministry	Theological Formation

Interview Time Code:

[00:00:30] Informed Consent
 [00:18:59] Emotional connection to the inquiry about the rostering system
 [00:21:53] Financial privilege and flexibility
 [00:26:12] Word and Service
 [00:26:50] Theological formation
 [00:30:02] Word and Sacrament
 [00:32:02] First vocations were spouse and parent
 [00:34:14] Ordinary and profound mystical experiences
 [00:36:20] Everything that I know to be true about God or that I have experienced in my relationship with God is because somehow God initiated it
 [00:39:43] Lived and learned understanding
 [00:41:31] Identity performance
 [00:45:38] Congregational life
 [00:50:05] Reflections on ministry summit in Rocky Mountain Synod
 [01:00:41] What congregations deserve
 [01:03:40] Compensation
 [01:05:26] Call and job are intertwined
 [01:08:29] Sacrament and community building are linked
 [01:13:25] Limitations of the Rostering System

File Name: 00006 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:58:53

This is the recorded interview with Leila. It was held on 3/27/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Leila covered topics like preaching, discipleship, and the intersection of two faith traditions: Lutheran and Pentecostal. Leila articulated that identity is parts of a whole and cannot be compartmentalized even if it can be selectively preformed.

Key words, names, and places:

Devotion	Lutheran
Discipleship	Lutheran Theology
Identity	Lutheran Tradition
Nadia Boltz-Weber	Pentecostal
Ryan Zehr	Pope Francis
Tim Wengert	

Interview time code:

[00:00:12] Interview protocol
 [00:01:58] Defining identity
 [00:06:36] Identity cannot be compartmentalized
 [00:08:19] "Luthercostal"
 [00:10:07] Lutheran theology of law and gospel
 [00:11:39] Discipleship
 [00:15:31] Distinction between Lutheran theology and Lutheran tradition
 [00:18:26] Daily discipleship
 [00:24:11] Evangelize

[00:27:27] "I'm a storyteller"
 [00:39:40] Field education
 [00:41:43] Manuscript preachers
 [00:43:21] Difference between devotion and discipleship
 [00:46:58] Grace
 [00:51:58] Ordination rites and affirmation of baptism
 [00:53:36] Follow up procedures

File Name: 00007 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:14:15

This is the recorded interview with Melanie. It was held on 3/29/19 in person at a coffee shop. In addition to the interview questions Melanie covered topics like fear, abundance, the need for faith based managements practices, and a detrimental emphasis on recruiting rostered leaders to fill staff positions. Melanie also noted that the true identity for people of faith is as children of God and even if other things may change, that is the steadfast truth of one's identity.

Key words, names, and places:

Abundance	Leadership
Brene Brown	Management
Call	Salisbury
Fear	White Male Privilege
Identity	

Interview time code:

[00:01:26] Rooted in lutheran theology
 [00:02:53] Fear
 [00:09:43] Gift affirmation
 [00:13:46] How faith intersects with the world
 [00:18:34] "God made us who we are"
 [00:20:06] The gap
 [00:20:11] "When are you going to seminary?"
 [00:24:04] Access to knowledge
 [00:24:11] Faith based management
 [00:33:15] White male privilege
 [00:33:25] Vocation
 [00:39:29] Poor leadership
 [00:40:06] "We equate faith with kindness and passivity"
 [00:41:40] Threat of not enough
 [00:42:38] Fear
 [00:45:50] Family
 [00:51:46] Call and identity

File Name: 00008 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:57:31

This is the recorded interview with Micah. It was held on 3/28/19 in person at a coffee shop. In addition to the interview questions Micah covered topics like recovery and vulnerability. Micah's sense of identity exemplified the process of define one's self by deciding what they are not. As such, a theme of owning one's story was expressed. Even if it is hard it is especially important

to be vulnerable because it is healing work and can be a model for others when done by leaders in their positions of leadership.

Key words, names, and places:

Baltimore City	Lauren Muratore
Baltimore County	Lutheran Theology
Bill Gohl	Philadelphia
Delaware Maryland Synod	Recovery
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Emily Scott	St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Identity	Vulnerability
Jason Chesnut	

Interview time code:

[00:00:01] Interview protocol
 [00:00:56] Called to synod
 [00:01:31] Bible study
 [00:03:03] Internal mission and candidacy papers
 [00:06:47] Identity markers
 [00:09:35] 2009 Churchwide Assembly vote
 [00:10:22] "The church is a place I really want to be"
 [00:14:08] Vulnerability
 [00:15:36] Identity as minister and pastor
 [00:17:10] "Growing up in the institutional church"
 [00:20:50] Insecurities
 [00:22:17] "I'm an alcoholic"
 [00:24:00] Candidacy process
 [00:26:13] Approach to justice and identity expectations from others
 [00:27:43] Lutheran theology and recovery commitments
 [00:36:20] Human nature in a broken world
 [00:38:20] God's love is for others, too.
 [00:42:54] Preaching moment
 [00:48:29] What's missing
 [00:53:01] Do you institutionalize the creativity?

File Name: 00009 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:24:23

This is the recorded interview with Quinn. It was held on 3/29/19 via Zoom. In addition to the interview questions Quinn covered topics like change and the openness to change, as well as the struggle between negotiation one's identity versus the ideals, or expectations others place on individuals. This theme primarily related to the work Quinn does with small, rural congregations.

Key words, names, and places:

Acts 4:2-35	Ideals
Camp	Identity
Change	Julia Fogg
Community	Katy Perry
Dana Point	Martin Luther
Detroit	National Youth Gathering
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	New Orleans
God	Transformation

Vulnerability

Youth Ministry

Interview time code:

[00:00:10] Introduction to the study and informed consent
 [00:14:50] Interview protocol
 [00:17:52] Identity and social clues
 [00:19:41] Disabilities
 [00:20:38] Ideals
 [00:21:40] New identities
 [00:23:00] Identity can change
 [00:27:01] Ideals
 [00:28:17] Difference between ideal and identity
 [00:31:16] Pastoral roles and realities
 [00:32:15] Ideal versus identity
 [00:34:42] Disconnection between the people
 [00:35:55] Pastoral burnout
 [00:37:47] Transformed communities
 [00:39:28] Acts 4:2-35
 [00:40:48] Vulnerability and community
 [00:42:13] "Leave room to grow."
 [00:45:27] "This is how it's always been done."
 [00:47:46] Comfortable patterns
 [00:52:48] Small changes
 [00:53:13] White Scandinavian background
 [00:54:48] Seminary training
 [01:02:08] "Fight the power"
 [01:04:31] Resources

File Name: 00010 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 1:09:14

This is the recorded interview with Tommy. It was held on 3/24/19 in person on their farm. In addition to the interview questions Tommy covered topics like alternative ministry, service, ecology, and God's creation. Tommy also addressed the relationship between conscious and subconscious identity and how the subconscious aspects of one's identity formation may impact conscious storytelling and performance or choices.

Key words, names, and places:

Agriculture	Havre de Grace
Bible	Identity
Boston University	Jesus
Disciple	Lancaster Theological Seminary
Ecology	Malaysia
Ecological Theology	Maryland
Faith Practitioner	Muchelle Shireman
Farmer	Peace and Justice Studies
Food	St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Genesis	

Interview time code:

[00:00:52] Interview protocol
 [00:01:49] Core markers of identity
 [00:10:34] Theological Education

[00:13:19] Collective identity
[00:17:47] Identity of a disciple
[00:24:34] Defining call
[00:36:00] Ecological Theology
[00:40:04] Genesis
[00:41:03] Tommy: being a disciple often entails paths of resistance
[00:43:21] Narrative of God and faith
[00:44:44] "I am a farmer"
[00:55:48] Relationship to stuff
[00:59:58] Reflections
[01:03:16] Theological diversity

File Name: 00010 - CCG - Thesis - 2019 — Length of File 0:7:30

This audio was recorded at the request of the interviewee, Tommy. It was recorded on 3/24/19 in person on their farm after the interview took place. Tommy thought of another story and wanted to make sure it was documented. This clip captures Tommy narration of his mom's struggle with her identity.

Key words, names, and places:

Anorexia

Identity

Mom

Interview time code:

[00:00:02] Witness to a parent's identity struggle