

CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

INTERFATH UNDERSTANDING IN A MIDWESTERN UNITED
METHODIST CONGREGATION: AN ANALYSIS, ASSESSMENT, AND
ACTION PLAN

A PROJECT SUBMITTED IN CANDIDACY
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Interfaith understanding in a Midwestern United Methodist Congregation: An Analysis,
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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church defines the mission of the Church as being “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” and notes that “local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.”¹ All United Methodist Christians are called to practice this vision of mission. As a pastor, I’ve served four different local United Methodist churches over the past fifteen years. Each congregation had its own contextual interpretation of discipleship and mission. My foremost task in a new church was to understand how that particular church defines and makes disciples of Christ and how “the transformation of the world” operates in their community.

Since my July 2015 appointment to pastor the Avondale United Methodist Church (AUMC) in Kansas City, I have continued that task of making disciples with this congregation. The overall culture of AUMC is not that different from my previous churches. AUMC is an English-speaking middle-class Caucasian congregation, which understands the process of “making disciples” as the internal ministry of the church for the spiritual growth of congregants. The work of “transformation of the world” the congregation identifies with the outreach ministry programs of the church, such as the community food pantry and charity programs. The community in which AUMC is located, however, differs decidedly from the other churches I have pastored. At any time of day, I can observe Muslim men and women walking in the

¹ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 91. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 91.

church's neighborhood. Some of them are clients of the Avondale community food pantry. I know there are many ethnic minority students in the local schools.² Yet most members of AUMC don't live in the church's neighborhood, which is why I perceived the church as an island separated from the life of their neighborhood community when I first came to AUMC.

This ministry project is about the process of exegeting the congregation and the local community of AUMC and developing a relevant, contextual, and transformative mission for the whole community. In particular, the project focuses on building relations between AUMC and the Bosnian Islamic Center in the community. To that end, I studied the histories and social contexts of both congregations and visited the mosque. I have made an intentional effort to listen to the voices of both AUMC and the Islamic community, to be sensitive to their stories and characters, and to build relations with the Cooley Highlands neighborhood group.

Undergirding this study of AUMC is ethnographic practice. According to Mary Moschella, "Ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening your eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith."³ Thus, I researched the congregational history of AUMC and carefully traced the social transition of the community to understand the current separation of the congregation from the community.

Also, I administered a congregational survey to understand the congregational identity of those members of AUMC who lead the missional task of the church and their perspective on interfaith relation between AUMC and the mosque. I adopted the Parish Profile Inventory form

² For example, the diversity rate of the North Kansas City High School is fifty percent. <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/north-kansas-city-high-school-profile>

³ Mary C. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4.

from *Studying Congregations* by Nancy Ammerman et al.,⁴ and probed how they perceive the church's identity, culture, and theological stance, and the Muslims in the community. Through preaching a sermon on interfaith relation, I presented the result of the survey and my vision of interfaith reconciliation in the community.

To study the Islamic Center, I met the imam and the board members of the Bosnjak Islamic Center in Kansas City, visited their mosque, and researched local newspaper articles about them. Through my interaction with them, I came to understand the historical background of the local Muslim community and more broadly the Muslim population in Kansas City.

The final action plan is about building fellowship and collaborative mission opportunities for these two congregations. I have explored three specific projects: The first project is to plan a fellowship meal with the AUMC and the mosque congregations. The second project is to launch a small group in which AUMC learns about the faith of Islam and adherents' religious practices. The third is to explore potential community projects to assist refugees and immigrants in Kansas City in which AUMC could participate. I have already experienced many limitations to these projects. Working for interfaith relations requires patience and time. Despite my efforts and aspirations, the collaborative mission is still in its initial phase. In this paper, I share the challenges and difficulties we encountered and our accomplishments. That we had such difficulties in implementing my action plan testifies to the complexity of cultural and religious diversity and the gravity of interfaith mission with the Muslims in the local community of AUMC. Nonetheless, I hope that our two congregations will continue to sow the seeds of

⁴ Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney eds., *Studying Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 240-253.

reconciliation by learning about and with one another and through various collaborations in our community.

Understanding Mission as Transformation

In *Translating the Message*, Lamin Sanneh explains how the mission of the church has been as “a catalyst for change”⁵ in society. He introduces two different methods of missional approach that have been common in the history of the church. The first, *mission by diffusion* meant that the mission of the church was to assimilate a particular culture or community to Christianity. After all, Sanneh, reminds us, the early Christian church expanded “by means of its founding cultural warrants and is implanted in other societies primarily as a matter of cultural adoption.”⁶ The other way was by *mission by translation*. Here, the church found God in the receiving or host culture. The church translated the presence of God in the particular culture and context of community. To do so, the church declared “the recipient culture as a valid and necessary locus of the proclamation.”⁷ Sanneh claims, “As translation, mission commits to the bold, radical step that the receiving culture is the decisive destination of God’s salvific promise.”⁸ Through mission as translation, the church pays more attention to the life and culture of community and enculturates the gospel of Christ.

The United Methodist Church defines mission as “transformation.” Mission as transformation is a different approach to mission than, for example, diffusion and translation.

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* rev. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

The transformation of the world is different from the Christianization of the world. Also, it is different from the translation or enculturation of the gospel in a particular culture or community. The purpose of mission as transformation focuses on making a difference in the life of community. Here, the mission of the church is to create a community where people are reconciled with God and one another.

The gospels in the New Testament narrate how the lives of people Jesus met were transformed. The story of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke is an example.⁹ Jesus recognized Zacchaeus as not being an integral part of the crowd, conversed with him, and enabled him to reconcile with others and so rejoin his community. When Zacchaeus promised to give half of his possession to the poor and pay back those whom he had defrauded, Jesus proclaimed, “This day is salvation come to this house.”¹⁰ The narrative reveals that Jesus reconciled Zacchaeus with God and that Zacchaeus reconciled himself with others. Zacchaeus’ reconciliation with God and others was the sign of new life in God’s salvation.

Mission as transformation proposes that the church is called to create a community “that cannot exist without reconciliation that overcome boundaries among humans, and between humans and God.”¹¹ The mission of the church is to make reconciliation happen in their community. The work of reconciliation promotes mutual acknowledgement, relations, and the healing of broken relationships. In a reconciled community, people live together in peace and

⁹ Luke 19:1-10

¹⁰ Luke 19:9

¹¹ Viggo Mortensen and Andreas Osterlund Nielsen eds., *Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Mission Engaging Plurality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 71.

mutual well-being. When the church works for reconciliation, the reconciled community itself becomes the good news.¹²

How does the church create a reconciled community? Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder propose, “Dialogue is the how of mission, and in many ways the what of mission as well, because it is a sacrament of the way God is.”¹³ Dialogue is a biblical form of mission as I found in the story of Zacchaeus. The mission of Jesus was dialogical. The Gospels describe that Jesus conversed – prayed – with God, the disciples, and even strangers. Dialogues with Jesus were inviting, welcoming, challenging, or transforming, and continue through the story of his death and resurrection. The Book of Acts shows that his disciples adopted the methods of Jesus and continued his ministry. Specifically, the disciples not only preached like Jesus but also conversed with not only Jews but also gentiles, moving beyond the previous boundaries of their religious practices. Their dialogues were transformative for the power of the Holy Spirit endorsed their reconciliation with God.¹⁴

I postulate that dialogue is a transformative means or method for interfaith missional contact in the context of AUMC. When Christians and Muslims in the community work together, the whole community observes reconciliation occurring. It is the first step in the transformation of the world. In this project, I report how I developed relations with the Islamic Center and how I have dialogue with the leaders of AUMC and the Islamic Center. In the next section, I interpret

¹² John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays, Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 91. “The new Christian community in which the walls are broken down not by human idealism or democratic legalism but by the work of Christ is not only a vehicle of the gospel or only a fruit of the gospel; it is the good news.”

¹³ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 38.

¹⁴ The story of Peter and Cornelius in the Book of Acts is exemplary.

the result of a congregational survey which presents the congregational identity of AUMC and their social context. When I listened to the voices of those surveyed, I began to have more confidence in the need for vibrant interfaith relations in the community.

Part One. Exegeting Congregation

Who is the congregation of Avondale United Methodist Church? What part do they play in the community? How did they come to have Muslim neighbors? The history of the AUMC reveals how both the social and cultural contexts of the community has changed radically over the years. As the new minister of AUMC, I wanted to learn what had caused the transition in AUMC's identity and context, and to explore a new missional vision for the church based on its changed community context.

The AUMC was originally founded in the city of Avondale in 1914, at a time when Avondale was a small farming town nearby Kansas City. The history book of AUMC describes it like this:

Four of five houses, one little store, and a box car railroad station were situated on the side of one of the bluffs. Rock Creek meandered through the bottom of the valley and emptied into the Missouri River a few miles from where the bustling cattle town of Kansas City was well on its way toward becoming a prairie metropolis. Some of the well-to-do folks from Kansas City had established summer homes on the fringes of the wooded and hilly community.¹⁵

The city of Avondale therefore was a small suburban town, the charter members of AUMC largely farmers. As Kansas City grew, so did Avondale. The end of World War II brought significant social changes to the north of Kansas City.¹⁶ Primary among them was that what had

¹⁵ Avondale United Methodist Church, *Remember, Renew, Rejoice: Avondale United Methodist Church – 100 years* (Kansas City: Rockhill Books, 2014), 7.

¹⁶ Kansas City is divided by the Missouri River. The congregation calls the north of Kansas City the “Northland.”

been farmland was developed into residential areas. The wave of population moved into the neighborhood of the church. AUMC grew fast and came to need a larger facility. In 1958 AUMC built a new church building a half mile away from the original location in Avondale,¹⁷ with an address now in Kansas City. The church kept growing in the new location. The membership of AUMC grew to over 1,000 in the late 1970s, with most of those members living close by the church. Their daily life was not separate from the life of others in the community. Both the community and the congregation of AUMC were a homogeneous society racially, culturally, and linguistically. The church members encountered one another not only at church but daily at public places such as local schools, stores, hospitals, and the city hall.¹⁸

Yet after the glory days of the late 1970s, AUMC has been in a long period of transition, the membership having declined to approximately 400 with average Sunday attendance around 120. Most of the current congregants no longer live in the Cooley Highlands neighborhood. Yet the decline in numbers and the dispersal of members to other neighborhoods do not mean the church is not active. In fact, the commitment of the existing congregation is growing, with members giving more time and making more effort than ever before to continue the mission and ministry of the church. The church is busy with day-to-day ministry programs. There are several regular meetings and missional activities at AUMC every week. The church members and others attend the Prayer Team, the quilting group, the United Methodist Women's guild meeting, the community food pantry, the thrift store, Wednesday choir practice, various committee meetings, etc. At least one third of the members who attend Sunday worship services come to various weekday ministry programs.

¹⁷ *Remember, Renew, Rejoice*, 22.

¹⁸ Several civic leaders, teachers, and medical doctors of the North Kansas City Hospital were the members and leaders of AUMC.

The Wednesday community food pantry is one of the most active charitable ministry programs at AUMC, and has been so for years, thanks to several committed volunteers. The Pantry is located at what is known as the “Little House,” at the eastern end of the parking lot. The Little House is detached from the main facility of the church. It makes access for the clients to the food pantry easier and more comfortable. Many of the pantry clients show up on foot. On the unpaved non-existing sidewalk of Winn Road, they commute from home to local stores, metro bus stops, and the Little House. It is not unusual to find women wearing hijabs on the streets nearby, and a few Muslim families regularly show up at the Little House with their children.

The circumstances of the pantry volunteers represent well who the people of AUMC are. Most of them are long-time members of AUMC. They don’t live near the church, and in fact one of them lives thirty miles north of the church. They work as a team. The pantry is regarded as the place of mission, and its volunteers are the missionaries who meet people in the community. So it was this group of members that I invited to participate in a congregational survey. Nine persons participated in the survey. In the next section I introduce how they understand the task and role of the church and what the community means to their ministry.

Step 1-1. A Congregational Identity Survey

On a Wednesday in October 2016, I visited the Little House, met the volunteers, and described to them the purpose of my congregational survey. I handed a copy of the survey form to each of them and directed them to return the completed survey to a box marked for that purpose in the narthex of the sanctuary building. It was an anonymous survey. I also invited several other members to take the survey. They are committee chairs and Adult Sunday School leaders, who participate diligently in other charitable community ministries of the church. I used

the survey as an opportunity to hear how active members of AUMC think about and evaluate the ministry of AUMC in general.

The survey consists of five parts: the tasks of the church, congregational identity, religious beliefs, background information about participants, and neighborhood community. The questions in the first four parts originated from the parish profile inventory included in Ammerman et al.'s *Studying Congregations*.¹⁹ The first four parts relate to the general performance of Avondale UMC, theological standpoints, and demographic information. The fifth part of the survey, which is directly related to the purpose of this thesis paper, is to reveal the participants' basic awareness of the Muslims and the prospect of new contextual mission. The survey consists of multiple choices and essay questions. Nine completed survey forms were returned by the end of November 2016.²⁰

In part 1 of the survey, the participants evaluated how various areas of ministry are performed at AUMC. The areas consist of worship, Christian education, spiritual growth, evangelism, charity, social justice ministry, caring ministry, counseling, fellowship, stewardship, world mission, and spiritual gifts. For example, question 1 is about "Providing worship that deepens members' experience of God and the Christian tradition." Question 7 is about "Engaging in acts of charity and service for persons in need." Respondents are to pick one of three choices: "Receives Too Much Emphasis," "Generally Satisfied," and "Needs to be Given More Emphasis."²¹ Table 1 shows that participants marked the last two choices, but that no participant marked "Receives Too Much Emphasis."²² They seem to be generally satisfied with

¹⁹ Ammerman, et al., *ibid*.

²⁰ I distributed the survey form to 11 volunteers.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

²² Appendix 1.

the day-to-day ministry of the church; in twelve of fourteen areas, all nine participants were generally satisfied with the performance of AUMC. The participants were satisfied with the performance of ministry in worship, education for children and youth, charity, social justice ministry, and world mission. Half of the responses indicated that AUMC “Needs to Give More Emphasis” in such areas as adult Christian education, spiritual growth, caring ministry, counseling, fellowship, and discernment of spiritual gifts. There were two areas that survey participants suggested there needed to be “More Emphasis;” those participants want the church to provide more Christian education programs for adults and more fellowship opportunities for members.

One of the most significant results from Table 1 was that the participants kept a positive acknowledgement of the charity mission of AUMC. On question 7, “Engaging in acts of charity and service for persons in need,” eight of nine marked “Generally Satisfied.” It means most of the participants who actively engage in the community food pantry were satisfied with their ministry as well as other charitable acts of the church.

If part one of the survey evaluated the formative tasks of ministry at AUMC, part two, “Congregational Identity,”²³ focused on the characteristics and ethos of those tasks. I adopted Ammerman’s nine sets of alternative categories.²⁴ Each category has two definitions which describes two alternative characteristics or identities such as “Our church is more influenced by history and tradition” and “Our church is more influenced by contemporary ideas and trends.” Each question is answered on quantified multiple choices: the five-point scale between each set

²³ Appendix 2

²⁴ Ammerman, 244.

of alternatives is used.²⁵ The participants circled the number that best described where AUMC falls, with “1” meaning most like the characteristic on the left and “5” meaning most like the characteristic on the right; “3” indicates an equal mix of both. Table 2 shows that the participants think AUMC is different in values and lifestyle to the people who live immediately around the church, even though the church is very involved with the community. AUMC is not a social activist church. The church’s approach to social issues is to depend on each congregant’s individual conscience. The survey also showed that AUMC doesn’t consider itself to be one of the status churches in the area, and that it stresses its denominational identity and heritage.

Part 3 of the survey is titled “Religious Beliefs.”²⁶ It includes three questions about the authority of the Scripture, human nature, and theodicy.²⁷ The answers displayed a broad spectrum of participants’ theological stances. For example, one participant marked, “I do not believe it (the Bible) is really God’s Word” and two of them picked, “The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be taken literally” on the survey. On the issue of theodicy, however, the majority – seven of ten answers – voted for “The church should work for justice and support groups that are working to end inequality and oppression.”²⁸ Three participants marked, “I think of it at a more personal level. It means I should try to be just and fair in all my dealings.” This indicates that social justice is important to most of participants.

The first three parts of the survey reveal that the participants work together for the community food pantry regardless of their diverse theological stances. Their participation in

²⁵ *Studying Congregations* uses a scale of seven (Ammerman, 244). I simplified it to make the assessment function easier.

²⁶ Appendix 3.

²⁷ Ammerman, 247.

²⁸ Ammerman, *ibid.*

ministry does not always follow from a common theology. The congregational identity of AUMC is based on a common missional practice rather than a common theological stance. As Moschella explains, “Religious practices do not necessarily emerge out of beliefs. Instead, things are done for all kinds of reasons – some having to do with habit or tradition, others with style or aesthetic preference.”²⁹ The diversity of theological views in AUMC proves the congregation tolerates various theological stances. Here I can see the possibility for AUMC to collaborate ecumenically with other denomination or other religions for the common needs of the community.

Part 4 of the survey is about the demographic data of the participants. Most of the participants live outside of Cooley Highlands; only one person lives within a one-mile radius of the church. This indicates that AUMC is the locus of their religious practices although the rest of the daily lives of members occurs outside of the Cooley Highlands area. Five of nine participants have been members for over forty years. Eight of nine attend Sunday worship four times a month or more. Six of nine come to church as a single person. Even though most of the participants live outside of Cooley Highlands, it is through the activities of AUMC that they have opportunities to contact Muslim neighbors. The survey also shows that the participants describe the Muslims as neighbors, children of God, immigrants, new citizens and people in need. Only one participant said the Muslims in the church neighborhood are not friendly. The participants wanted to know more about the Islamic culture, religion, history, community life, and needs, and were open to religious conversation with Muslim neighbors. They would like to talk about Jesus, the Trinity, and the Bible if the Muslims want to hear about them.

²⁹ Moschella, 39.

The last question of the survey was regarding the ideal relationship of AUMC with the Islam community and elicited the following responses:

- Working together to promote understanding of each other. Supporting positive relationship. Finding common ground, advocating to eliminate “fear” of each other so we can live together in peace.
- Being good neighbors – for example sharing our parking lots, as a way of getting to know each other.
- We can accept them as good neighbors. If they have needs, we can help with we should do our best to do that. We could see if they are interested in interacting with our congregation so we might better understand each other.
- Hopefully sharing in fellowship activities.
- “I don’t know. As far as I’m concerned they are just people like the rest of us and need help every once in a while. And we are here so we need to help them and have fun with them.
- Peaceful, open, caring.
- Working together for community improvement. Would really like a forum for dialogue and co-exploration.
- Respect and understanding of each other.³⁰

The above responses indicate that the participants want to know more about the Muslims in the Cooley Highlands. There was no sign of rejection of new neighbors or hostility toward the Muslims. The common theme of the responses is a desire to build community through fellowship. Respondents want to remove ignorance and eliminate fear and accept the Muslims as partners in community improvement.

From the result of the survey, I developed a sermon with a message of hospitality. It was to reflect the result of the survey and encourage the congregation to show hospitality to our Muslim neighbors. Sermon preparation included the process of exegeting the congregation and their community. I clarified that the interfaith relation is unavoidable in the neighborhood community of AUMC and the survey participants resonated with this. The participants’

³⁰ Appendix 5.

responses show that building a community with God's love and hospitality cannot be limited by the boundary of a religious tradition.

Step 1-2. A Sermon on Relationship with the Islam Community

On the first Sunday of Advent in 2016, I preached a sermon from the Christmas narrative in the Gospel of Matthew. The Scripture text is from the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-15.³¹ The story is about why the family of Jesus had to leave Israel and became refugees in Egypt. Historically Egypt became the refuge of Israel, except at the time of Exodus. In the Coptic Church in Egypt, hospitality is regarded as an important faith tradition. I paralleled the situation of the baby Jesus in Egypt with the life of refugees in the Cooley Highlands. I preached that the justice of God is to protect the vulnerable and show hospitality to the underprivileged, regardless of their religious and social status. At the end of the sermon, I shared an image of solidarity with the congregation. It was the photo of unity taken in February, 2011: "Christian protesters stood together to protect Muslims as they prayed; they joined hands and faced out surrounding hundreds of Muslim protesters left vulnerable as they knelt in prayer."³²

I evaluate the sermon as having invoked the congregation's curiosity about knowing their Muslim neighbors and their passion for helping others. Since I delivered it, I have continued to

³¹ ¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." Michael Coogan ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10 New Testament.

³² Daily Mail, February 3, 2011, accessed February 1, 2017
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html>

receive feedback from the congregation on the subject of interfaith relations. The congregation became aware that their pastor is working toward interfaith relations with the Muslim community.

Part Two. Exegeting Community

Step 2-1. The Pivotal Sociocultural Transitions of the Community

At the same time as studying the congregation, I researched the broader community in which the congregation is situated. The Cooley Highlands Neighborhood Association (CHNA) contributed to my study. As a new resident of the Cooley Highlands, I attend the CHNA meetings every third Wednesday of the month. In those meetings, I came to learn about the historical background of the area, the changes in the Kansas City area, and the factors influencing the development and transitions in the Cooley Highlands area. Two ecological factors in the Greater Kansas City area explain the social transition of the Cooley Highlands neighborhood. These factors are also considered as the external reasons that caused the decline of AUMC since the 1980s.

The first factor is the development of new Kansas City suburbs. The city was included in the nationwide process of “decentralization within metropolitan areas” from the 1970s to the 1990s.³³ New houses, schools, and commercial areas were built. New churches, including Methodist churches, were founded in the northern suburb. Many residents – including AUMC members – moved out of the Cooley Highlands or the city limits of Kansas City. They left their

³³ Robin Leichenko, “Growth and Change in U.S. Cities and Suburbs,” *Growth and Change: A Journal of Urban and Regional Policy*, vol. 32 (Summer, 2001): 328, accessed January 31, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/4910255_Growth_and_Change_in_US_Cities_and_Suburbs.

home churches and made new ones in the vicinity or commuted to their home churches. This transition brought about a significant social change in the life of many local churches in that there is separation between the center of daily life and the locus of ministry. As the survey result reveals, most of the congregants of AUMC live outside of Cooley Highlands. One of the survey participants who is a long-time member of AUMC now drives thirty miles to come to church.

The second factor follows the first. New neighbors began to settle in Kansas City. Apartments were built for low-income families. New residents of those apartments include many refugee families and immigrants. The Walnut Grove Apartments at Cooley Highlands are located across the street from AUMC. According to the apartment lease office, 80 or 90 percent of their adult residents barely speak English. The local public schools received new students who speak English as their second language. Their families are from Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan, Cuba, Vietnam, Somalia and other African countries.³⁴ The Cooley Highlands suddenly became a showcase area of Muslim people from various regions of the Islamic world.

Though Cooley Highlands is still 68 percent Caucasian, there are large African-American and Hispanic populations.³⁵ The neighborhood of AUMC has a higher ratio of racial and cultural

³⁴ “In the early 1990s a second wave of immigrants from Somalia and Bosnia came to Kansas City. The Somali community settled in Northeast Kansas City and established Masjid Al-Huda. During that time period, Masjid Omar had to move to a small adjacent location, creating need for another Islamic Center, Al-Inshirah, which was opened at 3664 Troost Ave., Kansas City, Missouri. A third wave of immigrants came in the 2000s from Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq.” Crescent Peace Society, The Greater Kansas City Area, *Muslim in the Metro*, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://kcpt.org/files/uploads/2016/03/Muslim-in-the-Metro-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

³⁵ The MissionInsite provides the demographic information based on the US Census Bureau. According to the one-mile radius FullInsite report, the percentage of Blacks/African Americans in the local community of AUMC is 10.43%. It is larger than any other minority group. MissionInsite, accessed February 28, 2017, <https://maps.missioninsite.com/GenerateFile.aspx?Type=1&ID=570042>. The data of the MissionInsite, the one-mile radius report of the FullInsite, is different from the statistics of the Cooley Highlands because the covered areas on the map are slightly different. GRAPHIQ, Find

diversity than any other area in the north of Kansas City.³⁶ Regardless of one's race, "approximately 43.0% of Cooley Highlands' population lives in a low-income household, or a household with an annual income of less than \$25,000. This is a high percentage of low-income households for Kansas City and Kansas City Metro."³⁷ All this demographic information reflects that "we" – the congregation of AUMC – are different from others. The demographic data prove that the perception of the survey participants was right: AUMC is an island, a culturally and economically isolated entity in Cooley Highlands.

Step 2-2. The Islamic Center Bosnjak (ICB), Kansas City

The presence of Muslims in the Cooley Highlands is both noticeable and unnoticeable. Women wearing hijabs walk on the streets near AUMC every day. They commute to local stores and Cooley Park. I recognize two couples – two men and two women – who walk around the parking lot of AUMC for exercise. AUMC volunteers see the Muslim neighbors who come to the community food pantry. In most cases, communication between the pantry volunteers and the Muslim clients are minimal because of the language barrier. Most of the AUMC members are ignorant of who constitutes the congregation of the mosque or are indifferent to their existence. I met several long-time members of AUMC who did not know of the Islamic Center at all. The two communities hardly know each other and exist as two separated diasporas in the Cooley Highlands.

The Home, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://places.findthehome.com/l/165633/Cooley-Highlands-Kansas-City-MO>

³⁶ GRAPHIQ, *ibid.* The one-mile radius report of the FullInsite says 76.60% (2016) MissionInsite, *ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

On July 29, 2016, I met Bajram Radoncic, a board member of the Islamic Center Bosnjak (ICB). I found his name in the Kansas City Star, a local newspaper. The reporter who interviewed Radoncic provided me with his contact information. In the article, Radoncic described the historical background of Bosnian refugees in Kansas City. I invited Radoncic to the neighborhood meeting. He is an active participant and the vice president of the Cooley Highlands Neighborhood Association. Ever since I suggested that AUMC and ICB takes turns in hosting the neighborhood meeting, I have visited the mosque more often and have met their imam and board members. I also attended their Friday Midday *sala*.³⁸ The imam said I am the first non-Muslim person to attend their prayer rite. I explained my intention of building relations between AUMC and the Bosnian Muslim community.

Through the meetings with the imam and board members, I learned that the ICB is open to all Muslims in the neighborhood.³⁹ On the day I attended the Friday *sala*, I saw various ethnic Muslim men pray together. They sat close together on the floor, and bowed, rose, and prostrated themselves in unison. The religious grammar of Islam seemed to provide them fellowship beyond language, culture, and ethnicity. The ICB is an ecumenical community.

A six-foot wooden fence surrounds the ICB facility. The entrance to the parking lot is located behind two small local stores known as the “European Store” and the “Corner Store.” They are the grocery stores nearest to the Walnut Grove Apartment Complex. The Muslim residents walk down to the stores or the mosque. The mosque looks like a house behind these stores. An austere sign on the door – “Islamic Center Bosnjak (ICB)” – only identifies what the

³⁸ “Sala” refers to the prayer rite that Muslims do five times a day. Mark Sedgwick, *Islam and Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006), 70.

³⁹ “Most Muslims will still generally go to whichever mosque is closer” (Ibid., 144).

facility is for. There is no religious symbol outside of their building. The inside of the mosque is very simple. It has one big open room and a small kitchen by the entrance door. According to Radoncic, the ICB is the cultural center for Bosnians in Kansas City.

Bosnian immigrants are one of the small Muslim minorities in the United States.⁴⁰ There are around 2,000 Bosnian Americans in the Kansas City area. A recent article in the *Kansas City Star* estimated there to be 30,000 Muslims and 18 mosques in the Kansas City area.⁴¹ The ICB is the only Bosnian mosque in the Greater Kansas City area.⁴² Beyond the religious tasks of the mosque, it is a place for the Bosnian population to network. When a soccer event sponsored by ICB was held in October, 2016, Cooley Park located across the street from ICB was crowded with hundreds of Bosnians.

The ICB is also a memorial chapel for the Bosnians. The first generation of ICB members came to the United States during the Bosnian War.⁴³ Many of them are survivors of the “Srebrenica Massacre,”⁴⁴ a religious genocide that took place in July 1995. Most of the ICB

⁴⁰ “The largest group of Muslims in America (32 percent) is of Arab origin, followed by the American Muslims – mostly African Americans (29 percent). A close third are Muslims of South Asian origin (28.9 percent), followed by smaller ethnic groups – Turks, Iranians, Bosnians, Kosovoars, Malays, and Indonesians.” Zahid Bukhari et al., *Muslims’ Place in the American Public Square* (Rowman: AltaMira Press, 2004), xxxvii.

⁴¹ Karen Ridder, “Gathering in Peace,” Cover Story of 816 North, *Kansas City Star*, August 3, 2016, 11.

⁴² According to the imam, the ICB is one of 65 Bosnian mosques in the United States.

⁴³ “In 1991, Yugoslavia began to break up along ethnic lines. When the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia) declared independence in 1992 the region quickly became the central theater of fighting. The Serbs targeted Bosniak and Croatian civilians in a campaign of ethnic cleansing. The war in Bosnia claimed the lives of an estimated 100,000 people and displaced more than two million.” United to End Genocide, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-bosnian-war-and-srebrenica-genocide/>

⁴⁴ Ibid., “The height of the killing took place in July 1995 when 8,000 Bosniaks were killed in what became known as the Srebrenica genocide, the largest massacre in Europe after the Holocaust.”

congregation lost their family members and friends at Srebrenica. Radoncic mentioned they mourn, pray, and talk about what happened in 1995 at the mosque. Their shared memory of war and exodus to America make their solidarity all the stronger. July 11 is *Srebrenica* Remembrance Day. In the same article of the Kansas City Star, Radoncic said, “The month of July, no Bosnian sleeps.”⁴⁵ The traumas of *Srebrenica* are reinforced whenever the news of islamophobia or xenophobia are on the media. The ICB congregation prays for peace and no more genocide in the world. In the neighborhood meetings, Radoncic kept saying Islam is the religion of peace and stands against the Islam terrorists: “They are not Muslim, because Islam is a religion of peace.”

There are two external similarities between AUMC and ICB. First, the two congregations are similar in size. The membership of AUMC was 392 in 2016, that of ICB around 400.⁴⁶ Average Sunday attendance at AUMC is between 120 and 130; average Friday midday *Sala* attendance at ICB is 150. Second, most members of ICB don’t live in Cooley Highlands but drive to come to the mosque. Only a few Bosnian families live within walking distance of the ICB⁴⁷—which is very similar to the AUMC pattern.

There is a shared mission identity between the two congregations. The ICB values charity as their religious practice. Much as AUMC operates the community food pantry and gives to local charitable organizations, so too the ICB donates food and assists people in the neighborhood. Also, according to Radoncic, the ICB donated a vehicle to *the Della Lamb*

⁴⁵ Will Schmitt, “Bosnian refugees in KC remember ‘hell on earth’ of Srebrenica genocide,” *Kansas City Star*, July 28, 2016, accessed February 1 2017, <http://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article92371497.html>

⁴⁶ Radoncic also said their congregation has 120 households.

⁴⁷ Most of my knowledge and information of ICB are from accumulated conversations with ICB leaders.

Community Services in Kansas City, which provides education and support to refugee families and immigrants.⁴⁸ The Della Lamb is one of three agencies that support resettlement of refugees in Kansas City. Most Bosnian refugees received their assistance when they first came to Kansas City. The Bosnian community supports the service of the Della Lamb, and one of the ICB members works for the Della Lamb.

The missional identity of the ICB confirms that my vision of collaborative mission in this project is going in the right direction. In the November CHNA meeting, I shared the idea of such a collaboration on behalf of the community in which we all worship. Radoncic was interested in learning more about it. I proposed three potential programs: developing a study group, having a fellowship meal, and volunteering at the literacy center. In the following section, I describe what these programs are and examine how our two congregations work for them.

Part Three: Action Plan

Since it is clear that AUMC and ICB are open to develop interfaith connectedness and caring for the whole community,⁴⁹ the goal of my action plan is to create a reconciled community beyond two congregations. Through the following three programs, ICB and AUMC work for building such a relationship and develop a better future for the whole community.

Step 3-1. Exploring the Scriptural Reasoning

In the context of the Midwestern America, local churches have been barely exposed to interfaith dialogue. It explains why the congregational survey reflects that the participants have

⁴⁸ The Della Lamb Community Service is a United Methodist affiliated agency.

⁴⁹ Peter Block used the terminology “Connectedness and Caring for the Whole.” Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1.

no idea of how to initiate a dialogue with their Muslim neighbors even though they regard them as friendly new neighbors. I think AUMC needs a form of interfaith dialogue the church can adopt or a trained moderator who can lead the conversation with Muslims. Through my research, I found “Scriptural Reasoning,” an established form of disciplined interfaith dialogue that is used for Christian-Muslim-Jews conversation. Unfortunately, there is no Scriptural Reasoning group in Missouri. In this section, I introduce the aim and methodology of Scriptural Reasoning and examine how it fits with the context of AUMC and ICB.

The Cambridge Inter-Faith Program explains that Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is differentiated in that “[i]t is not about seeking agreement but rather [about] exploring the texts and their possible interpretations across faith boundaries, and learning to ‘disagree better’ . The result is often a deeper understanding of others' and one’s own scriptures, as well as the development of strong bonds across faith communities.”⁵⁰

In an SR meeting, participants who practice Judaism, Islam, or Christianity read their scriptures, listen to others’ sacred texts, and share their reflections. The practice is intended to deepen understanding of one’s own text. By discovering disagreement or dissatisfaction with other scriptures, SR provides new perspectives when one reads one’s own scriptures and makes each one’s faith mature and healthy.⁵¹ The participants, so-called “reasoners,” are trained how to converse with other religions and build a community.

⁵⁰ The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, Scriptural Reasoning, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/>

⁵¹ Van Lai Thuam Lian, *Scriptural Reasoning as a Practice of the Common Good* (GRIN Publishing, 2016), Kindle.

SR envisions “a network of Jews, Christians, Muslims and others who gather together for shared scriptural study in both academic and non-academic settings.”⁵² The common ground of the three religions lies in the sacred scriptures that become the theological foundation and the practice of faith; each religion identifies itself as the “religion of the book.” The three religions are called the “Abrahamic faith traditions.” These noticeable historical and geographical commonalities of the three religions are also the origin of disagreement and dissatisfaction with others.

When I read the Qur’an for the first time, I felt as if I were in a wonderland. I was surprised to find characters I knew from the Bible and how their stories are narrated differently. The story of Abraham and his family in the Qur’an was different from the story I knew from the Old Testament. The Jesus in the Qur’an was different from the Jesus in the New Testament. The Qur’an denies the narrative of “my” Bible. The more chapters of the Qur’an I explored, the more dissonance I experienced. I assume SR is the place each participant can encounter dissonance in religious experiences and yet learn how to accept otherness in a small group setting. Also, the effort of developing an SR group itself can contribute to building a community, in which religious entities in the community seek reconciliation and collaboration.

Even though it is hard to anticipate how the practice of SR is likely to impact the participants without such a group being a part of my own experience, I admit that at least SR can contribute to building a new spiritual practice: reading scripture regularly with others. SR participants should read the scripture and talk about its meaning with others. Also, they should listen to other participants and their scriptures. It should shatter blindness and fear from

⁵² The Scriptural Reasoning Network, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.srnetwork.org/mission/>

ignorance of other religions. If the SR group works fruitfully, all participants can grow in their knowledge and interpretation of their own scripture as well as that of others. If the SR participants don't learn from each other, the experience could simply affirm the narrowness of one's own doctrinal faith or be abused as the method of evangelism because the purpose of SR is not in concealing tensions and disagreements among religions.⁵³ The culture of open-mindedness, tolerance, acceptance, and hospitality is necessary to accomplish the vision of SR. The ethical effort to create "an environment free from domination and intimidation"⁵⁴ is a prerequisite to such a group working.

Founding an ordinary SR group in the Cooley Highlands seems far off. The more I explore the practice of SR, the more obstacles I find. The external cause is the language barrier. English is the unavoidable foundation of SR. The participants are required to bring an English translation of their scriptures to meetings. Many of the adult Muslims in the Cooley Highlands – the first generation of refugees or immigrants – barely speak English. At ICB they pray in Arabic. The imam's message is in Bosnian. The congregation uses the Bosnian Qur'an. When I talked about the idea of SR, the imam also admitted the language barrier to be an issue. Another issue is that reading the Qur'an daily is not a practice of most ICB members, nor are they trained to talk about it with others.

So instead of launching an adult SR group, I am looking to establish a youth SR group. The second generation of ICB has no language barrier. They speak both English and Bosnian. The imam said he teaches school-age children the Arabic Qur'an every Saturday so they can read the Qur'an by themselves. On April 22, 2017, I visited the ICB school with the confirmation

⁵³ It is called "a risky practice." David Ford and C. Pecknold eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), vii.

⁵⁴ Bukhari, 91.

class of AUMC. It was a preliminary meeting to explore the possibility of a youth SR group. The AUMC group consisted of four teenage students and four adults. The ICB school had two elementary school children and four teenagers. It was the first time that AUMC visited ICB. There was no interactive conversation among the students. Instead, the Methodists watched as the confirmands learned from the imam about how to pray and what to pray in Islam. The AUMC group stayed less than an hour. Yet it was a first step toward building a relationship between the two congregations.

Step 3-2: Ramadan Community Meals

Ramadan is a notable feature of Islam to non-Muslims. The fasting in Ramadan is known as one of the main pillars of Islam, which provide shared religious identity to all Muslims in the world. Ramadan can be compared to the season of Lent in Christianity. Both Lent and Ramadan are regarded as seasons of repentance and forgiveness. Abstinence and worship are the key values both religions practice. “Ramadan is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramadan inspired the Prophet to exclaim: ‘Welcome to the one who purifies!’ Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavor to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings.”⁵⁵

The major difference between Lent and Ramadan comes from the daily fasting and community meals. Ramadan is not only for fasting but also for communal eating. Radoncic said the congregation of ICB also seems bent on keeping this holy season. The ICB members gather

⁵⁵ Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Ramadan the Month of Fasting: Islamic Books on the Quran, the Hadith and the Prophet Muhammad* (Goodword Books, 2014) Kindle Locations 5-9.

together and eat every evening – after sunset – during the month of Ramadan to celebrate the completion of each day’s fast.

In a neighborhood meeting, I proposed the possibility of a fellowship meal event. The imam and ICB leaders invited AUMC to their Ramadan meals. The precise dates of Ramadan change every year. The period of the Ramadan in 2017 is from May 26 to June 25. ICB has invited AUMC to their meals on May 27 and June 25. More than ten AUMC congregants have already signed up for the first meal. It should become a significant event for the life of both congregations. It is another great stride toward a new future of the community.

The hospitality of ICB is exceptional. Radoncic said they are planning to set up tables and chairs for AUMC even though it is not their typical way to have meals at the mosque. My hope is that we participants from AUMC will deepen our understanding of the religious practice and culture of Ramadan. I expect AUMC and ICB to cultivate mutual respect for each one’s religious practice through this fellowship meal.

Step 3-3. Developing Collaborative Mission Projects for the Community

In January, 2017, a staff member of *the Della Lamb Community Service* was invited as a presenter to an adult Sunday School class of AUMC. The class wanted to learn more about the life of refugees and their resettlement in Kansas City after they heard my sermon on interfaith relations. I also attended this class and learned about the resettlement system of refugees in Kansas City. The Della Lamb and other refugee resettlement agencies provide their clients English class, job training and search, financial aid, and administrative assistance for legal documents. However, their service programs only last for five years.

Many refugee families in the Walnut Grove Apartment Complex in Cooley Highlands have been here longer than five years. Yet, as I described earlier, more than eighty percent of the

adult residents can barely speak English. It means they still need the assistance program, including the English class. So the Local Investment Commission (LINC) in Kansas City and the Walnut Grove company opened a Literacy Center in the apartment complex facility in 2017. The center intends to offer English classes, afterschool programs, and a children's library. Right now, the center is looking both clients and volunteers who can assist the staff. The program director of AUMC and I contacted the Literacy Center and started recruiting volunteers from the congregation. I hope there will also be volunteers from ICB and that we can work together at the Literacy Center.

I explained my vision of collaborative mission with ICB to their leaders when I had a meeting with them in December, 2016. At that time, I was looking for an opportunity to provide meals to the homeless in downtown Kansas City on Christmas Eve and the ICB leaders wanted to participate. Unfortunately, the project never happened because of the situation of the host agency that I contacted downtown. The imam and I have agreed to plan it again this year (2017). I will keep developing the programs in which the two congregations can collaborate.

CONCLUSION

This study began with my observation and curiosity. One of the local school bus stops is at the entrance of the apartment complex located across the street from the parking lot of AUMC. In the mornings, I recognized that the students and their parents waiting for the school buses are racially diverse. There is no Caucasian among them except a couple of Muslim Europeans. In the afternoons, I can see people wearing their traditional clothes walk on the Winn Road or cross the church parking lot. When I saw them for the first time, I felt I was in a strange new world, a new context of community. I became curious about how the church experiences the multicultural

and multireligiosity of the Cooley Highlands. Does the congregation ignore the reality of the community and keep their historic sense of identity and missional purpose? Or do the members want to leave the community and relocate the church to the north of the city where most of congregants live? Or do they want to respond to their changed circumstances and adapt their ministry to the needs of their community? Also, I was curious about what AUMC is to the Muslim neighbors who walk by our church.

Through the congregational identity survey, I listened to the voices of congregation. The survey participants are active leaders of AUMC who work together for the community food pantry and meet their clients, who are people from the neighborhood and who include Muslims. I wanted to know their perspectives on the church and the community. The survey results indicate that they have a broad spectrum of theological stances on the personal level, but a shared perception about the cultural and social identity of AUMC. They are generally satisfied with the overall tasks or ministries in which the church is involved. Yet they want the church “to give more emphasis” to the process of “making disciples,” such as through adult education, one’s spiritual relationship with God, sharing the good news of the gospel with the unchurched, and discovering one’s own gifts for ministry and service. On the questionnaire regarding the neighborhood community, the overall answers indicate that AUMC needs to build a relationship with the mosque and work together for the community. To the survey participants, Muslims in the neighborhood are the members of the community who can work together with AUMC for others. Church members are open to the need for interfaith relations, according to their responses. Encouraged by the survey results, I gladly moved on to the next step of my project. I visited the Bosnian mosque and met their leaders.

Living out Islam in the Cooley Highlands has its challenge and dilemmas. The Cooley Highlands is a strange new world to the Bosnian Muslims, too. An ICB member said he had never seen any African Muslims before he came to the United States. The multicultural Muslim society is a new reality both to the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the Cooley Highlands. I also learned that ICB is often the target of hatred, not acceptance, in the neighborhood community. Several times ICB members faced people who drove by the mosque and yelled at them in anger. The recent increase in xenophobia and islamophobia caused by the immigration policy of the new United States government makes the people of ICB feel terrified. The board of ICB has decided to install a gate to the parking lot. Even though they think the appearance of a gate could increase the ignorance and fear of Islam in the Cooley Highlands, they opted to do something for the safety of their congregation.

What I envision is a new future for the Cooley Highlands, in which Christians and Muslims collaborate in caring for the whole community. I am looking forward to building relations between AUMC and ICB and working for the refugees and immigrants in the Cooley Highlands. I believe it will lead to a transformation of the whole community. The action plan I propose on this project is the initial process of collaborative mission. The first step is the icebreaker between the two congregations. We'll meet and eat together during Ramadan 2017. Through this fellowship, AUMC can understand what Ramadan means to Muslims and how they pray, celebrate, and practice charity. The Literacy Center project is a way to begin a collaborative mission. It will be the touchstone of our future projects together.

There are several limitations inherent in the project, and several learning experiences. One of the most serious limitations is the language barrier. As the case of the Scriptural

Reasoning demonstrated, collaboration between the two congregations might be more difficult than I think because of the communication/language issue. When I visited the Friday *sala* at ICB, I conversed with only three congregants who are the board members of ICB. I don't know how many of the members speak English. Because nobody at AUMC speaks Bosnian the communication issue might discourage both congregations when they work together.

Interfaith reconciliation is more than simple fellowship or dialogue. It is about building a community, which “exists for the sake of belonging and takes its identity from the gifts, generosity, and accountability of its citizen. It is not defined by its fears, its isolation, or its penchant for retribution.”⁵⁶ As the pastor of AUMC, I'll keep communicating my missional vision to the congregation. I'll teach and preach about it. As a missionary in the Cooley Highlands, I'll work continually for the collaborative mission with the ICB and develop new community projects. As a practitioner now of ethnographic theology, I'll continue to listen, observe, analyze, and reflect upon the life of congregation and community. A Muslim scholar claimed: “Muslims were not here to assimilate. They were here to be accepted.”⁵⁷ I'll accept my Muslim neighbors and invite them to the collaborative work of transformation of the whole community.

⁵⁶ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008). 30.

⁵⁷ Bukhari, 99.

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Tasks of the Church⁵⁸

Questions	Needs to Give More Emphasis	Generally Satisfied	Receives Too Much Emphasis
1. Providing worship that deepens members' experience of God and the Christian tradition	2	8	0
2. Providing worship that expresses the Gospel in contemporary language and forms	1	8	0
3. Providing Christian education for children and youth	1	8	0
4. Providing Christian education programs for adults	5	4	0
5. Helping members deepen their personal and spiritual relationship with God	4	5	0
6. Sharing the good news of the Gospel with the unchurched	4	4	0
7. Engaging in acts of charity and service for persons in need	1	8	0
8. Encouraging members to act on the relationship of the Christian faith to social, political, and economic issues	2	7	0
9. Providing a caring ministry for the sick, shut-ins, those in crisis, and the bereaved	4	5	0
10. Providing pastoral counseling to help members deal with personal problems	4	6	0
11. Providing fellowship opportunities for members	4	3	0
12. Helping members understand their use of money, time and talents as expressions of Christian stewardship	3	5	0
13. Supporting the world mission of the church through study and giving	3	7	0
14. Helping members discover their own gifts for ministry and service	4	5	0

⁵⁸ Ammermann, 241.

Appendix 2

Table 2. Congregation Identity⁵⁹

Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	Alternative Characteristics
(1) Our church is more influenced by history and tradition.	4	2	3	0	0	(1') Our church is more influenced by contemporary ideas and trends.
(2) Members are similar in values and lifestyle to the people who live immediately around the church.	0	0	1	3	5	(2') Members are very different in values and lifestyle from people who live immediately around the church.
(3) Our church is very involved with the community around the church.	3	1	4	1	0	(3') Our church is not at all involved with the community around the church.
(4) Our church is primarily oriented to serving our members.	0	2	7	0	0	(4') Our church is primarily oriented to serving the world beyond our membership.
(5) Our congregation feels like one large family.	4	2	2	1	0	(5') Our congregation feels like a loosely knit association of individuals and groups.
(6) Our church is known as a prestigious one in the area.	0	0	4	3	3	(6') Our strength notwithstanding, our church is not considered one of the "status" churches in the area.
(7) The church's approach to social issues is basically educational, leaving any action to individual conscience.	2	4	3	0	0	(7') The church's approach to social issues is decidedly "activist." We have a proven history of taking a stand on social issues as a congregation.
(8) The congregation's approach to individual salvation emphasizes education, nurture and gradual growth in the faith.	4	4	1	0	0	(8') The congregation's approach to individual salvation stresses conversion and a born-again experience.
(9) Our congregation gives strong expression to its denominational identity and heritage.	3	2	3	0	0	(9') It would be difficult for a visitor to know to which denomination the congregation belongs.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Appendix 3

Table 3. Religious Beliefs⁶⁰

1. Which one of the following best expresses your view of the Bible?

1 The Bible is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good people, but I do not believe it is really God's Word.

2 The Bible is the record of many different people's responses to God and because of this, people and churches today are forced to interpret for themselves the Bible's basic moral and religious teachings.

6 The Bible is the inspired Word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error.

2 The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be taken literally.

0 None of the above. I think the Bible is _____.

2. Which of the following best expresses your belief about sin and salvation?

1 Sin and salvation really don't have much meaning for me personally.

2 I believe all people are inherently good. To the extent sin and salvation have meaning at all, they have to do with people realizing their human potential for good.

3 All people are sinful, but have only to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved.

0 All people are sinful, but may receive salvation as mediated through the sacraments of the church.

2 All people are sinful, but only have to live morally responsible lives according to God's commandments and Christ's example, to earn salvation.

1 None of the above. I think _____.

3. People sometimes describe God as a "God of Justice" or a God who commands us to bring about justice. Which one of these statements best expresses your belief about what this means?

6 The church should work for justice and support groups that are working to end inequality and oppression.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 247.

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- 3 I think of it at a more personal level. It means I should try to be just and fair in all my dealings.
 - 1 Justice is actually a spiritual term that refers to God punishing evil, rather than activities of the church or individuals.
 - 0 I'm really not sure what I believe about the meaning of God's justice.
 - 0 Frankly, the concept of God's justice doesn't have much meaning to me personally.
 - 0 None of the above. I think _____.
-

Appendix 4

Table 4. Background Information About Yourself⁶¹

1. How long have you been a member of Avondale UMC?
<input type="checkbox"/> [0] Not a member <input type="checkbox"/> [0] One year or less <input type="checkbox"/> [0] 2- 10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> [3] 11-30 years <input type="checkbox"/> [3] Since 1958 <input type="checkbox"/> [1] Longer than 58 years
<input type="checkbox"/> [2] None of the above: <u>40 + years</u>

2. In what denomination were you raised? If you were involved with more than one denomination before you came to Avondale UMC, with which did you have the greatest identification?
<input type="checkbox"/> [7] Methodist <input type="checkbox"/> [2] Baptist <input type="checkbox"/> [0] Roman Catholic
<input type="checkbox"/> [0] Presbyterian <input type="checkbox"/> [1] Other : <u>Mormon</u>

3. How long does it usually take you to travel from home to church?
<input type="checkbox"/> [1] 5 minutes or less <input type="checkbox"/> [2] 6-10 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> [5] 11-20 minutes
<input type="checkbox"/> [0] 21-30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> [1] 31 or more minutes

4. On the average, about how many times have you attended church services during this year?
<input type="checkbox"/> [0] None <input type="checkbox"/> [0] About once or twice a year <input type="checkbox"/> [0] 3 or 4 times a year
<input type="checkbox"/> [0] About once a month <input type="checkbox"/> [1] About 2 or 3 times a month
<input type="checkbox"/> [8] 4 times a month or more

5. Do you have a family member (spouse, children, or person who lives with you) who attends Avondale UMC?
<input type="checkbox"/> [6] No <input type="checkbox"/> [3] Yes, I have _____.

6. How many persons, friends, family members, or neighbors have you invited to visit or join your church in this year?
<input type="checkbox"/> [1] None <input type="checkbox"/> [2] One <input type="checkbox"/> [4] Two-Four
<input type="checkbox"/> [2] Five or more

⁶¹ Ibid., 249.

(If your answer is Yes) Can you describe briefly what you would like to talk about?

Answers:

“how we are children of God, John 3:16, I would want to know more about their Muslim beliefs. Are they secular or religious Muslims? Conversation.”

“God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit”

“Qu # 7 says “If they want to hear about it” (the Bible & Christian faith) I could share what I feel about my faith and answer or try to answer questions they might have.”

“Compare the two religions.”

“Jesus is in their Bible or the Talmud like our Bible?”

“Our Christian religion and faith.”

No Answers: 3

8. What is the ideal relationship of a Christian congregation (Avondale UMC) with a Muslim community (the Bosnian Islamic Center) in the same neighborhood?

Answers:

“Working together to promote understanding of each other. Supporting positive relationship. Finding common ground, advocating to eliminate “fear” of each other so we can live together in peace.”

“Being good neighbor – for example sharing our parking lots, as a way of getting to know each other.”

“We can accept them as good neighbors. If they have need, we can help with, we should do our best to do that. We could see if they are interested in interacting with our congregation so we might better understand each other.”

“Hopefully sharing in fellowship activities.”

“I don’t know as far as I’m concerned they are just people like the rest of us and need help every once in a while. And we are here so we need to help them and have fun with them.”

“Peaceful, open, caring.”

“Working together for community improvement. Would really like a forum for dialogue and co-exploration.”

“Respect and understanding of each other.”

No Answer: 1
