



CHAPTER THREE

Currency of Relationship

Most of us have heard of “six degrees of separation,” which refers to the idea that everyone is on average approximately six relationships away from any other person on earth. This means I can make a chain of “a-friend-of-a-friend” statements that connect me with any other person in this world in six steps or fewer. This theory was originally set out by Frigyes Karinthy and popularized in a play written by John Guare¹.

Three Degrees of Influences

Not so well known is the theory of “three degrees of influence” by Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler. According to this theory, “Everything we do or say tends to ripple through our network, having an impact on our friends (one degree), our friends’ friends (two degrees), and even our friends’ friends’ friends (three degrees). Our influence gradually dissipates and ceases to have a noticeable effect on people beyond the social frontier that lies at three degrees of separation.”² This means if I am happy, my friends are more likely to be happy, and my friends’ friends are more likely to be happy, and my friends’ friends’ friends are also more likely to be happy. Sadly, if I am suicidal, my friends’ friends’ friends are more likely to be suicidal. Whether we know it or not, our network of relationships can spread goodness and blessing, or destructiveness and curses.

Christakis and Fowler wrote:

Social networks have value precisely because they help us to achieve what we could not achieve on our own...networks influence the spread of joy, the search for sexual partners, the maintenance of health, the functioning of markets, and the struggle for democracy. Yet, social-network effects are not always positive. Depression, obesity, sexually transmitted diseases, financial panic, violence, and even suicide also spread.

Social networks, it turns out, tend to magnify whatever they are seeded with.³

Through their research on social networks, Christakis and Fowler describe the “Rules of Life in the Network” as follows:

1. We shape our network.
2. Our network shapes us.
3. Our friends affect us.
4. Our friends’ friends’ friends affect us.
5. The network has a life of its own.⁴

While I know that my social network shapes me, I also know that I can shape my network by influencing my friends, who in turn can influence their friends, and so on. We have a choice in choosing who is in our network or which network we are part of. We also have a choice to decide what to spread through our network. Do we use it to spread lies or tell truth, instill fear or foster trust, propagate hate or share love, control or empower, break

down or build sustainable communities? Christakis and Fowler remind us, “[O]ur interconnection is not only a natural and necessary part of our lives but also a force for good.”⁵

An inspiring worship at a church that moves 100 participants to do good in the community can have the potential of influencing (if each person in the network has at least five friends) 500 people in the first degree, 2,500 people in the second degree and 12,500 people in the third degree to also do good. In a small town of under 10,000 people, this means what happens in worship for a small church can have the potential to influence almost everybody in the community. We have great responsibility, then, for the networks of which we are a part. As a Christian, I am a part of one of the largest faith networks in the world. I need to value my role in this network and do my part in calling the people in my network back to following Jesus, who seeded this network with grace and truth.

Danger of Disconnect

Two thousand years ago, Jesus initiated a network of followers who were charged to be his witnesses, first locally (in Jerusalem), and then to nearby towns and communities (Samaria), and to “the ends of the earth.” It was a daunting task, but in view of what we now know about network theory, the charge was definitely doable, and even realistic, but with considerable dangers. The Christian network did spread and was eventually embraced by the powerful, making it the most popular religion in Europe. But somewhere along the way, many in the network lost their original connection to Jesus. Instead of witnessing to what Jesus had said or done, and to his truth and grace, many became witnesses to the interpreters of who Jesus was— many degrees away from the source—resulting in the spread of many destructive things—such as hatred, exclusion, and even wars in parts of the Christian network.

Even though we are scores of generations away from the first Christians who connected directly with Jesus, faithful Christians must find ways to stay close to the source of our network—Jesus. Our first degree of connection is with the Jesus who confronted the oppressive system of his time by having relationships with the poor, the outcasts, the displaced, the unclean, and the powerless, making those who were on the fringe of the social network the center of his ministry.

The Divine-Human Network

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you... As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (*John 15:5, 7, 9, 12–14*)

Jesus called his followers “friends,” and invited them to abide in him and his love so that they might bear fruit. Jesus also said repeatedly that he was connected with God, who loved him, and in turn he loved them, telling them that they were to spread this love through the developing Christian network. In other words, we are only two degrees of separation from God through Jesus.

At the baptism of Jesus, the voice of God said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Jesus taught us, in the Lord’s Prayer, to call God “Father.” The actual word that Jesus used was “*Abba*,” which was what a child would call his or her father in the language that Jesus spoke. The radical nature of Christianity as exemplified by Jesus emphasizes the parent-child relationship between human and Divine. If we are all children of God, we are all then siblings to each other. Like brothers and sisters in a family, some of us are

really close; some of us might not get along well; some might really dislike each other. And yet we are family—we cannot do away with each other.

Jesus wants us to be no more than two degrees of separation from God, the Creator and Sustainer; Jesus wants us to connect with each other like brothers and sisters. With this divine-human network of grace and truth, we might be able to better understand some of the radical things that Jesus said, such as, “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” Realizing and living out of this divine-human network changes every relationship. It forces us to see each other on the same level: face-to-face.

Let’s do a little imagination exercise on what our community would be like if we all treated each other as siblings. Imagine that a homeless person and a millionaire are brothers; how would they relate to each other when they see each other? Imagine that a CEO of a corporation and a line worker are sisters; how would the company be run? Imagine that the marketing director of a drug manufacturer and a patient are brothers; how would a new drug be advertised? Imagine that a bank loan officer and a potential homebuyer are sisters; what would the loan process be like? Imagine that Democrats and Republicans are brothers and sisters; how would they behave in Congress?

Imagine We Are Brothers and Sisters

Invite members of your community to take a walking tour of their neighborhood. As they walk around, invite them to take notice of the people whom they see. Ask them to imagine that each person they encounter is a brother or a sister. Gather as a large group and invite participants to consider the following:

1. Select one person whom you encountered in your neighborhood. Write out a scenario or a dialogue that you would have with this person as if this person were your brother or sister.
2. Share your dialogue or scenario in small groups.
3. Consider the question: What am I called to do as a result of this reflection?

This foundational belief that we are connected to God through Jesus, making all of us closely related and interconnected like brothers and sisters, is the reason why we need to pay attention to and develop our relationships as a currency of exchange. The Christian community is called to be a network that connects people from very diverse backgrounds and experiences—man and woman, young and old, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, straight and gay, job providers and jobless, political left and political right, those who have a home and those who have none, the filled and the hungry, etc. When our churches, through our membership, make real faithful connections across the diverse people of God, we are building up the divine-human network, making everyone in the network eventually two degrees from God through Jesus. These internal and external networks of relationships are the foundational structures, the frame in which sustainable missional ministries are built.

Currency of Relationship—Internal and External

The currency of relationship consists of the internal and external networks of mutually respectful connections that leaders and members of the church or ministry have. Internal connections include constructive relationships among members and leaders, area churches or ministries of the same affiliation, area denominational organizations, and national and international denominational structures. External connections include constructive relationships with non-members, different racial, cultural and ethnic groups in the neighborhood, people with resources and people in need in the community, civic community leaders, ecumenical and interfaith partners, community and civic organizations, and local businesses.

Even though Jesus’ initial network was composed mostly of Jews, he also commanded his friends to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Building and strengthening the internal network is an essential first step for every church. However, if we are to fulfill Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves and to spread this love to the ends of the earth, we must also learn to develop relationships outside our community of faith, connecting with people in our immediate neighborhood, in the town and city, in our nation, and across the earth.

An Experience of Internal and External Networks

To demonstrate the importance of having a balance between the internal and external networks, here is an activity you can invite a group (between 8 and 30 people) to do:

1. Invite one participant to play “the outsider.”
2. Invite the rest of the participants to create a body sculpture that depicts a tight-loving community.
3. Invite the outsider to attempt to join this community.
4. Invite participants to share their reflections, beginning with: “I notice....” “I wonder...”
5. Now invite participants to create a second body sculpture that depicts a community that focuses on reaching out to outsiders.
6. Invite the outsider to connect with this community. Then invite the outsider to consider finding a place inside the community to rest and to be nurtured.
7. Invite participants to share their reflections, beginning with: “I notice....,” “I wonder...”
8. Invite participants to create a third sculpture that depicts a community that values both internal and external relationships.
9. Invite the outsider to join this community, find a place inside for his or her wellness, and then find a connection to exercise his or her ministry to the outside.
10. Invite participants to share what they learned from this exercise.

Developing the Currency of Relationship

Now as [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way, he entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me!”

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (*Luke 10:38–42*)

Martha-like Ministry

Many in churches are like Martha. We are so used to “doing” church that we might neglect to be more like Mary: to be, to listen, and to relate. We’ve been doing this since the 1950s, when one norm of U.S. society was to go to church on Sunday morning. If a family did not go to a church of any denomination on that day, that family would be looked upon as the “other.” The question of whether or not someone would come to church at all would not have even been in our consciousness. The key to church development was to compete for attendees. The thinking was like this: *If we do our music better, preach our sermons louder, and make our buildings prettier than the church down the road, people will come to our church. We just need to “do church” better, and everything*

will be fine.

Most events and gatherings, as a result, are task-driven. We talk, we give instruction, and we try to convince people to stay. We plan our liturgy in a linear fashion—doing one thing at a time, making sure each piece is done well.

On Sunday morning, the ushers do their ushering by getting people to their seats. The preacher is busy getting ready to do a good sermon. The choir is practicing to do the hymns and anthem well. In many churches, the only time when there is a focus on relationship is during “the peace,” which re-entered church worship in many mainline denominations during the 1970s. Even for some churches, the passing of the peace is task-driven: “Everybody stop shaking hands and hugging; we have more church to do.” We forge on ahead by doing our prayers, doing communion, and doing the coffee hour. We then go home when church is done.

This is what I call a Martha-like church. Not only is our worship task-driven, we also use the Martha-like approach to many other ministries. For example, a feeding ministry that is task-driven might operate this way: We get all the donated food, we get the volunteers to come and make the food, we put the food in bags, we line up the people who come, we hand them the bag of food, then we clean up, and we are done.

In the last sixty years, the U.S. societal norm has shifted. Sunday morning is no longer set aside exclusively for church or any kind of faith-community gatherings. People no longer are necessarily expected to go to church. One of the determining factors for whether one goes to church is relationship. People go to church because they have relationships with people there, and these relationships are also exchanged for other currencies such as truth, wellness, and leadership. As our society’s valuation of faith communities was shifting, many churches stayed Martha-like. Many have not learned to move from “doing” church to being a church with people who relate to people. And sixty years later, many churches are shrinking in attendance and financial resources. We need to refocus our church’s ministries on being relational. In other words, we need Mary-like churches today.

Mary-like Ministry

Like Mary at the feet of Jesus in her house, a relationship-driven ministry focuses on listening. Building relationship is not a linear process but a circular or spiral one, in which we encounter another person at least a few times. Each time we get to know a little more about the person as we listen to his or her story. Each time we encounter each other, we build a little more trust.

What would a Mary-like church look like? What would our programs be like if we were focusing on building relationship as well as getting the job done? Here is an example of one church’s exploration in shifting their feeding program to becoming more Mary-like during a Holy Currencies workshop. Instead of making the food for their guests, they would invite their guests to wash up and make the food together. In the process of cooking side by side, they could listen to each other’s stories and build relationships. One of the members of this church was a chef of a local restaurant. They came up with another Mary-like idea: *What if we ask our chef to offer a cooking class on Wednesday when people come to the food pantry?* They noticed that some of the people had no idea how to cook the food items they got. They would invite a church member to pair up with a guest and, working together, they learned to cook a nutritious meal using exactly what was in the bag of food they received. Another church member heard of a restaurant called Soul Kitchen⁶, opened by the rocker Jon Bon Jovi in central New Jersey. It is like a regular restaurant with linens and silver, waiters, and so forth, but there are no prices on the menu. The guests make a donation for the meal. If they are unable to donate, they can volunteer to work in the kitchen. Church leaders began to envision such a ministry: *What if we create a café or restaurant like Soul Kitchen through which relationships among those who have and those who are in need could be built?*

From Task to Relationship

Here is an exercise in which you can engage church members to re-vision their ministries from task-driven to relationship-driven.

- 1. List some of the ministries of your church, especially the ones that involve interacting with those who are not already members of your congregation.
- 2. Spend some time discerning which approach these ministries emphasize more—are they task-driven or relationship-driven?
- 3. Select one of the task-driven ministries and describe what this ministry will look like (with some details) if it is a relationship-driven ministry.

For example, what would worship look like if it were relationship-driven? What would the sermon be like if it aimed at building relationships with both old-timers and the newcomers? What would the music ministry be like if its purpose was to foster connections among the worshipers? What would prayer time be like, and so on? When should we have the coffee hour? Should we just serve coffee, or should it be breakfast or lunch?

This exercise is one the most effective ways to encourage church members to begin to think missionally through simply adjusting the way they think about ministries—from doing to being with, from accomplishing tasks to building friendships, from converting someone to being a friend, from convincing to listening, from giving instructions to sharing stories, from being Martha to becoming more like Mary.

Contrasting Different Ministry Approaches

Task-Driven	Relationship-Driven
Linear	Circular or Spiral
Talking	Listening
Convincing	Trust-Building
Doing	Connecting
Instruction-Giving	Storytelling

Besides transforming your task-driven ministries into relationship-driven, here are other ways to develop your currency of relationship using other currencies that the church currently has.

Develop and Strengthen Internal-Relationships Currency

Create a special time and place on the church grounds that will enable more relationship-building among members, such as a community room, game night, regular sport events, etc. Many churches already have women’s groups, men’s groups, youth groups, and educational programs. To develop this currency, one might think about creating events at which interactions between these groups are encouraged. Set aside money to develop programs, events, and gatherings that strengthen internal relationships, such as relational-leadership training and pastoral-care ministries. Some churches actually hire a staff person to be the relational minister. Schedule regular times for the church members to explore and dialogue on topics on which they have different opinions and perspectives. These internal “truth events”⁷ are essential for restoring relationships, especially when the church is dealing with a contentious issue. Truth events can avoid breakdown of relationships and might actually rebuild some of the already-damaged ones. Wellness events such as retreats, social events, field trips, game night, a day at the park,

or visiting museums are all great events for building internal relationships. Again, the tendency might be to make these into task-oriented events; careful re-visioning and planning of these events to shift them ever-so-slightly toward relationship-driven ones will turn them into relationshipcurrency developmental events.

Develop External-Relationship Currency

The best way to develop external relationships is to find excuses to have a party. Wellness events for the neighborhood, such as festivals or block parties, are a great way to use your currency of time and place to develop your relationship currency. Get to know the different ethnic groups in your community. Find out what and when their significant cultural celebrations are and offer your church grounds to host these celebrations. You can get local businesses that cater to that population to be part of planning and to provide resources for these events. For example, if you have a substantive Chinese population in your neighborhood, invite the local Chinese community organizations and businesses to have a Chinese New Year celebration on your church grounds, complete with food, decorations, and the lion and dragon dances, while especially embracing the traditions that connect people, such as sharing well-wishes when you meet someone and giving red packets with money in them for the children. These celebrations do not need to be limited to that particular ethnic group. On the day of the Chinese New Year, everyone can be “Chinese” for a day. Most importantly, in order for these celebrations to be a relationshipdevelopment event, church members need to be present and ready to connect with people. Some pre-event relational-leadership training might be required. Other cultural celebrations may include a German Oktoberfest, St. Patrick’s Day, English Teatime, St. Lucia Festival, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, etc. Using the church grounds, you can create relational events and social businesses such as film festivals, a laundry facility, art exhibitions, concerts, a youth theater, a flower shop, a café or restaurant, etc.

Some of these relational events and programs will require financial investments to get them started. But, if a church works through the whole Cycle of Blessings when designing these events, you might find an entrepreneurial way to make these events self-sustaining as well as relational. So set aside money in the church budget for external relationship-building events and programs; it is the best way to mobilize the Cycle of Blessings. Give money to local community and civic organizations and offer to enter into partnership with them to serve the community together—these organization may include community centers, the fire department, the library, a hospital, the human-relations commission, the YMCA, an arts center, etc. Once a month, select a local business that keeps resources flowing within the community. Invite church members to spend their money to buy something or use the services from that business. This is a smaller version of what is called “cash mob.” Imagine the business owner meeting person after person coming into his or her business, all claiming to be from the same church. Over time you may develop very strong relationships with many of the local businesses.

Organizing wellness events for the community is a great way for building external relationships. Invite your neighbors to come and learn how to stay well, both spiritually and physically. Use local people, organizations, and businesses as resources; this way you are also building mutually beneficial relationships with them. Invite people in your neighborhood to come to a health fair, an emergency preparedness conference, a farmer’s market, or a recycling event.

Be aware of the issues that the larger community is facing. Your church can host and facilitate “truth events” such as community forums, dialogue programs, and healing events and engage people in your community to speak the truth to each other. These kinds of gatherings are helpful in building relationships, especially when there has been a traumatic event impacting the community. Invite people in your neighborhood to come to an interracial dialogue series, interfaith dialogues, or a job fair with a strong component for dialogue between the resourceful and the unemployed.

Make sure church members commit their time to attend these events and are ready to connect and listen to

people in order to make a friend. Provide leadership trainings that focus on relationship building for church members and encourage them to use these skills at these gatherings as well as at home, in school, and at work.

Relationship Currency Exchanges

During the Holy Currencies workshops, the discussion has often reverted back to money, even after I have presented the full Cycle of Blessings with all six currencies. We are so conditioned to think about sustainability with money as the only currency that some find it difficult to explore beyond the limits of what money can provide. Here is a real story of a church that unstuck itself from the tyranny of money by focusing on their currency of relationship.

This church was facing a mid-year \$10,000 budget shortfall. This was not because the church was not doing missional ministries. In fact, they were serving the neighborhood with many innovative projects. During the coffee hour that Sunday, the pastor asked those gathered to bring out their phones, look through their contact lists, and select five friends who were not members of the church. The church members were invited to call the five people right then and there and tell them about the ministries of the church to the community—how they spoke the truth, built leadership, and created wellness. Then, they were to ask them for a donation. If twenty-five church members could get four out of five people to give \$100, they would raise \$10,000. And, indeed, within half an hour, they accomplished their task.

Instead of asking how much money they had, which then determined what ministries they could do or could not do, they asked how many relationships they had first. Since they were doing ministries that created wellness, spoke the truth, and developed leadership in the community, the people with whom they had real relationships would gladly contribute financially to support the ministry even though they were not members.

So, money is not the primary issue in most unsustainable churches. The deeper issue is relationship. If we have a strong currency of relationship—both internal and external—this currency can easily be exchanged for money and many other currencies. Let’s take a closer look at the currency of relationship and how it is a principal part of the cycle of blessings.

Internal Relationships Currency Exchanges

Having strong relationships amongst members of the church is essential for a sustainable ministry. These relationships are primary to accomplishing the missional ministries of the church by being exchanged for the other five currencies.

Church members will gladly offer their volunteer hours for ministries when they have strong ties to the church community. They can also provide additional places for ministry beyond the church properties. For example, a church member might provide his or her home or business for ministries that build relationships with people in the neighborhood. Through the strong internal network of the church, raising up leaders is easily accomplished, usually by friends inviting another friend to take up leadership. Members can offer their gifts and skills for ministry, not only as individuals but also working together in teams, because of the relationships that are already developed. Strong relationships among members of the church allow people to speak truth to each other in love. They will stay together even though they might disagree and have very different perspectives on the issues they face. Their relationships will hold them together to struggle to discern the truth. Truthful relationships enable church members to stay healthy spiritually, especially when they are able to work through issues and conflicts constructively. Church members will gladly offer financial support for a church that provides them with a meaningful supportive network of relationships.

In addition to building relationships among members of the local church, denominational churches also need to maximize their relationships with area congregations of the same affiliation. Having working relationships

with other churches of the same denomination will enable the churches to pool their resources of time and place, money, and gracious leadership to create and sustain ministries that can be done together while respecting the unique ministries of the separate communities. Churches in the same area can also enable each other to see the bigger picture of the needs and concerns of the larger community and to find resources to support ministry projects that the churches can do together, by speaking the truth together and creating community wellness. For the same reason, churches with denomination affiliations need to have working relationships with their national and international denominational organizations such as conferences, dioceses, conventions, presbyteries, and synods. These relationships give churches access to resources not available locally. For example, many denominational bodies can provide leadership training that will enable local churches to build relationships, speak the truth, and achieve wellness in the local communities. Sometimes a denominational body may be able to provide money and a place for a new ministry.

The key purpose to developing relationships internally is to create wellness within the church community. In that platform of spiritual, social, and sometimes financial wellness, church members can mobilize the other currencies in the Cycle of Blessings, especially in building external relationships as the prime currency for missional ministries.

Examining Your Internal Network

Gather the people in your community and invite them to examine their internal network with the following instructions:

1. Write down the names of up to five church members whom you know and trust.
2. Recall the last few contacts you had with them. What blessings were exchanged—knowledge, resources, leadership, wellness, truth, money, time, etc.?
3. Form small groups and share your insights from this examination of your internal network. (For a small congregation, another option is to ask each participant to write down his or her name on one side of a notecard, and up to five names on the other side. Using these notecards, a team of people can draw a relationship map by putting names on a large piece of paper and drawing lines representing the relationships between these names.)
4. Conclude by asking the following questions: How does your internal network shape who you are? Who are the key people in your internal network? How have you influenced your internal network through these relationships?

External Relationships Currency Exchanges

Building mutually respectful relationships with those who are not members of the church is the most important currency for missional churches. Research on the so-called emerging generation informs us that this generation wants to belong before they believe.⁸ Therefore, connecting with this generation by building relationships first is the key to reaching the un-churched. Through these relationships, we discover their needs and concerns. We learn to speak the truth with them about their own experience and about their environment.

Rich and Poor

Having genuine relationships with individuals and groups in need will give us the truth of a more complete picture of what is going on in our neighborhood. On the other hand, establishing relationships with individuals,

groups, and organizations that have resources are essential for balancing the sustainability equation. The church, through these relationships, can connect those who have resources and those in need—challenging the resourceful ones to give and serve, while holding up the dignity of those who receive. On the other hand, spiritual wellness flows in the direction of the resourceful ones. The currencies of truth and wellness can flow from a well-developed currency of external relationship. Remember, we are talking about people who are not members of your church. The role of the church by having these relationships is to move the currencies of money, time, and place toward blessings in the wider community, creating wellness.

People from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Interracial conflicts and intercultural tensions are often part of the un-wellness of many communities. If members of a church have real, respectful, trusting relationships with the different racial or cultural groups in the community, we can broker many connections that would not normally occur. We can foster social wellness in the community by using our currency of relationship to bring people from different racial and cultural backgrounds to have meaningful dialogue, thereby achieving understanding, speaking truth, and building stronger community.

Civic Leaders

Do members of your church know their local, state, and federal civic leaders and elected officials—members of the school board or city council, or state senators and members of Congress, etc.? Getting to know civic leaders is vital for the church to be recognized as an essential part of the wider community. These relationships will help the civic leaders to know the concerns and issues of the neighborhood, enabling the civic leaders to do a better job in representing the people. Through these relationships, the church can be an advocate in speaking the truth to power.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Partners

Does your church have working, respectful relationships with the ecumenical and interfaith partners in your neighborhood—Protestant churches, Catholic churches, churches with no denominational affiliation, synagogues, mosques, Buddhist temples, etc.? Having mutually respectful relationships with other faith communities and organizations can be exchanged for gracious leadership so that the partners can work together to address issues that concern the wellness of the overall community. Interfaith partners may also pool financial and other resources, such as those of time and place, to address common concerns. Leadership development can also be done together, as well, by sharing cost.

Local Businesses

Do members of your church know the people working in the local grocery stores, gyms, restaurants, car services, hotels, gas stations, coffee shops, supermarkets, movie theaters, amusement parks, bookstores, major corporations, communications services, computer stores, cleaners, private healthcare providers, artists, art galleries, law firms, banks, locksmiths, accountants, etc.? These local businesses, large and small, are part of the fabric of the neighborhood. Having mutually respectful relationships with the owners and workers of these firms allows church members to listen to their concerns, let them know about the ministries of the church, and develop potential mutually beneficial community projects.

Community and Civic Organizations

Do members of your church know the people working in the local community center, post office, YMCA, library, parks, hospitals, public transportation agency, health centers, elderly housing complexes, children services,

schools, shelters, hostels, community gardens, farmers' market, recreational facilities, public gardens, police department, fire department, courts, hospice organizations, social services, or government agencies, to name (more than) a few? When we have working relationships with these organizations, there is even more potential for working together on mutually supportive projects. It is impossible to have relationships with all of these businesses and community establishments, but the more workable relationships you have, the more possibilities your church will have in creating shared ministries for speaking the truth, creating wellness, and developing gracious leadership in the community.

Environment

Do members of your church have a deep relationship with the earth? Have they learned from nature's way of recycling and recirculating resources? Even though most of us use money to buy our food and pay for the transportation of water and energy, we need to know where our water, energy, and food come from. Having a mutually respectful relationship with the environment means knowing we are interconnected with the earth and that everything we do impacts the well being of the environment. We need to know we are part of the link of recirculating the earth's resources, and not just consumers of the same. If nature takes care of us with the abundance that it produces, how do we take care of nature? Listening to the earth and knowing what the earth needs to maintain its balance so that it can continue to regenerate itself will be exchanged for the currency of truth and wellness for all.

Examining Your External Network

Gather the people in your community and invite them to examine their external network with the following instructions:

1. Write down the names of up to five people in the wider community who are not church members and with whom you have respectful and trusting relationships.
2. Recall the last few contacts you had with them. What blessings were exchanged—knowledge, resources, leadership, wellness, truth, money, time, etc.?
3. Form small groups and share your insights from this examination of your external network. (Another option is to list all external groups and names mentioned by participants. Categorize them according to possible external relationships listed in this chapter.)
4. Conclude by asking the following questions: How does your external network shape who you are? How have you influenced your external network through these relationships? As a church community, where are your strengths in your external network? Where are we lacking in relationships in the wider community?

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Relationship Inventory

Gather leaders of your church and take an inventory of the internal and external relationships of your church using the two tables provided in Appendix A.

Internal Relationship Inventory:

1. Name the key persons or groups who have been involved in building relationships in your internal

network, whether among church members, among area churches, with area denominational organizations, or with national and international denominational structures.

2. Rate these relationships: None – weak – okay – strong
3. For what currencies and other blessings can these relationships be exchanged?

Internal Relationship Inventory:

1. Name the key persons or groups who have been involved in building relationships for your external network: with people not already members; with different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups in the neighborhood; with individuals and groups with resources, or individuals and groups in need; with civic and community leaders, ecumenical and interfaith partners, local businesses, civic and community organizations, and environmental groups.
2. Rate these relationships: None – weak – okay – strong
3. For what currencies and other blessings can these relationships be exchanged?

For the visual learners, draw a network map of your church or ministry based on the completed inventories of internal and external relationships. Draw a big circle on a piece of paper. Put the internal network inside the circle and the external network outside the circle. Draw lines to represent the connections among the key people and groups.

1. As you work through the two exercises, what do you notice and wonder about...
...where your strengths lie?
...where your struggles occur?
2. If you were to increase your ministry's missional effort and its sustainability:
What do you need to pay attention to?
What adjustment would you make to increase the effectiveness of your network, both internal and external?
3. In what ways can you assist the leaders and members of your church or ministry to increase the effectiveness of their ministry network, whether internal or external?

Develop a plan to continue to strengthen existing relationships by building up the capacity of the internal network. More importantly, develop a plan to enable church members to build mutually respectful external relationships in the areas where you are deficient.

Cornerstone and Living Stones

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone. (*Psalms 118:22*)

A cornerstone is the first stone set in the construction of a building's foundation, from which all other stones will be set in reference, thus determining the position of the entire structure. In a human community, each person is like a stone (a living stone), connecting and supporting each other, forming a structure and a network of relationships. I have seen communities that are strong, healthy, and sustainable, characterized by a spirit of abundant living in which there is room for everyone. I have also seen communities that are not sustainable, characterized by infighting, unhealthy competitions, and a spirituality of scarcity. We can always discern why a certain community is sustainable or not by discovering the cornerstone from which the community is built.

But unlike a physical building—whose cornerstone, once laid, cannot be changed—human communities are

fortunately made of living stones. We can reset the position of our community's cornerstone, thereby reorienting our community toward being missional. Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. Jesus, at the home of Martha and Mary, reminded us that relationship is the cornerstone of his community. From there, we can build the network of relationships, which is the church. When we reset the cornerstone of the church with relationships, everything is reoriented. Everything will have to be reconsidered and changed in order to strengthen internal relationships and expand our external network. We need to reorient the way we think about ministries so that everything we do has to do with building our currency of relationship in order to move toward becoming a missional and sustainable ministry.

Here are some of the ways we can help our community to reorient toward being relational by helping them notice, acknowledge, and value relationship as a currency.

Reports: The regular reports from paid staff and volunteers can include a section on relationship. For example, in a pastor's report to the church council, vestry, or session, the pastor can report what percentage of his or her time is spent on building relationships, both internal and external. The report can include the number of relationship-building events that he or she had facilitated, the number of pastoral visits, news of connections made in the community with local businesses, civic and community leaders, interfaith partners, etc.

Ministry Review: In the evaluation of every event, include a reflection on relationship building. *How did we do on building more relationships in this event?* Use the growth of relationships as a marker for the success of all programs and events. Survey newer members and ask them how they initially became connected with the church. Track the relationship networks that made that happen. Affirm and recognize individuals and groups who were keys to making these connections with newcomers.

Worship: Include a time for church members to share the new friends they made during the week and then invite the community to pray together for these new friendships. In addition to offering money, ask church members to name new relationships they have developed during the week. The community is invited to pray for these new friends by name during worship and throughout the week.

Meetings: Build into every meeting a time for relationship building.

Narrative Budget: The annual budgeting process can include a section on relationships. Categorize the different programs as internal and external relationship-building ones. The budget presentation to the congregation should also include how different budget items are important in building internal and external relationships.

Leadership Development: In every leadership-training event, include and emphasize the importance of a relational approach to ministry, making sure trainees understand that building relationships is a major part of being a leader. Include skills in listening, connecting, trust-building, and storytelling.

New Ministries: In the development and visioning of new ministries, include reflections on how the new ministry builds the internal and external relationship networks. Set relational approaches as the cornerstone of the ministry.

Expanding Your External Relationship Network

Here is an activity that you can use to develop your external network and help church members value the currency of relationship:

1. Invite church members each to consciously build respectful relationships with three people in the wider community this week—for example, get to know the gas station attendant, the head librarian, a postal

worker, the school superintendent, the fire chief, the police chief, the corner grocery store owner, a janitor at the school, a homeless person at your free-lunch program, the head of a major corporation in your community, a teacher in the local college, etc.

2. Gather the group to share their experiences of attempting to start relationships in the community. Have the group share their concerns and listen to the issues they heard.
3. In addition to offering money during church worship, church members are invited to write the names of the people they have recently established relationships with on pieces of paper and put them in the offering plate as well. During prayer time, the community is invited to pray for each person by name.

¹ Frigyes Karinthy proposed the theory in his 1929 short story "Chains," popularized in the play "Six Degrees of Separation" by John Guare.

² See Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, *Connected* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 26–30.

³ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁶ See chapter 12 for full description of Soul Kitchen.

⁷ See chapter 5 on Currency of Truth for a full description of a truth event.

⁸ See Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 158–59.