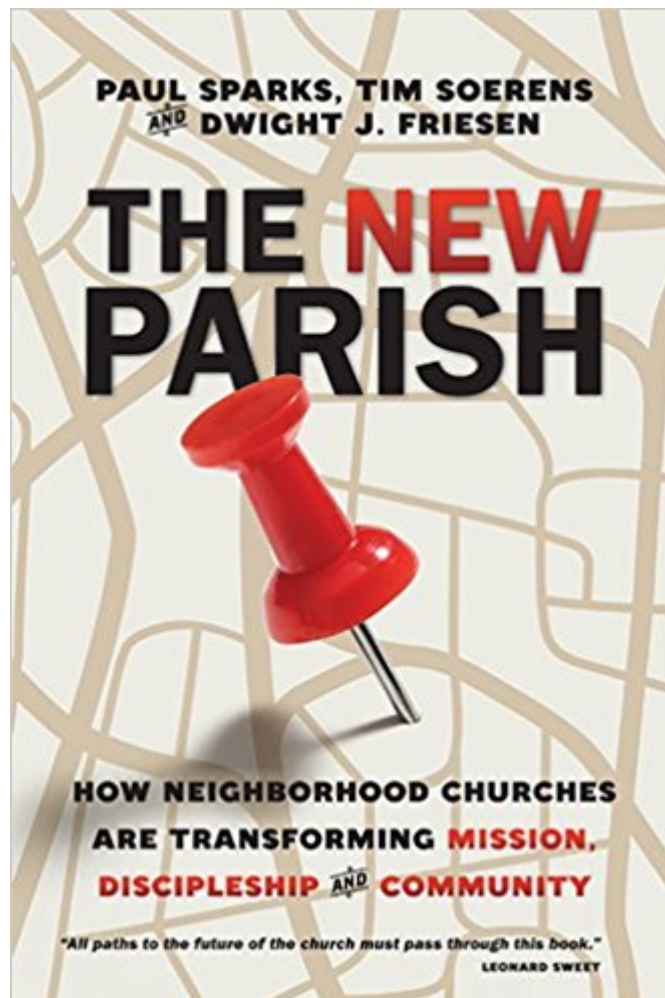




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The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship And Community



Synopsis

2015 Christianity Today Award of Merit (The Church/Pastoral Leadership) 2014 Readers' Choice Awards Honorable Mention 2014 Best Books About the Church from Byron Borger, Hearts and Minds Bookstore "When . . . faith communities begin connecting together, in and for the neighborhood, they learn to depend on God for strength to love, forgive and show grace like never before. . . . The gospel becomes so much more tangible and compelling when the local church is actually a part of the community, connected to the struggles of the people, and even the land itself." Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen have seenâ•in cities, suburbs and small towns all over North Americaâ•how powerful the gospel can be when it takes root in the context of a place, at the intersection of geography, demography, economy and culture. This is not a new ideaâ•the concept of a parish is as old as Paul's letters to the various communities of the ancient church. But in an age of dislocation and disengagement, the notion of a church that knows its place and gives itself to where it finds itself is like a breath of fresh air, like a sign of new life.

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Customer Reviews

"The authors explore how the limitations of staying rooted in a particular place actually provide opportunities for transformation and mission. This is a counterintuitive notion for churches that have bought into the mobile and transient values of our culture." (David Swanson, Christianity Today 2015 Book Awards, January/February 2015)"Faithfulness needs to encompass more than worship to include the mundane activities of everyday life, according to The New Parish. In prophetic tones

the authors suggest that if the church cannot be present and involved in its neighborhood, it has lost its way. These theologically trained authors all propose a new parish. Follow Jesus into your neighbourhood with other followers of Jesus. This means 'taking your bodies, your locations and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them.' If a church is in, and for, the parish, everything changes, and might result in what they call 'slow church.' . . . This book would be an excellent resource for small group study." (Henry Neufeld, Canadian Mennonite Magazine, September 10, 2014)"Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen have seen . . . how powerful the gospel can be when it takes root in the context of a place, at the intersection of geography, economy and culture. This is not a new idea, the concept of a parish is as old as Paul's letters to the various communities of the ancient church. But in an age of dislocation and disengagement, the notion of a church that knows its place and gives itself to where it finds itself is like a breath of fresh air, like a sign of new life." (Light Magazine Canada, June/July 2014)"As someone who is doing church as parish, I have found this book a very helpful guide in practically answering what a church could look like as it is lived in community. What I also appreciate is the authors do not gloss over the challenges presented and the hard work involved in developing a new parish. They acknowledge the journey is complex, the transition difficult, and experienced guides are few. This is a resource that will definitely be a textbook for those wanting to embrace a localized view of church in years to come." (Dave Harder, Mennonite Brethren Herald, May 2014)"The authors offer fresh insights into the fragmentation of Western Christianity and explain why moving from megachurches to neighborhood churches is impacting the spread of the gospel." (CBA Retailers + Resources, April 2014)"What would it look like if God's reign were to be more fully realized in your neighborhood? In The New Parish, Tim, Paul and Dwight team up to answer this question in concrete ways. With a rich theology of place and practice, they guide us in how to have a humble posture and be a faithful presence in the neighborhood. This is a must-read!" (JR Woodward, national director of the V3 Church Planting Movement, author of Creating a Missional Culture)"Quietly, beneath the purview of the dominant social systems, a revolution is taking place. The church is returning to the local. In The New Parish, three subversives plot the church's simple way back into the neighborhood. The result is flourishing, renewal of the Spirit, indeed the gospel taking on flesh! This book is your invitation to the revolution!" (David Fitch, Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology, Northern Seminary, and author of Prodigal Christianity)"In The New Parish, Paul, Tim and Dwight offer a theologically rich vision of church life intertwined with the places we inhabit. In stark contrast to the displacement and fragmentation that dominates our age, this important book calls us to slow down, become rooted, and experience a taste of the abundance and healing that God intends for all creation. Church

leaders take heed, the new parish is, without question, the church of the future!" (C. Christopher Smith, coauthor of *Slow Church* and editor of the *Englewood Review of Books*) "The New Parish offers a vision for Christian community that honors place amidst fragmentation. This book will inspire a new generation of Christian leaders who will answer the yearnings of all of us for authentic community." (Tremper Longman III, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California) "In a world of increasing mobility, fragmenting relationships and a loss of any real sense of covenant, we need learn again to attend to the various people and places where God has located us. This book is a much-needed antidote to the endemic alienation of our time. Missionary grow home!" (Alan Hirsch, author, activist, dreamer) "In a society addicted to the next technique, a thought-provoking and insightful book, *The New Parish*, provides a refreshing solution. God has a sense of place, and when followers of Jesus share life together and put down roots in a specific location, they become something new, something that has the power to transform and energize that community. God is at work in neighborhoods, and the church does well to pay attention." (Felicity Dale, author of *An Army of Ordinary People* and coauthor of *Small Is Big!*) Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are on the leading edge of a massively important return to place-based ministry. I have been an admirer of their frontline work in this area for years and am now excited to see their platform grow through this book. If the missional church movement hopes to still be around for the next generation, it is going to have to keep the question of place front and center. *The New Parish* does just that while continuing to push this discussion in challenging and fruitful directions." (Eric O. Jacobsen, author of *The Space Between*) "At last a candid, thoughtful, insightful book that provides a practical framework for doing church in the city. *The New Parish* offers a much-needed roadmap for regrounding the church in the soil of communityâ€”the key to recovering its transformative power in our urbanizing society." (Bob Lupton, founder and president of FCS Urban Ministries) "The New Parish is a gift to church leaders like me. Though the authors challenge the most fundamental understandings of the church's mission and its presence in the neighborhood, they do so as practitioners deeply invested in its flourishing. This book sets out a challenging agenda for the local church, but with such encouragement and hope that one is left in no doubt that the challenge is within reach. In fact, it's right outside our front doors." (Simon Carey Holt, pastor, Collins Street Baptist Church, Melbourne, Australia) "Paul, Tim and Dwight each live the reality they describe. I know they've paid high prices for taking a journey born out of biblical imagination and profound instincts for the practice of gospel life in North America. The path they describe is not and will not be popular. It sounds sexy and seems full of romance, but, as they well know, this is another kind of journeyâ€”without glamor, romance or individualistic heroismâ€”focused on the agency of God and the disorienting, disturbing,

disrupting work of the Spirit. We are being invited to refound the church for the sake of the healing of neighborhoods and communities in the name of Jesus. Read this book and ask how you can practice life in the 'parish.'" (Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Network*)"Something's up in neighborhoods right across this country. Kids raised in the generic of American suburbs are becoming adults who yearn deeply for a sense of place, for belonging, for community. The New Parish is a passionate call for churches to join in the beautiful work of placemaking, not only as a response to this yearning but as a core expression of the mission of God in our world." (Michael Frost, author of *Road to Missional* and *Incarnate*)"The New Parish is, hands down, one of the most sensible and simultaneously exhilarating books I have read in a long time. Rich in specific details and concrete examples of a new old way, it will serve its readers as both instructor and encourager. The underlying, foundational concepts here, together with the central theme of localization, make for prophetic reportage, and the result is as exciting as it is rife with hope." (Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Age of the Spirit*)"Here is a must-read book for those who are looking for creative ways to join with others in becoming a life-giving presence in your neighborhood in these uncertain times. We urge you to use this book as a study guide in your congregation in reimagining how to become a source of compassion and hope in your parish." (Christine and Tom Sine, Mustard Seed Associates, www.msaimagine.org)"The New Parish is a needed admonition on what the church must become if she is to rise to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The authors provide fresh applications of ancient truths, offer sober reflection with a pastoral touch and create a viable framework for fruitful engagement. I would recommend this book for all who are serious about what the church and her faithfulness in the twenty-first century can look like." (David Hillis, president, Leadership Foundations)"If you cut Paul, Tim and Dwight, they bleed parish. The hope and integrity of the twenty-first-century Christian church may require that the rest of us learn to do the same." (Tony Kriz, author of *Neighbors* and *Wise Men*)"This is a must-read book for those who know deep down in their bones that the life of following Jesus is meant to be anything other than a weekly jaunt to a building referred to as a church. Rather than a mere critique, this compelling, winsome and wise book is an incendiary love letter that invites us to develop the eyes, heart and imagination to follow what the Spirit is already doing to foster reconciliation, justice and care in our neighborhoods. Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are potters whose artistry has required them to immerse themselves in all that is broken, dirty and beautiful about the church and envision a new parish life that offers us all a taste of the banquet of reconciling love. Come, taste and see." (Dan B. Allender, professor of counseling psychology and founding president, The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology)"This book articulates the answer to a question many of us have been asking: What

might it look like to do ministry in a real way in the neighborhoods in which we live and work? It is a wonderful combination of practical insight and fresh vision. We will be using this book as a catalyst for our own missional work and as a resource to pass on to others who are also eager to engage their neighborhoods in practical ways in the name of Christ." (Leanne and Dallas Friesen, pastors of Mount Hamilton Baptist Church)"Local. Global. Presence. Linking. Rooting. Parish. Commons. Integration. These words will radiate with meaning when you finish this important, needed, comprehensive and truly worthwhile book. I would wish it upon every seminarian, church leader, church member and church dropout. The New Parish is one of the most important books on the church, Christian identity and mission that I've read in a decade." (Brian D. McLaren, author of *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?*)"The New Parish offers a rich, thoughtful exploration of the characteristics and processes of ministry that is deeply rooted in faithful presence in local neighborhoods. This book is an important reflection on how to overcome one of the biggest threats to the vitality of ministry in the Global North: disembodied practice that doesn't recognize or collaborate with the active presence of the Holy Spirit incarnate in our communities. I particularly recommend The New Parish for denominational leaders and church planters. It will give you critically important advice for leading the church into the future." (Alexia Salvatierra, coauthor of *Faith-Rooted Organizing*)"As our vehicles and gadgets get faster and faster, people are hungry for a place to belong and a people who know them. What a gift the notion of the parish is for our time. And what a joy to know this collective that's figuring out how to breath life into this ancient notion in our time." (Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, author of *Strangers at My Door*)"The New Parish is the faith-based version of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Not only do the authors make a compelling case for getting out of the sanctuary and into the neighborhood, but they provide the inspiration and advice to make it possible. This book is full of inspiring stories and practical lessons to help Christians connect with their neighborhoods and, in the process, connect more deeply with one another and their faith." (Jim Diers, Seattle's former director of the Department of Neighborhoods and author of *Neighbor Power*)"A bold, refreshing exploration of how to be the church in the twenty-first century. Rooted in experience, theological reflection and ecclesial study, this book invites us to express church in a way that commits to a people and a place, making possible real transformational change of persons, communities and systems of degradation and injustice. A practical guide for any group of people committed to relevant church expressions, The New Parish will encourage and inspire you to continue the slow and patient work of nurturing the body of Christ in our broken but hope-filled neighborhoods." (Phileena Heuertz, author of *Pilgrimage of a Soul* and cofounder of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism)"What is so significant about this book is

that its content is the direct fruit of a Spirit-led convergence between friends. Dwight, Tim and Paul's profound reflections are rooted in the relational journey they have been on for meaning, connectedness and a way of being that bears evidence of 'thy kingdom come' in their own respective contexts. Together they offer us a taste of what it looks like when the church becomes a faithful presence in a given time and place. Those who have experienced the kinds of things they talk about through their stories will find affirmation. Those who still yearn for it will find reason to keep hope alive. The book exudes the patient and passionate commitment to praxis that the authors live out in their neighborhoods. We are grateful for their collective contribution to the kingdom community." (Tom and Dee Yaccino, *Del Camino Connection*) "Across North America and around the world, churches are moving into the neighborhood, faithfully rooting themselves there and connecting with neighbors to weave a fabric of care in their communities. *The New Parish* is the handbook for that movement. Paul, Tim and Dwight have been mentors in my own journey into place. It's likely that my copy of their wise, inspiring and even essential book will never make it on to my bookshelf; I'll keep it close at hand and return to it again and again." (John Pattison, coauthor of *Slow Church* and managing editor of *CONSPIRE Magazine*) "Journeying with these three brothers through the various iterations of Western Christianity into the 'new parish' reminds me of the traveling school of the prophets in ancient Israel--except they are walking with me in my hood. Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are giving us new eyes to see and convening a new space for what is emerging in our context by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In *The New Parish* we are being invited to participate more fully and faithfully into this Spirit-led, ancient-future social technology of the kingdom of God. Are you in place?" (Anthony Smith, core team, *Transform Network*, and pastor/co-missioner, *Mission House*) "What makes this book so refreshing is that it is not another program for church renewal and growth. Instead, it is a call, a guide, and a toolkit written by three collaborators engaged on the frontier of the twenty-first-century Christian community. In contrast to a church blown by the fragmenting winds of capitalist creative destruction, consumerism and individualism, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen offer us a hopeful alternative vision. This is a church that abides in fragile dependence on the Spirit and sees in the bricks, mortar and faces of its neighborhood the real substance of the kingdom of God. Even more, they present us with practical suggestions on how those of us seeking to feel our way forward in this time of transformation can begin to cultivate such formative, missional and deeply relational communities." (Dan Rhodes, editor-in-chief for *The Other Journal* and coauthor of *Free for All*) "All paths to the future of the church must pass through this book." (Leonard Sweet, professor, *Drew University*, *George Fox University*, and author of *The Well-Played Life*) "Everyone wants 'tweaks'--slight adjustments that will

finally be the silver bullet, costing very little and doing little to challenge our prevailing ideas and ideals of ministry. They don't exist! What is needed for the church today are wild ideas that line up with the story of Scripture. In *The New Parish*, we finally have a group of friends telling their stories and giving us something radical to consider: behaving as Jesus would in our neighborhoods. This book will blow some circuits, but seriously, aren't you tired of reading the same stuff in different packages? Read at your own risk." (Hugh Halter, author of *Flesh and The Tangible Kingdom*) "Teeming with fresh ideas and rich energy for the future of the church. The authors fully recognize the sorry state of much of the church in our culture, but insist, in most imaginative ways, that another way of church is possible. It is all about relationship, listening, communicating and caring in bodily, concrete ways. *The New Parish* reveals why such a practice is deeply grounded in the gospel and how this is contrary to so many current church strategies. This is hands-on missional ecclesiology in its most generative mode." (Walter Brueggemann, author of *Journey to the Common Good* and *Sabbath as Resistance*) "The traditional idea of a parish is just what this book is reclaiming--'churches rooted in the neighborhood.' The idea and reality of a parish used to be geographical. Those called to lead the parish did not organize for the purpose of drawing people to a specific theology or affinity or program. Done well, those called to lead 'read' their neighborhood and responded. They did not wish for 'other people,' they thanked God for the people in their neighborhood, put down roots, built relationships and incarnated the body of Christ. This book is an attempt to reclaim that traditional understanding in a new day for a new generation. It is much needed, and I am so thankful for it." (The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel, VIII Bishop of Olympia) "Time and space are honored in this book. The neighborhood is honored in this book. The kingdom of God is proclaimed in ways that are ancient and new. Sparks, Friesen and Soerens are not wild-eyed dreamers, but make no mistake, they have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. What these creative pastors understand is that there is, in fact, a new parish. It calls for deep local practice fueled by incarnational presence, solidarity and collaboration with the Spirit in the neighborhood. Much of theological education seems to miss that point. Warning: Don't read this book unless you care about the ministry of the church in the next decade." (Keith R. Anderson, president at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology) "Strong communities, strongly rooted in place, are the future: for food, for energy, but also for our spiritual life. This is a powerful account of a necessary future." (Bill McKibben, author of *Wandering Home*) "This book introduces a way of understanding the local church grounded in appreciation for where and when God has placed it. . . . Church leaders who get that they need to learn to see and listen first of all to God and to their parish context will cultivate practices of discernment for themselves and the communities they

lead. In this way they will 'spark the communal imagination toward Spirit-led action in the parish' and "as the stories in the book demonstrate" plant seeds for ministry that will bear much fruit." (Aileen Van Ginkel, Faith Today, November/December 2015)"We are accustomed, as the authors here argue, to 'living above place': leading individualized lives within a fragmented, globalized economy. Real gospel transformation has to start in our neighborhoods, as people root themselves" their spirits, emotions, and bodies "in a particular place. The New Parish shows how believers can come together, both within the church and beyond, for the good of their communities. If you aren't jazzed about what God is doing in your neighborhood after reading this book, it might be time to move." (D. L. Mayfield, Christianity Today, September 2015)

Paul Sparks is a Parish Organizer and Social Entrepreneur. His place-based expertise and trusted friendship in neighborhoods across North America make him an indispensable consultant to faith communities, academic institutions, and community organizations. Paul speaks for strong resilient relationships within the parish, and brave collaborative links across places. Paul is the co-founder of Local Life: Coalition for Livable Communities, the Parish Collective: Rooted and Linked for Parish Renewal, and Urban Landscaping: Rapid Placeshaking Collaborations. He is also an instructor for the Leadership in the New Parish at the Seattle School of Psychology and Theology and is the co-founder of the Inhabit Conference. Paul lives in an urban neighborhood at the heart of Downtown Tacoma, Washington with his co-conspiring wife Elizabeth. They pastor a growing faith community comprised of friends, artists and entrepreneurs seeking a common life together with their neighbors.

Tim Soerens is a pastor, social entrepreneur, and co-founding director of the Parish Collective. As co-director of the Parish Collective he convenes ministry leaders, teaches, and consults with organizations seeking human flourishing in particular neighborhoods while also working collaboratively across the city. He is also the co-founding producer of the Inhabit Conference and the new "Leadership in the New Parish" certificate program at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. As social entrepreneur, Tim is a founding adviser to the Hub-Seattle, an innovative co-working space for change makers in both non-profit and business sectors. He earned a BA in Rhetorical Sciences from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Masters of Divinity from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. He lives in the Wallingford neighborhood of Seattle with his wife Maria-Jose and their son.

Dwight J. Friesen (DMin, George Fox University) has over a dozen years of missional pastoral experience and is currently Associate Professor of Practical Theology at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. He is passionate about peace-making, interfaith and missional-ecumenical conversation, and about communally and

personally embodying the Gospel of Jesus Christ in local contexts. In 1996, Dwight pioneered an emerging network of simple churches in Seattle called "Quest-A Christ Commons." He has served as a guest lecturer and spiritual director around the country and is a co-founder of the Inhabit Conference. As a speaker and consultant for churches, denominations and mission agencies, he speaks internationally on issues of contextual ministry, postmodern culture, social systems and missional Christianity. He also served for a number of years on the Faith & Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. Dwight, his wife Lynette, and their son are active members of the Lake Hills neighborhood of Bellevue, Washington.

Lots of us have theories on where the Holy Spirit is leading the church in North America in the 21st century. Lots of angsty people hope the church will reach Millennials. Lots of doomsayers believe the Spirit is letting the church die. I'm putting my money on one basic idea: The Spirit is leading churches to re-root in their communities, in their local neighborhoods. Many churches do this already, natively. But surprisingly a lot less do than could. It's not uncommon for people living in a neighborhood to have little or no contact with the community of people who worship together in a church building right on their block. Anecdotally, there are at least five churches I can walk to in my own neighborhood where I don't know a single person who attends there. I don't know where their members live. I've never met anyone who attends these churches. Also anecdotally, when I tell people I am the pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, even if they live right next door to the church, more than once I have had them ask, "Where is that church?" Or: "Is that the church there on Rolling Hills somewhere?" There are perhaps many reasons why individual churches are in the neighborhood while not being in the neighborhood. If they are a church like ours with a denominational affiliation that tends to attract members from across the region rather than in the specific neighborhood, the church may not have as part of its identity the notion that it is a part of the neighborhood. It is, on the other hand, surprising to me that congregations don't take the injunction from Jesus, "Love your neighbor," as a practical and geographical suggestion. In other words, as a church, if we are to love our neighbor, we might start right next door, with our actual neighbors... with the school next to us, the other churches nearby, the rehab center down the street, the offices and businesses around the corner, the POA down the block. This is why I am so attracted to Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen's new book, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*. They have captured in this book the heart of a movement that I believe will be the signal movement of local congregations in the 21st century. Churches will thrive in community by

re-rooting in their local communities. On one level, the book brings nothing radically new to the conversation. Community organizing has been around for a while. Neighborhoods have been rediscovering themselves not just from a Christian perspective, but in the post-modern era also. What is helpful about the way these three pastors frame the conversation, however, is by understanding the parish as an integral part of designing fresh expressions of neighborhood life. First, they emphasize that many of us have gotten into the habit, unfortunately, of living above place. In our global, networked world, we know more people on Facebook than in our neighborhood, and think of ourselves as a part of interest groups more than our block. So the book is first of all an invitation to live in rather than above place. Second, these pastors help us define the new parish in ways that has resonances with the old parish model, but with enlivening new modalities. As just one example, since many churches often exist even within one neighborhood, the new parish model invites the possibility of collaboration and mutual mission together in the neighborhood across denominational lines. Additionally, in the new parish, the neighborhood contributes to the form of the church as much as the church helps define the parish.

Neighborhoods, and the way they mutually care for each other, can teach churches something about love and faithfulness. Overall, the authors of *The New Parish* adopt a mentality of the new commons, and strive to find the church in all of life. The book doesn't simply redefine the relationship between church and neighborhoods. It is up to some ecclesiological work, redefining the nature of the church itself. The church is now defined by the way it faithfully presences itself in the midst of the new commons. *The New Parish* is published by IVP Press, which is both a strength and a weakness. It's strong on offering devotional resources for readers of the book to think through the spirituality of the transition to a new parish way of thinking. It is soft on some of the ethnographic and social science research I think could be really fruitful in convincing readers why a strong re-rooting of congregations matters for redevelopment in communities and neighborhoods. Perhaps Dwight Friesen, the author who is also on seminary faculty, will write some kind of companion piece that picks up more of this research. I would love it if he did. My favorite chapter is the chapter on re-rooting itself, chapter 7. The authors recognize that if we are going to let re-rooting inhabit our imaginations, we are going to need to imagine it on three levels. First, we are called to re-root on a personal level. We are called to get to know our neighbors, wherever we actually individually live. Then, congregations are being called to re-root in their local neighborhoods. Then, third, we are called to re-root with other people of faith in our neighborhoods. This will look like ecumenical partnerships, or groups from different denominational affiliations who are committed to causes in our neighborhoods. I have seen some of these practices already at work in our own community. We

have a group of churches who have identified a neighborhood in which they wish to serve a weekly community meal, because there are hungry people. People of faith are partnering together to build community gardens, set up Free Libraries, tutor at the schools, and more. Often, these kinds of neighborhood re-rooting are even transcending religious boundaries. We have served our meal with the youth group from the synagogue. We celebrate congregational ministry in the summer with congregations of people from at least three historic religious traditions. The authors conclude with a chapter on "linking," a topic dear to the heart of Dwight Friesen, whose previous book was *Thy Kingdom Connected* (A "version: Emergent Village resources for communities of faith): *What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks*. The authors recognize that although churches are called to re-root in their neighborhoods, in the new parish model this will include learning best practices from other parishes and communities around the world. Never before have there been as many opportunities for people to share with each other about their parish practices through links and networks at the global level. The authors have travelled around the country seeing how other new parish ministries are developing. They encourage reader to reach out and learn, nationally and globally, in what might be a kind of new denominationalism. It's a worthy final proposal, and will be a good check on the new parish movement so it is ecumenical rather than parochial. I conclude with a series of questions from the book. If you are serious about re-rooting in your neighborhood as a Christian, and discovering how your local congregation can re-root in its own parish, consider working through these with a friend or group of brothers and sisters in Christ.

1. Where do you live? Describe the contours of your neighborhood. What narratives or values seem present in the place where you live?
2. How might you describe your current relationship to your place?
3. What might be an intentional and natural next step for you to live even more fully present within and in-with your place?
4. Walk with a friend or two: Invite a neighbor to join you on your walk through your neighborhood. As you walk together share what you see and hope for.
5. Are you a character in your neighborhood? Wonder together about ways of rooting within your parish so people might come to know of and depend on you.
6. Have a conversation with your community of faith exploring intentional ways of being present as a group in the life of your neighborhood.

I want to love and recommend this book more, but it fails in two key areas for me. First, the book is extremely light on Scripture. I wouldn't recommend that the authors proof text their church practices or models with "Thus says the Lord..." In fact, I dislike authors who cannot separate opinion from doctrine. However, with that said there is very little direct theology in this book at all, and I do believe who we are and how we act is rooted who and what we believe about God. Second, I

struggled at times to have anything but a vague idea of what the meaning of the new labels and concepts the authors were presenting. One of their central ideas supported by numerous charts was the term "Faithful Presence." Yet, in all of their repetition of the term "Faithful Presence" I never felt like I understood it well enough to tell others what it means. For example, the authors offer a new definition of the church writing, "The church exists as Christ's body to form us as a people who are faithful present to God, one another and creation, even as Christ was and is faithful present." I love this definition...but if I was asked to decode and explain it, I'm not sure I would be able to. As I said, I really wanted to love this book. As you can see I still gave it 3 stars. There are some really good nuggets of information in here. And I do believe the authors are onto something really good. However, this book lacked the clarity to make it truly amazing and transformational. In fact, my fear would be that some would read it and miss what I believe is obscured beneath the surface and simply toss it aside as missional hipster church repackaged with new labels.

I read this book with great anticipation. The idea that the church should serve and be a part of its neighborhood sounded like such a great idea. As I read the theory, and a few stories of the authors' experiences, I kept waiting to get to the part where the theory could be applied to a real congregation. Unfortunately that part of the book hasn't been written, probably because my situation does not match with the authors' assumptions. While mentioning that not all neighborhoods are the same, all the examples came from experiences with city neighborhoods. But that's not where all of us live. How do we connect with neighborhoods when there is no gathering place, no businesses or stores, no sense of neighbor? I think it can be done, but I would like to have had some ideas, some examples, even some encouragement. I bought the book looking for some direction, not a road map, but at least a step or two to take. I finished the book with no more direction than when I had begun.

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