

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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To date, no investigation of the Emerging Church Movement has made an effort to examine the environmental and political views of its members. Despite the vast research on the politics and environmental opinions of American evangelicals, little is known about where the majority of members of the Emerging Church Movement are on the political spectrum or how they view environmental protection and climate change issues. As an exploratory case study, this thesis advances our understanding of the Emerging Church Movement by considering these issues and how the movement influences its members. Using interviews and participant-observation, this thesis utilized qualitative methods to analyze and compare the environmental and political views of emerging church members against those of traditional evangelicals. There

were three main findings from this research: (1) members of the Emerging Church Movement are more politically moderate than their evangelical counterparts; (2) social action calls were heard in church services rather than political action calls; and (3) environmental protection, though seen as important, did not appear to be a prominent issue in the Emerging Church Movement. The findings from the research suggest that there were both differences and similarities among the views of emerging church members and traditional evangelicals. The methods and practices employed in this study present a usable framework for future research, while the findings prompt new and interesting questions for future research on the nascent study of the Emerging Church Movement.

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The Emerging Church Movement: An Exploratory Case Study of  
Its Environmental and Political Attitudes

by  
Loni M. McKelvie

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Loni M. McKelvie, Author

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For my grandpa,  
Charles R. Hazel, PhD,  
who instilled in me a desire for higher education,  
and to whom I will always credit my pursuit of it.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Traditional Protestant Christian groups, including evangelicals, are some of the most studied and understood religious groups in America. A newer and less studied group is that of the Emerging Church Movement (ECM). At its core, the ECM is a critique of the ways in which conservative evangelicals have practiced Christianity (Bader-Saye, 2006; Bielo, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Drane 2006; Hunt, 2008; Moritz 2008; McKnight, 2007). The young leaders that started the ECM in the mid 1990s wanted to reconcile the widening gap between the ideologies of America's youngest generations and the interests of conservative evangelicalism (Bielo, 2011b). The ECM is decentralized in nature with only an amorphous set of ideals that hold them together and that separate them from conservative evangelicalism (McKnight, 2007).

The main focus of this movement is to engage with the postmodern culture of today and to do missional work in communities in which their churches are situated (Bader-Saye, 2006; Bielo, 2009; 2011a, 2011b; Drane, 2006; McKnight, 2007; Moritz, 2008). Effort has been made in describing the characteristics of this movement, but as of yet, there has been few analytical reports made on the ECM. As a pilot study, this project will attempt to develop new understandings about the ECM and generate new research questions for future scholarship on this movement.

If this group were to become as politically active as traditional evangelicals have come to be over the last thirty years, their influence on politics could be significant, so building an understanding of how members of this movement interact with political

issues will be more important as the ECM grows. At present, one of the most prominent political issues has been the environment and concerns over climate change. That is why in this study, the environmental attitudes and political orientations of the ECM will also be evaluated. As religious socialization is so pervasive in America, it will likely have some bearing on how someone views environmental issues along with other cultural issues. Though they are often seen as being more liberal than their traditional evangelical counterparts (Bielo, 2011a; Hunt, 2008), the ECM is still very new and not much is truly known about this group's political orientations and views on environmental issues. Through this exploratory case study of an emerging church, this research will add to a fairly new scholarship of the Emerging Church Movement. This research will be interdisciplinary, incorporating methods from the fields of cultural anthropology, political science, and sociology of religion.

Chapter 2 explores the previous research on the topics of environmental politics, evangelicalism in America, and the ECM. It begins with a brief explanation of worldviews and religion, followed by a discussion about American evangelicalism, and what is known about the environmental views and politics of evangelicals. It continues with a discussion on partisanship and the environment—how Republicans, Democrats, and even Independents see environmental issues. Finally, there is a discussion on the ECM.

Chapter 3 explains the interdisciplinarity of this project along with the methodology behind the design of the project. Church services were observed for eight weeks and 11 participants were interviewed for this study. The case selection process,

participant observation, and the semi-structured interviews are all explained in this chapter.

In chapter 4, the results from the participant observation and semi-structured interviews are described. It begins with a look at the origins of the study participant church (SPC), followed by a description of the church, its missional focus, and a description of the church members and participants. After that is a section about the perception of clergy speech at SPC. Lastly, the results from the interviews are explained.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion comparing what is known about traditional evangelicals and what was learned about the ECM, including the ways in which they view environmental issues, how they appear to be more politically moderate than other evangelicals, and that they tend to hear more social action calls during church services. This paper concludes with a brief assessment of the limitations to this project as well as recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2: LITURATURE REVIEW

### **Worldview and Religion**

Religion, at its most basic level, does two things. It supports one's worldview and teaches us how to relate to the rest of the world (Gottlieb, 2006). These two things go together because often one's worldview is the way the world is understood to be. Religion “provides a set of values and beliefs that serve to construct a coherent and defensible worldview” (Gaskins, 2011, p. 52). It not only, “encompasses the form of the relationship of human beings to God” it also “encompasses all relationships possible in the life of the world” and “it can explain everything” (Merklinger, 2008, p. 211). For many cultures around the world, religion and worldview are synonymous and permeate almost all aspects of life. For evangelicals in America, religion influences how they understand politics and science, and which roles they think the government and other institutions should have (Nagle, 2008; Smith, 1998). For many evangelicals, their worldview is dependent on the Bible. It is the only real authority they trust, and they take it very seriously (DeWitt, 2006; Hunter, 1983, Smith, 1998). Understanding the history, motivations, and goals of evangelicals can inform a greater knowledge of how they interact in this world.

### **American Evangelicalism**

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a resurgence of conservative Protestantism occurred. The isolationist fundamentalism that dominated conservative Protestantism in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had not adequately engaged the crisis of World War II in a meaningful way. After the war, a new type of evangelicalism

began to develop here (Noll, 1992). “Evangelical” is not a specific denomination, but rather an overarching set of religious beliefs and attitudes. There are four major religious and theological traditions that make up the roots of contemporary American evangelicalism: “(1) the Baptist tradition, (2) the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition, (3) the Anabaptist tradition, and (4) the Reformation-Confessional tradition” (Hunter, 1983, p. 7).

This new evangelicalism was a trans-denominational movement that was theologically conservative, and politically and socially engaged (Noll, Wells, & Woodbridge, 1983). This group encompasses a diverse array of believers with no single authoritative theological or political structure binding them, yet they remain different from their theological and sociological relatives (Smith, Emerson, Gallagher, Kennedy & Sikkink, 1998). They are held together by

a set of minimal, baseline, supradenominational theological beliefs and, perhaps more importantly, by a distinctive, shared sensibility about strategy for the Christian mission in the world (Smith, et al., 1998, p. 87).

For evangelicals, the emphasis is placed on a personal, pietistic, bible-centered faith (Marsden, 2006), where the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Evangelicals believe “the Bible is to be understood ‘in its plain and obvious sense.’ Concerning ethical, moral, and historical matters, the Bible is to be understood literally” (Hunter, 1983, p. 61). This understanding of the Bible is a common characteristic among the broader evangelical tradition. The theology of evangelicalism is held together by a

commitment to more or less historical Christian Orthodoxy, as interpreted through Protestant Reformation: the Scriptures are divinely inspired and therefore true, the ultimate source for

believing and living; Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, whose ministry characterized by supernatural power and authority; personal salvation is rooted in the grace of God, not in human works, and is mediated to sinners through their faith in Jesus Christ alone; and Christian conversion implies a life committed to holiness and to Christ's ongoing mission in the world (Weber, 1991, p. 13-14).

For evangelicals, proselytizing, that is sharing their religious beliefs with others that are not of their faith (also referred to as evangelizing, translated from Greek, meaning "good news"), is a major dimension of the evangelical tradition. "In the Evangelical subculture, evangelism is considered the first priority" (Hunter, 1983, p. 66-67). In Nancy T. Ammerman's 2005 book, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and their Partners*, she found that 85% of conservative protestants, or evangelicals, said that, "sharing their faith was either very important or essential to living a good Christian Life" (2005, p.30)<sup>1</sup>.

Although evangelicals are often considered by the mainstream public to be a monolithically conservative group, they are polyvocal, meaning that varying opinions and beliefs can be found among this group. Evangelicalism has created a "meaningful identity-space on the American religions field that, under one banner, manages to accommodate a remarkable degree of theological and political diversity" (Smith, et al., 1998, p. 87). Because of this, evangelicalism is flourishing in America; it has been able to adapt well to the different forms and values of modernity that is so much a part of the dominant American culture (Wells, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> In *Pillars of Faith*, Ammerman describes the diversity and similarities of different religious traditions in the United States from data derived from survey research and interviews with people from 91 different religious traditions, and ethnographic observations of American congregational life.

According to a 2007 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, evangelicals make up 26% of the population (in Oregon they make up 30% of the population). Eighty one percent of all evangelicals are white, and there are more women that identify as evangelical than men, 53% and 47% respectively. A majority (58%) of evangelicals make below \$50,000 a year, and only 20% of evangelicals have a college degree or higher level of education (Pew Research Center, 2007).

### **Evangelicals and the Environment**

From the Bible, evangelicals can learn almost anything they need to know about how to live in this world. From Genesis 1:26 in the Old Testament of the Bible many evangelical Christians read that God told man to have dominion over all the earth, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (New International Version). This is interpreted by some as permission from God to use the environment in any way they want. This mindset is often referred to as the "dominion belief." The dominion belief is widespread and people who agree with that belief "are generally less informed on environmental matters than others" (Woodrum & Hoban, 1994, p. 202), that is, they usually have less formal education.

Evangelicals that view global warming as unimportant are usually making a theological statement that concerns about the environment are beneath them and detract from their core concerns (Djupe & Gwiasda, 2010). There are three interrelated notions

that act as justification for not taking care of the environment. Together they form the possible case for environmental disregard:

(1) The idea that since Christians are not going to be around for much longer anyway, there is no reason to be concerned about problems that will not occur for generations to come; (2) The belief that since this earth will be completely annihilated and a new earth created, there is no reason to care about something that will necessarily be destroyed; and (3) The conviction that, given the limited amount of time left, Christians should be single mindedly devoted to converting people to faith in Christ---anything else would be simply a distraction from fulfilling the great commission<sup>2</sup> (Simmons, 2009, p. 63).

Witnessing to non-believers, that is, converting them to Christianity is the key characteristic of evangelicalism, but this does not mean that there is not a portion of evangelicals that are not concerned with environmental protection too.

Not all evangelicals share the same views and opinions on the environment. "A Christian worldview is not incompatible with holding pro-environmental views" (Djupe & Hunt, 2009, p.681). While 35% of evangelicals think that stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy, 54% think that stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost (Pew Research Center 2007). For some churches and theologians the importance of the environment is stressed. If religions could change their perspective through the lens of their own scripture, they could demonstrate that their relevance and teachings could be used to address the tremendous environmental issues we have today (Gardner, 2002). In fact, "classic texts

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<sup>2</sup> The Great Commission is the instruction given by the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread his teachings to the entire world. The Gospel of Matthew 28:16-20 says, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

have been read, and interpreted, anew” and that “marginalized elements which support an ecological ethic have been recovered and stressed, and some previously unchallengeable teachings have been rejected” (Gottlieb, 2006, p. 7).

As some religious leaders began to preach a greener gospel, more people began to see that the human treatment of nature was affecting not only the nonhuman world but also the human world. The recognition of the environment was beginning to be understood as an ethical concern mandated by Christian faith (Simmons, 2009). This has created “a truly remarkable moment in evangelical history that could have profound repercussions for the future of American environmental policy” (Simmons, 2009, p. 43). In the past few decades there has been a small environmental movement in the evangelical church. This movement is not based in secular environmentalism but in the notion of “Creation care.” Creation care originally came out of the environmental justice movement and a concern for the welfare of the world's poor, which builds on evangelical’s interest in social justice issues. Creation care theology was formed and networks to meet the needs of its practitioners were built. The first ones were the International Evangelical Environmental Network (IEEN) in 1992 and the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) in 1993 (DeWitt, 2006).

Creation Care, co-founded by Reverend Richard Cizik, is part of the platform of the National Association of Evangelicals. Cizik has emphasized the “distinctly evangelical process” he went through to come to be concerned about the environment. It was through prayer with others and reading scripture that he had a “conversion” on the issue of climate change (Djupe & Gwiasda, 2010). The stance that Cizik and the NAE

have taken on the environment is about being good stewards of God's Creation. Djupe and Gwiasda state that, "The information Rev. Cizik provides to evangelicals is both novel and dissonant, evangelicals cannot rely on existing stereotypes and are therefore led to consider Cizik's message" (2010, p. 77).

### **Evangelicals and Politics**

Evangelicals are often seen to be both religiously and politically conservative. During the last half century, the culture wars, which pitted highly committed religious traditionalists against secularists and religious liberals, played a very large role in shaping partisanship in the United States. Since then, there has been a significant movement of conservative Protestants into the Republican Party (Layman, 1997). Evangelicals have, over the last few decades, been seen as the base of the Republican Party – they are one of the strongest populations within the contemporary Republican coalition (Edsall, 2006; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Indeed, more than any other religious tradition, evangelicals are far more likely to affiliate with the Republican Party (Rhodes, 2012). According to Pew's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2007), 52% of all evangelicals have a conservative political ideology, while 30% are moderates and only 11% are liberals. "Christian Evangelicals are much more likely to be conservative than other Americans and less likely to be liberal" (Smith & Johnson, 2010, p. 353) and that there was "no statistical difference between young and old evangelicals to political party affiliation" (2010, p. 358). Thirty six percent of evangelicals identify as Republicans, while 31% say they are Democrats and 28% identify as Independent (Pew Research Center, 2010). Members of evangelical denominations are "associated with Republican

Party identification quite apart from the value commitments and social circumstances of congregants” (Brint and Abrutyn, 2010, p. 341). Even most mainliners who self-identify as evangelical have political opinions that are similar to those within evangelical denominations (Lewis & Huyser de Bernardo, 2010). This, along with their religious beliefs, has likely had an influence on their environmental opinions as well.

Religious socialization is very pervasive in America, so it likely has some bearing not only on how someone views cultural issues, such as abortion and gay rights, but also on environmental issues. In fact, conservative eschatology proves to be one of the strongest predictors of environmental perspectives (Guth, Green, Kellstedt, & Smidt, 1995).<sup>3</sup> With these views, we might expect evangelicals to become a prominent voting bloc with regard to environmental issues. By being politically active evangelicals can assert power and influence in this country and around the world. Political activism hasn't always been one of their main focuses, although, over the last twenty to thirty decades it has been increasing; this has coincided with the debate over climate change (Nagle, 2008).

Many evangelicals see themselves as part of the ‘religious right,’ which took shape in the United States during the cultural changes that happened between 1960 and 1980 (Olson, 2011). This mutually fruitful relationship that conservative Christians and Republicans created has grown stronger since the early 2000s. A majority (69%) of Evangelicals reported having heard something about the religious right. Although,

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<sup>3</sup> Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smith’s 1995 study looked at whether conservative eschatology (Biblical literalism, End Times thinking), religious tradition, and religious commitment were negatively related to support for environmental policy. They used data from four national surveys of clergy, religious activists, political-party contributors, and the public to analyze the impact of religious variables on environmental attitudes.

nearly half (47%) of Evangelicals reported having “no opinion” on the religious right, 41% reported they do agree with the religious right (Pew Research Center, 2010). Conservatives are not the “only ones to articulate a faith-based political outlook, either. Indeed, during much of the twentieth century, the dominant faith-based voice in American politics came from the left” (Olson, 2011, p. 272). There is still a ‘religious left’ today, although it is not as prominent or organized as well as the religious right. According to Pew Research Center’s “Religion and Public Life Survey” from 2010, 47% of Evangelicals had not heard of the religious left.

Organizations, such as the religious right and religious left, have the ability to influence and rally large groups of people together for their particular political interests. On a smaller scale, the social networks of churches can influence and recruit individuals into political participation through behavioral expectations and direct conversations (Djupe & Grant, 2001). Church members are also more likely to be politically active if they see their church activities as a way to influence the political process because they may “see political activity as a natural extension of religious activity, most likely because of the ties between the two that have developed over time for reasons specific to each tradition” (Djupe & Grant, 2001, p.311). As people increase their participation in religious activities, the more easily they link religious dogma with political issues (Gaskins, 2011).

Religious services are also a significant source of socio-political messages. “An average of about three political messages during a meeting whose primary purpose is explicitly nonpolitical and typically lasts about an hour indicates a high level of political

cue-giving” (Brewer, Kersh, and Petersen, 2003, p.129)<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, Evangelicals often hear calls for direct political action, whereas mainliners are more likely to hear calls for social action (Brewer, Kersh, & Petersen, 2003). Djupe and Hunt found that the actual speech by clergy on environmental issues has very little effect, “but the degree to which members perceive their clergy to address the environment has a significant effect” (2009, p. 680).<sup>5</sup>

### **Partisanship and the Environment**

Other indicators of environmental beliefs are linked to party affiliation and political ideology. When environmental issues became more prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, support for environmental protection in the United States was fairly non-partisan (Dunlap & Gale, 1974; Dunlap & McCright, 2008). Environmental protection was considered to be a “consensus” issue because poor environmental quality affected everyone (Dunlap & Gale, 1974). Views began to change in the early 1980s, “as the Reagan administration labeled environmental regulations a burden on the economy and tried to weaken them and reduce their enforcement” (Dunlap & McCright, 2008, p. 26). Reagan’s conservative anti-environmental administration caused environmentalism to go from a non-partisan issue to a strong partisan one, and the policies of George W. Bush’s administration has reinforced conservative Republicans’ strong opposition to environmental protection (Dunlap, Xiao, & McCright, 2001).

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<sup>4</sup> Brewer, Kersh, and Petersen’s study from 2003 investigated whether church- and temple-going American’s regularly receive political messages from their ministers, priests, and rabbis during worship services. They also wanted to know the types and the intensity of political messages that were heard.

<sup>5</sup> Djupe and Hunt’s 2009 study looked at the importance of social dimensions, like the consideration how doctrine is communicate in a congregational context, to the study of religious experience. Their study employed a unique data set of both clergy and congregation members to demonstrate the varied informational effects of church membership on environmental attitudes.

Numerous studies have consistently found significant relationships, not only between partisanship and environmental concern, but also between ideology and environmental concern. Political ideology has actually been found to be more strongly and consistently related to environmental attitudes than party identification. Although we have to remember that there is a significant correlation between party identification and political ideology, the importance of both ideological and partisan differences should be considered. Findings have shown that Republicans and conservatives consistently express less environmental concern than their Democratic and liberal counterparts. (Dunlap, Xiao, & McCright, 2001).

In the research on the differences between Republican support and Democratic support for environmental protection, the results show a significant divergence between the two parties. Even among the general public, Democrats and liberals have been more pro-environmental than their Republican and conservative counterparts. (Dunlap, Xiao, & McCright, 2001). In Congress, votes on environmental issues “tend to split along a strong partisan divide” (Guber, 2001, p. 456). Over the past two decades, the Republican Party has become much more conservative; one component of this is the party’s aversion to strong environmental protection. This is “presumably because it is viewed as harming business and economic prosperity and as involving unwarranted governmental restrictions on both business and industry and individual citizens” (Dunlap, Xiao, & McCright, 2001, p. 30). Republican legislators are much less likely than Democrats to support laws which result in an increase in governmental regulations, especially when they are perceived to have a negative affect on private enterprise (Dunlap & Gale, 1974).

Partisan views on global warming are similar to those on environmental protection. According to Gallup Poll data, nearly half (49%) of Democrats view global warming as a serious threat, while only about one-quarter (26%) of Republicans feel similarly (Dunlap & McCright, 2008). In a 2010 Pew Research Center survey, “only 16 percent of Republicans agree that there is ‘solid evidence’ of anthropogenic warming and only 14 percent see it as a ‘serious problem’” (Antonio & Brulle, 2011, p.198). In terms of the perceptions of global warming, there is still a very large gap between self-identified Republicans and Democrats (Dunlap & McCright, 2008). Acknowledging the significant differences between Republicans and Democrats, Guber (2001) asserts that for environmental issues to make a difference at the polls success seems to lie with Independent voters. As with most of their other political and ideological views, the environmental views of independents tend to be more “middle-of-the-road” (Guber, 2001).

Even though independents are a very important part of the electorate, the scholarship on them is very limited; most of what is known about independents is very general. According to Gallup Poll numbers, the percentage of Americans identifying as political independents increased to 40% in 2011; this is the largest proportion of independents in at least 60 years (Jones, 2012). Guber (2001) notes that true independents are less likely to have strong connections to partisan differences, but Mayer (2007) says that there is considerable evidence that show many self-identified independents are “hidden partisans.” That is,

people who embrace the independent label and the resonances of civic virtue associated with it but whose actual attitudes and

voting behavior are every bit as partisan as those who embrace party labels more openly (Mayer, 2007, p. 366).

Jones states that “independents with party leanings vote similarly to party identifiers” (2012)<sup>6</sup>. A portion of independent voters can be considered swing voters, that is, some one that could vote either Republican or Democratic. Mayer explains that:

if some voters are firm, clear, dependable supporters of one candidate or the other, swing voters are the opposite: those whose final allegiance is in some doubt all the way up until the election day (2007, p. 359).

### **The Emerging Church Movement**

As culture changes, so too do the ways in which religion is practiced. Many theologians have begun to reevaluate their practices because of cultural changes. Among Evangelicals these changes have been dubbed the 'Emerging Church Movement'; although, the leaders of the ECM prefer to call it a 'conversation' rather than a 'movement' (Moritz, 2008), with no clearly articulated systematic theology (McKnight, 2007). Emerging Christians are usually considered to be more politically liberal than their traditional evangelical counterparts. Hunt notes that,

while conservative evangelicals have held firmly to biblical foundations (or at least how they interpreted them) and a hermeneutically sealed theology, their liberal counterparts sought to be relevant to contemporary culture (2008, p. 287).

Being relevant to contemporary culture is central to the ECM.

The ECM came out of a critique of conservative evangelicalism. This is what happened at the 1995 meeting of the Young Leaders Network (YLN), which was a project of the Leadership Network (an evangelical institution for church leaders). The

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<sup>6</sup> Jones notes that “more American independents lean to the Republican Party than to the Democratic Party” (2012).

YLN's main focus was to address what they saw as a detrimental problem for the future of Christianity in America: The "gaping dissonance between the youngest generations in the country and the organization, style, and interests of conservative evangelicalism" (Bielo, 2011b, p. 268). This led to a desire to be authentic—to be your real self—and to be missionaries in their own communities, that is, to be "missional." Being authentic had a bearing on changes in worship styles; and being missional, as they define it, led to a strong sense of place and to an interest in political and social justice issues.

While the ECM is a "protest against much of evangelicalism as currently practiced" (McKnight, 2007, p. 38), it is theologically very evangelical. The pioneers of the ECM were voicing a critique of conservative evangelicalism (Bielo, 2011a; Bielo 2011b; Drane 2006). They were frustrated "with politics, theology, worship, evangelism, ecclesiology, and capitalist-consumer impulses" (Bielo, 2011a, p. 8). They were also convinced that American society had shifted from being 'modern' to 'postmodern.'

Defined in epistemological terms, postmodernism affirms "that America's youngest generations doubt the human ability to know absolute truth with absolute certainty" (Bielo, 2011a, p. 8). Postmodernism is also seen in terms of its traditions.

Younger generations want to:

return to mystery (with renewed spiritual practices and medieval mysticism)... hunger for spirituality (even if overlaid with 'new-age' assumptions and do-it-yourself religion), [want] new models of networked communities (via Internet, cell phones and increased mobility)... desire to find roots in traditions (in contrast to the modern suspicion of tradition), and [yearn] to encounter God through image, ritual, and sacrament (Bader-Saye, 2006, p. 16).

The ECM is, in a sense, a response to those who feel traditional evangelicalism is not working in this postmodern age. This speaks to their desire to be authentic and culturally relevant, which they believe to be the best way in which to reach the most people.

This desire for authenticity is a common organizing trope for emerging evangelicals (Bielo, 2011a). Individuals in the ECM

favour [sic] the sharing of experiences and interactions such as the testimonies, prayer, group recitation, meals and other communal practice, which they believe are personal and more relevant over propositional, evangelistic preaching and exegetical Bible teachings, since these involve claims to an absolute 'truth' (Hunt, 2008, p. 289).

Authenticity is a desire to be connected to "real Christianity" and to be your real self with each other. This dictates the ways that emerging Christians relate with one another and with the rest of society and it also informs the ways they worship together.

Bader-Saye talks about there being a conversation of a third-way, or third element, in the emerging church—both theologically and in terms of worship styles (2006). Theologically, the emerging church is moving past the liberal-conservative dichotomy by rethinking Christian discipleship through a reengagement with church tradition. The ECM is also going past the traditional-contemporary divide. Where traditional worship services tend to include, pipe organs, hymns, classical music, and more formal dress, contemporary worship services tend to include guitars and drums, rock music, overhead screens, and more casual dress. In many emerging churches, worship styles are 'different.' Traditional worship with oratorical preaching is often set aside in favor of a more experiential format (Bielo, 2009) or group discussion format.

Many congregations are trying to create “the ambiance of the art gallery or the café rather than the excitement of the arena or the rock concert” (Bader-Saye, 2006, p. 19).

This takes it out of the traditional worship style and away from the contemporary styles that are common among evangelical mega-churches.

Another very common aspect to the different worship styles in the emerging church is to incorporate the concept of ancient-future, which was coined by Robert Webber (Bader-Saye, 2006; Bielo, 2011a)<sup>7</sup>. The practice of ancient-future is a way in which older traditions are used in conjunction with newer ones. It can create a more experiential worship experience; it “should occur bodily, with all senses, not solely through the limited cognitive assent to meaningful words” (Bielo, 2011a, p. 15). Things like candles, icons, incense, kneeling and chanting can be seen alongside projection screens and rock music (Bader-Saye, 2006; Moritz, 2008).

In the ECM how a person lives can often be seen as more important than what he or she believes. That is to say there may be an emphasis on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy – that is, right practice over right belief (McFague, 2008; McKnight, 2007). Although many in the emerging church still believe there is a need for both (McKnight, 2007). Brian McLaren (2004) uses a sports analogy to explain how orthodoxy and orthopraxy relate to each other. He says those who defend orthodoxy “were seen more like referees than basketball players; nobody cared if they could pass, dribble, or shoot as long as they could blow a whistle and name an infraction in their black-and-white striped shirts” (p. 31). He believes that orthopraxy assumes we are all on the court as

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Webber was a well known theologian, who in the latter half of his life took a special interest in Christian worship practices. He wrote “more than 40 books on the topic of worship, focusing on how the worship practices of the ancient church have value for the church today” (Yang, 2007).

players; we should know the rules (orthodoxy), not so we can act simply as referee, but so we can play a good clean game.

The desire to be authentic, and the importance placed on orthopraxy, is central to the ECM. These factors are vital to the movement's goal to be missional. Being missional is to focus on the lived experience of faith (Bielo, 2009) and is often focused on the local community. Being missional is also about cultivating relationships, not before or after conversion, but in place of them (Bielo, 2011a). A missional community "goes well beyond the salvation of just individuals, and extends also into the local economic, social, and environmental contexts of each particular church community" (Moritz, 2008, p. 31). Emergents believe that Jesus cared not just about lost souls, but about the whole person and whole societies (McKnight, 2007).

Being a missionary in your own society is what being missional is about. Because of this, many emerging churches have an incredible sense of place—they are connected very strongly to a specific community and feel called to help those in that area. There is a great importance placed on how social location shapes one's view of the world and of truth (McKnight, 2007) and this affects how a church will interact within their larger community. Sometimes this manifests itself as a church that does more outreach, other times it may just be a group of people that host weekly dinners that are open to the public, and still others might offer much needed services to the community.

In this way, place and religious subjectivity intersect, creating a lived experience of space that does not distinguish between enacting one's faith, supporting community improvement efforts, awareness of social problems, and local memory (Bielo, 2011b, p. 277).

This sense of place that emerging church members have is a tool used for reaching people and for strengthening their religious community (Bielo, 2011b).

Emerging evangelicals also continue the tradition brought forth by conservative Christianity, particularly conservative evangelicals, of mobilizing in support of political causes (Bielo, 2011a; Hunt, 2008).

The attempt by the Emergents to be 'authentic' has forged a prophetic vision of sorts which shapes the Emerging Church's orientation towards politics and political activism. This doesn't necessarily mean the endorsement of abortion or gay sexuality, but the movement tends to be leftward leaning in opposition to right-wing conservative agendas (Hunt, 2008, p. 289).

Left-leaning evangelicals tend to have a wider set of concerns, like "health care, welfare, [the] environment, trade, foreign policy, war, [and] housing" (Bielo, 2011a, p. 16).

Although, many emerging evangelicals have expressed "disillusionment with the political narrow-mindedness of conservative Evangelicalism" (Bielo, 2009, p. 228), it would still be wrong to lump all emerging Christians in with progressive evangelicalism. Yet progressive evangelicalism and the ECM do share many similarities.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

### **Hypothesis**

This project is a study of one emerging church congregation and their political and environmental attitudes. Descriptive research on the ECM does exist, but no information was found analyzing the environmental and political views of its members. Based on the limited existing descriptive research, this study expects to find that the members of the ECM will be more liberal, and in turn, more environmental than traditional evangelicals because of the new ways that the ECM is engaging with a postmodern culture and their tendency to be more leftward leaning than the right-wing conservatives that currently dominate traditional evangelicalism. This project is in the nascent stages of scholarship on this topic, and therefore, its findings are expected to be valuable in the development of future research on the ECM.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, I used an interdisciplinary approach, making use of research methodology from the fields of political science, sociology of religion, and anthropology. I used a combination of two different qualitative methods, ethnographic interviews and participant observation, in a case study of a single church congregation. Using qualitative research methods in the study of political science provides data that can offer a broader perspective and richer descriptions of phenomena; which, at the early stages of inquiry, can be especially important (Sofaer, 1999).

The primary objective of this project was to use a case study of an emerging church in Western Oregon to learn more about the ECM and to better understand how

members of that church describe their environmental and political views. The case selection, which involved content analysis of church websites and observation at church services, was the first phase of this two phase project. I chose the participating church because it incorporated many key components of the ECM. I included Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and participant observation in the second phase. The participants were recruited from this church to take part in interviews about their political orientation, environmental attitudes, and biblical beliefs.

Content analysis was employed for this project. Although the goal of this project was not to produce findings that are generalizable to the entire ECM, the results could lead to generalizations about the ECM in the Pacific Northwest because of the unique environmental, political, and religious cultures in that part of America. These ideas could then provide a foundation for future research aimed at better understanding the ECM on a national scale using the same research methodology.

Content analysis "is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 349). I gathered ethnographic data from interviews and participant observations and used content analysis to create analytic categories. I used specific interview quotes to represent major themes (Bernard, 2006). With this methodology, data can be systematically interpreted in such a way as to allow for the analysis of the environmental and political attitudes of this group. As previous research on the ECM has been mostly descriptive, rather than analytical in nature, this project should be considered a pilot study for future research on this topic. Research on

traditional Evangelicals has produced very extensive data. As part of this study, I used “control questions” previously asked in interviews of evangelicals.

This project is a case study of one emerging church congregation in Oregon. I used a case study methodology for the following reasons. First, the ECM has many adherents throughout the country and the state; this is just one case out of a broader category of emerging churches which allows for a more focused and in-depth study (Berg and Lune, 2012). Second, because little is known about the environmental and political attitudes in the ECM, I chose an exploratory case study for this project. According to Johnson, “exploratory case studies may be conducted when little is known about some political phenomenon” (2005, p. 85). Third, case studies can be very appropriate for answering “how” questions (Johnson, 2005), and because one of the major goals of this research was to learn *how* emerging church members describe their environmental and political attitudes, I decided that a case study was most appropriate for this project.

### **Data Collection**

During the first phase of this project, I identified churches that met specific criteria as potential case study candidates. I used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling to determine which churches to consider for the case study. I did this through an analysis of content on church websites and through attendance at public church services in Western Oregon. As a result of this process, it was possible to verify which churches possessed the characteristics of an emerging church.

The ECM is new, and because the nature of the movement is pan-

denominational, there is no real storehouse of information or list of affiliated churches that exists. I used *Sites Unseen*, *Acts 29*, basic *Google* searches, and newspaper articles to create a reliable pool of possible churches to consider<sup>8</sup>. Conducting these multiple searches highlighted overlaps of ideas and concepts, thereby increasing confidence in selection of key terms and case study churches.

I applied the searches of the *Sites Unseen* website and the *Acts 29* website based on recommendations from James S. Bielo (personal communication, June 4, 2011; Bielo, 2011a)<sup>9</sup>. One of the many resources on the *Sites Unseen* website was a list of “uncommon communities of faith” listed by state. In *Google*, I searched using the terms “emerging churches” and “missional churches” in different Oregon towns. Among these multiple searches there was overlap of churches from the *Sites Unseen* list, *Acts 29*, *Google*, and churches mentioned in newspaper articles about the work they were doing in their community.

The multiple searches yielded a list of 19 churches that were the initial sample pool of possible churches for a case study in Oregon. From this list, I did a content analysis of each church’s website. I examined the church websites for specific words, like authentic, missional, and postmodern (which are words that are commonly use in the ECM), and whether the church websites mentioned a missional focus in their local

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<sup>8</sup> *Sites Unseen* is a website that provides “off-the-beaten-path resources to the right-brained and left-out in Christ-shaped faith and spirituality; to share safe and generative resources for the faithful, seekers, doubters, and inquiring media types”; that is to say, it appeals to emergents (read ECM) and “missional folk” ([www.zoecarnate.com](http://www.zoecarnate.com)). *Acts 29* is a church planting organization that helps with training and resources for church planters that want to be missionaries in their respective communities ([www.acts29network.org/about/vision/](http://www.acts29network.org/about/vision/)).

<sup>9</sup> James S. Bielo, Ph.D. is a scholar and professor in the field of anthropology of Christianity studying the Emerging Church Movement and other varieties of American evangelicalism. He has written two books and several articles on these topics.

community. The original list was narrowed down to six churches based on these criteria.

I attended one regular church service, at each of the six churches, between January and March 2012. The purpose of attending these church services was to identify if emerging church themes were being used in each service (e.g., during the sermon or message, in prayers, etc.), or in the other printed materials that were available (e.g., church brochures, bulletins, activity schedules, etc.). From this, I was able to narrow the list down to two possible churches that surfaced as the most appropriate candidates for the project. The first church that I contacted agreed to participate in this study.

To begin phase two, I sent an email to the head pastor of the potential church requesting an interview and permission to address the congregation and to hang a recruitment flyer in the church building. Once permission was granted, I interviewed the head pastor. After this interview, I began participant observation at the church's regular Sunday services. To recruit participants, I made several announcements during church services and I left recruitment flyers at the church. The pastor also spoke about his experience in his interview, so as to give the congregation an idea of what to expect if they participated.

Participant observation occurred over eight weeks, from the end of May through July of 2012. The average Sunday attendance was 22 people with usually more men than women<sup>10</sup>. The small size of this congregation was typical for a church in the ECM.

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<sup>10</sup> Several homeless individuals were often in attendance; they were mostly male. This is to be expected, because in Oregon, as in the rest of the U.S., the homeless population is a majority male (Oregon Housing and Community Services, 2010; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010). There is a

Although church sizes vary throughout the ECM, a small congregation is one of the phenomena of this movement<sup>11</sup>. This comes from the ECM's "cultural critique of the conservative Evangelical church growth and megachurch movements" (Bielo, 2011a, p. 13).<sup>12</sup>

I conducted eleven ethnographic interviews (including one with the pastor). Each of the ten church member participants self-selected to participate. Five women and six men were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 26 to 62 with the average age being 39. The interviews were semi-structured and averaged approximately 21 minutes in length; 35 questions were asked, including four demographic questions. A modified version (with 31 questions, including four demographic questions) was used in the interview with the pastor.

The goal of the interviews was to gather data about church members' political and environmental attitudes, and to gain an understanding of how they describe their attitudes. I used questions and topics from previous research in order to compare trends from the ECM to that of traditional Evangelicals. The topics of the questions ranged from their experiences at church to their political opinions and views on the environment. The questions were taken from past Pew Research Center surveys and other work done on similar topics by other researchers.

Question topics addressed three key themes and their connections to each other.

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prominent homeless community in the area that this church serves, and so it is not surprising that some of the homeless attend church services there.

<sup>11</sup> From the churches visited as part of the case selection process, Sunday attendance ranged in size from approximately 20 to 300.

<sup>12</sup> A megachurch is defined as a church having 2,000 attendees in one regular weekend service (Thumma, 1996).

They are: (1) politics, (2) the environment, and (3) religion and experiences at church. Political themed questions asked about political identification and orientation, how often they follow politics and government affairs, and if they have ever volunteered with or given money to a political campaign. Environmentally themed questions asked about opinions on global warming, membership in an environmental group, and opinions about government spending for environmental protection. Religious themed questions asked about the importance of religion in daily life, frequency of attendance at church services and activities, questions about sermon topics, and their opinion about the Bible's literalism. The other questions asked were about their religious life history and background, if they described themselves as an evangelical Christian, and if they were born-again. Most of the interview questions integrated multiple themes together.

Many of the questions I used in the interviews were taken from The Pew Research Center's July 2010 survey on Religion and Public Life and from previous research done by others in the study of religion and politics. They include: Bielo, 2011a; Djupe and Hunt, 2009; Djupe and Olson, 2010; Layman, 1997; Smith and Johnson, 2010; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994. From the Pew survey, I asked questions such as, "Do you think there has been too much, too little or the right amount of expressions of religious faith and prayer by political leaders?" and "At the present time, do you think that religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?" I also used several questions from the Pew Research Center survey about sermon topics. From Djupe and Olson (2010) I asked questions about opinions on global warming, one example is: "Whether or not global warming is important, do you think it is an

appropriate problem for church congregations to address?” Inspired by the work of Woodrum and Hoban in their 1994 research, the question, “What do you believe the Bible says about how people should interact with God’s creation?” was written for this survey. A full list of questions can be found in Appendices A and B.

I used Participant-observation of church services and other events at the participating church as a means of triangulating the interview data and increasing validity of results. I attended eight services over nine weeks in the summer of 2012. I also attended one “missional activity” that the church did in cooperation with another area church. This missional activity was a weekly dinner that was supported by this church but organized and put on by another area church. The weekly dinner feeds the area homeless and encourages everyone – homeless and non-homeless – to sit and eat together to build relationships with one another.

I used an iterative process to code all of the qualitative data from the interviews. I organized the transcribed responses from all of the interviews by interview question so that the responses to each question could be analyzed together. After reading and rereading the responses several times, common themes became apparent. Most of the themes relate specifically to one question but several themes did overlap to different questions.

The approach and methods I used for data collection provide a usable and repeatable framework for this study and future ones like it. Application of qualitative ethnographic methods to the study of political science, along with the interdisciplinary

nature of this project, made it distinct. The rich, textural data produced in this study will prove especially important in the ongoing early stages of research on the ECM.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

In this chapter, I will describe the Results from the observations and participant interviews. Individual stories from several of the participants (all have been given pseudonyms in order to obscure their identity) have been incorporated to illustrate interesting aspects of the findings from this study. Given the limited sample size of only 11 participants, I am not claiming representativeness for this sample. The analyses contained in this thesis are meant to be exploratory in nature, not definitive or generalizable beyond what the data allows.

The church that participated in this study, which I will refer to as the Study Participant Church (SPC), or “this church,” was chosen because it embodied the main characteristics of the ECM: being post modern, authentic, missional, and having a strong sense of place. When the lead pastor planted<sup>13</sup> SPC, a specific interest was placed on creating a new type of church, one that could bring spiritual meaning back to church for an emerging generation. The mission statement of SPC is “to be Jesus to an emerging generation by creating authentic community, practicing missional living, engaging in creative dignity, and nurturing spiritual formation.”<sup>14</sup> These values are put into practice on a regular basis in this church community and summed up by the church motto: “Restoring Broken Lives.”

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<sup>13</sup> Church planting is a process of establishing a new church, which is a common practice in the ECM.

<sup>14</sup> This quote was taken from church documents, which are not being cited specifically, in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for the participating church and its members.

### **Pastor Jason's Story and the Origins of this Church**

An understanding of how SPC came into existence is illustrated by the story of the lead pastor. In the late 1970's, Jason (who is now 35) was born into an Anabaptist family. His parents were both brought up Amish-Mennonite and they lived close to their extended families in Ohio until his parents moved the family to Oregon when Jason was four years old. His dad had become an alcoholic and the family did not attend church for several years. Jason recalls that when he was eight years old, how meaningful it was for him when his father decided to get sober, "he went into [Alcoholics Anonymous], and that was a big thing in my life... He rededicated his life to Christ. So, when I was nine, I decided to give my life to Christ – which was a big step – and I was baptized" into a Baptist church. When Jason entered college he went a few years without going to church before he found a Church of Christ ministry on his college campus. Throughout the rest of his time in college he continued to ask faith questions and felt a call toward college ministry, so he decided to enter seminary at a Christian university in Texas.

When he was done at seminary in 2003, Jason and his wife, Samantha, began to feel a stronger pull toward the importance of the spiritual, which seemed to be incongruent with the church organization they were a part of. They loved the church and they loved the relationships they had made there, but when their first son was born, it caused them to ask what kind of church culture they wanted to raise their son in and, unfortunately, the church they had been a part of "was just not." They spent the next year trying to decide what to do and in 2005 became a part of a church plant, but it still

did not feel like the type of church they had envisioned. Thus, in 2007, they started looking for “a community and a city that would be a good fit for the postmodern church” that they were thinking of. They drove all around the area looking for the right place and talking to a lot of people. Many of the people they talked to expressed an interest in being spiritual and wanting to know Jesus, but were uncomfortable with, or did not like, church—at least how it is commonly thought of; this was an important point for Jason and Samantha. To pay for these excursions, Jason picked up a second job working at a coffee shop across town. While working there, he started to run into the very people that he and Samantha were looking to build a church community with so they decided to move across town, and in 2008 they planted SPC. At the beginning, church services were held in Jason and Samantha’s home. But as their congregation started to grow, they were able to move the services out of their home and into a permanent church facility.

### **The Church**

This small emerging church is situated in a somewhat depressed area of a more affluent side of town. It sits on a busy street, near an industrial area, at the end of a short row of small businesses. The church facility is what is referred to as a “store-front” church location. On one side is a vacant lot, and on the other side, a beauty salon. Nearby there is a karate dojo and a used book store. Across the street is a roadside park with a grassy area and a tree lined walk way, just beyond that is a major highway. There is no parking lot for this little shopping center and church, only street parking.

When you walk through the single door, you enter a large carpeted room which serves as the main worship space for SPC. Near the door is a table with various printed material about the church and their upcoming events laid out in neat stacks. On a round, wooden table next to it, there are a few snacks: fresh grapes, watermelon, and blueberries, cheese and crackers, and some bread and butter. Beyond this table to the left is a wall of windows with heavy dark brown drapes. The wall on the front of the room is made from cinder block and is painted dark purple with a large white rectangle painted near the ceiling, which serves as the screen for the overhead projection. Despite the heavy curtains and the dark paint, the room is bright, warm, and inviting. Along the front wall, there are a few random pieces of band equipment, like music stands, microphones, and an old upright piano. Behind the piano, leaning up against the wall is a plain wooden cross probably about seven feet tall. On top of the piano is a row of small unlit votive candles in different colored glass holders. Around the edge of the room there are comfortable sofas and arm chairs and a few mis-matched old dining room chairs. In the back of the room is a desk with a computer on it. This area looks as if it is used for administrative purposes and for running the slides for the overhead projector. On this back wall, painted in large print is a verse from Isaiah, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (41:10).

In the center of the room is a small "communion table" made from a small folding table covered with a table cloth; a small adorned cross and a candle is sitting on top of it. Next to the cross is a broken loaf of bread and small dish of grape juice. In a

half circle around the communion table, facing the wall with the band equipment and cross, are three rows of black folding chairs. On every few chairs is a paper-bound NIV Bible.

On the side of the room opposite the windows is a short hallway that goes back to the two Sunday school rooms, some storage areas, and the restroom. Near the hallway is a bookshelf with Bibles on it and another table that is set up with a coffee maker and a pitcher of ice water. At the back of the hallway, just inside a large garage door, is a long folding table with several boxes of food donated from a local grocery store. The donated food is usually perishable food like produce, baked goods, or even flowers.

### **The Church Service**

Before the service begins, there is contemporary Christian music playing softly in the background while people are milling about visiting with each other. The children are running back and forth together. People are eating the snacks while they visit and other people are going through the donated food picking out the best pieces. Because it is a summer evening, most people are in jeans or shorts and their shirtsleeves. Some have that look as if they have spent all day working in their yard. As it gets closer to five o'clock, people begin to take their seats, either on the folding chairs or the comfortable sofas.

When a new person walks in, there are a few smiles and a brief greeting of "hello" or "welcome" from those that are standing near the door. When the pastor recognizes a new face, he introduces himself as Pastor Jason and asks the newcomer

what their name is, how they heard about SCP, what has brought them to his church that day, and where they live. A few minutes later, a young woman will most likely approach this newcomer, introduce herself as Samantha and ask very similar questions just as the pastor has done.

Most Sundays the service begins with a brief prayer followed by approximately 20 minutes of music. A young man around the age of thirty leads the congregation in song with his acoustic guitar. He is accompanied by another young man playing the cajon drum. The lyrics are projected onto the overhead, but it is obvious that most people already know the songs. Some in the congregation are seated and others are standing. The songs being played are popular contemporary Christian praise songs that, because of the instrumentation, take on a folk rock sound. During the songs a few people have their hands raised, and often as soon as one person raises their hands, others begin to do the same.

After the singing was over, the song leader would say a prayer and then Pastor Jason would stand up in front of the whole group with his Bible and begin his message. I call it a message and not a sermon because it was never given like a speech to the congregation; it was always more like he was sharing his thoughts about the chosen topic and scripture for that week. Pastor Jason used a few notes and had slides on the overhead. The slides had the key points of his message and maybe a few visual aids. He would read a passage from the Bible and then explain what it means for today's Christians.

Over the eight Sundays that were observed, Jason preached six times. For the two weeks that Jason was gone, there were two different guest preachers. One week the service was led by Evan, who is an active member of the congregation. Evan preached about how life is extraordinary because God created it; sharing photos and experiences from his recent trip to the desert south west. The other week Jason was not present, the guest preacher was a man who used to work as a police chaplain. He preached about how to be with people who are grieving because Jason's father had just passed away.

Jason preached twice on evangelizing. One of these messages was about how Christians are supposed to scatter to bless people outside the church and to proclaim God's Kingdom realities to the world, at one point he told his congregation to "Find someone who hasn't met Jesus." Of the other four messages, he gave two that were ultimately about how we are supposed to learn from God; one about persevering and learning from our mistakes and punishments, and one about how you can learn through simplicity, rhythm, and fasting. The other two were about the importance of relationships and God's love for us.

For example, in July of 2013 Pastor Jason began a series called "Wisdom for Today." This series was intended to focus on what the Bible says about relationships. On the first Sunday of this series, he read Proverbs 1:1-7 which explains that it is important to understand and learn from the parables.<sup>15</sup> Jason tells his congregation that

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<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 1:1-7 (NIV) The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

it is important to be both teachable and available. He then reads the parable of the sower in the fourth chapter of Mark.<sup>16</sup> He tells his congregation that the seeds that fell onto the path and were eaten by birds were neither teachable nor available; the seeds that fell into the thorns and were choked out were teachable but not available; the seeds that fell around the rocks and couldn't set roots were available but not teachable; but the seeds that were sown in good soil were both teachable and available. This message was ultimately about God's love—how He loves you, but that you also have to work at that relationship by being both teachable and available. In doing this, Jason is able to illustrate to his congregation an understanding of this popular parable. Most of his messages were done in this way, connecting scripture to everyday life.

On the last Sunday of every month the service incorporated a “discussion” format. On these Sundays the worship space was set up with tables and chairs so that people could sit facing each other in small groups. During these services there was no music. Pastor Jason would begin with a prayer and then jump right into the message.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark 4:2-8, 13-20 (NIV) He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”... Then Jesus said to them, “Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

He would introduce one topic and then ask the congregation to discuss it with those sitting around them.

After the message portion of the service, they would pray again and then they would partake in communion. On some Sundays a member from the congregation would come to the front of the room and give a short communion message before everyone was invited to come up and take communion. People would slowly move toward the communion table and break off a piece of bread, dip it in the grape juice, eat it, and walk back to their seats. Some individuals would stand together in small groups to pray quietly at the front of the room after taking communion. During the communion time the praise leader would play a soft song on his guitar. After this, the service was over. By this time, the children were done with Sunday school and people would begin to visit again as they prepared to head home.

### **Being a Missional Church**

A very large focus of this church is to help out its local community; that is what being missional is. In the case of SPC, their missional focus is on the less fortunate people in the community, especially the homeless. They distribute the food from a local grocery store, let Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous use their space for weekly meetings, run a weekly after-school program, hold clothing giveaways, and partner with another area church to provide a hot meal and fellowship to the homeless once a week. Due to their community involvement, some of the congregation members have joined the church as a result of the help/services they have received from the congregation. Lacey, the youngest participant of this study is one of those people.

*Lacey's Story and Why She attends a Missional Church*

Growing up, Lacey attended church sporadically with friends and then later on with her sister. After a failed marriage right out of high school she met another man and became pregnant. She wanted to make sure her kids were raised going to church but the children's father disagreed with her. For financial reasons, they got married and had another child together. He never liked that she was taking their kids to church so they divorced and she was kicked out of the house. She met another man named Dustin, and began going to church with him and decided to get baptized, but they never really found a church home that felt right to them. They became homeless and started camping around town. She said that everywhere they were "God was with us, protecting us and keeping us safe." Then they found out about this church. Lacey said, "They did dinners on Friday nights... so we started coming down here and getting to know people." Lacey had to go to jail, but when she was released Dustin had nestled himself into the SPC community and that was how she started going regularly and getting more involved. She decided to make this her church home because she had really connected to all the people at SPC. She said that the church's motto—Restoring Broken Lives—was exactly what it did for her and that is why she continues to go there.

Lacey attends SPC for very personal reasons. After receiving some of the services this church provides, she was also able to build relationships with other members of this church community. Because SPC is missional, and being missional is not only about providing tangible help to those in need, but also, and possibly more

importantly, about connecting with people and building relationships, Lacey was able to find her church home and get back on her feet.

*Scott's Story and Why He Attends a Missional Church*

For some of the other members of SPC, belonging to a church that actually helps people is what is most important to them. Out of the church member participants (excluding the pastor), half mentioned the missional work that SPC does as a reason they attend. For one member, this is almost the only reason he goes to this church.

Scott grew up going to many different churches; he attended different denominations of varying size congregations with his mother. When he got to college, he became very involved with the University Christian Center. He even met his wife there. After college, he and his wife continued to be a part of the ministry there, but after a while they started to feel disconnected. They were in their thirties and did not have children while most of the other congregants were still in their twenties and in college or were slightly older with young families. About this time, Pastor Jason, whom they had met years ago through the campus ministry, invited Scott and his wife to help them plant this new church, so they came on board and were part of the launch team for SPC.

But, over the last several years, Scott has been questioning “the whole faith thing.” He says, “If you were to ask me the question: Do I absolutely believe that God is an absolute real thing? Well, I don’t know.” He admits that belonging to a church when you aren’t sure you believe in God is an odd thing, but he believes the missional work

SPC does is important enough to continue as a member of this church community. He explained it by saying,

One reason why I have kept with this church is because they're – yes, they take faith very seriously, but they also act it out, you know. They actually go and actually serve people... Well okay, I'm on board with that even if I'm not agreeing with everything that is being taught. I'm on board with the actual action of what we're doing and how we're taking care of people. So, I can definitely stay for that.

For Scott, serving people is why he continues to go to SPC. Even though he may be questioning his faith, he values what this church does enough to stay.

### **Membership and Attendance at this Church**

Not only was the church facility physically small, the size of the congregation was also small. According to Pastor Jason, SPC had 15 people in “covenant membership” at the time of this study, although more attend than were in covenant. Covenant membership differs from the way one normally thinks about church membership. The covenant membership pamphlet from SPC states that persons who are in covenant membership:

have decided to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior, have been baptized (immersed) into Christ, are committed to the church's Mission and Values, give regularly, and actively participate in community worship gathering, a discipleship group with others, and personal spiritual growth.<sup>17</sup>

To become a covenant member the pamphlet says you should:

- (1) Prayerfully consider taking the spiritual step of covenant membership as well as the commitment you are making to God and others,
- (2) Schedule a time to talk about your commitment

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<sup>17</sup>The mission and core values of this church are to be “Jesus to an emerging generation by creating authentic community, practicing missional living, engaging in creative dignity, and nurturing spiritual formation.”

with [the lead pastor] or attend an upcoming Covenant Membership “class” to learn more about what this commitment means, (3) Personally commit to embodying our shared Mission and Core Values in the Covenant by signing the Covenant Membership Application.

Covenant members have more responsibility than those that just attend, for example being eligible to take part in the discernment and deciding process of the leadership of SPC’s faith community.

For the weeks that I observed, Sunday attendance ranged from 16 to 26 adults with the average being approximately 22 adults (on average, there were about five children in attendance as well). There were often a few homeless – or, at least, people that looked like they were living in poverty or close to homelessness – there each Sunday.<sup>18</sup> Most of the people attending church consisted of small family units or couples; there were only a few that came on their own.

### **Description of Participants**

Demographically, the participants of this study were not completely homogenous. Although they were all white (common among evangelicals and the ECM), the six men and five women that I interviewed were among different age groups, had different levels of education, and varying incomes. Emerging Churches tend to be younger in general, and this church was no different. Of the 11 participants, eight were below the age of 40, with the largest age group represented being 31-40 (seven people were in this age group). Three of the participants were over the age of 50. The oldest

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<sup>18</sup> Homeless people that were known to be homeless were observed at church services. This was something that the pastor and other participants acknowledged. Scott reported that “I don’t know what the percentage is, but honestly on any given Sunday, we have probably a quarter of the people there are homeless, or at least some level of homelessness.”

participant was only 62 and the youngest was 26 years of age. All of the participants had at least some college level education: three had some college, one had a two year degree, five had a four year degree, and two had a Master's degree. When it came to income, the participants were much more evenly distributed, as presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 - Yearly Household Income of Participants**

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number of People</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than \$10,000	2	18%
\$20,000 to under \$30,000	2	18%
\$30,000 to under \$40,000	1	9%
\$40,000 to under \$50,000	2	18%
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	1	9%
\$75,000 to under \$100,000	1	9%
\$100,000 to under \$150,000	2	18%

I asked each participant about both their political ideology and their political affiliation, that is, how he or she was registered to vote. In both cases there was a plurality in the responses. Four people (36%) described themselves as moderate; with one other person (9%) saying they have both conservative and liberal opinions without saying specifically that they were a moderate. People who said they were liberal or leaning liberal made up 27% and people who said they were conservative or leaning conservative was another 27%. The responses about political affiliation did not correlate exactly. The registered Independents made up 27%, with another 18% who said they were an Independent, but that they did tend to vote more liberal or Democratic. Democrats made up 18%, Republicans were 27%, and the remaining 9% said they voted for a different third party. Table 2 shows the breakdown of political affiliation by

political ideology, with both percentages and the numbers representing the total amount of people in each category shown in parentheses.

**Table 2 - Political Affiliation and Ideology**

<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Democrat	18% (2)	18% (2)	---
Independent	9% (1)	18% (2)	---
Republican	---	---	27% (3)
Other	---	9% (1)	---

Seven (64%) of the participants self identified as “evangelical.” Of those, 43% were Democrats, 29% were Independents, and 29% were Republicans. Eight (72%) said they were born-again. This included two people – one was Pastor Jason – who identified as born-again but not as an evangelical Christian. The other was Lynn, a 54 year old conservative Republican woman. When she was asked about whether she considered herself to be an evangelical Christian she said, “I used to. I don’t like that word and a lot of negative things are associated with it, so I guess not.” When I asked her if she ever considered her self to be born-again she replied that she does consider herself to be a born-again Christian saying, “that term is not offensive to me.”

### **Perception of Clergy Speech**

How the congregation perceive their pastor and what he says is an important aspect to understanding how a church can influence its members’ political views. I asked the participants several questions about what their pastor had said in sermons on different topics during the last year, and if they agreed with those statements it. For comparison, I also asked the pastor if he had ever preached on these topics and what he had said on these topics. The issues that I asked about were: abortion, the wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan, immigration, hunger and poverty, the environment, laws on homosexuality, the death penalty, and political candidates and elections.

Pastor Jason had preached on all topics except the death penalty and political candidates and elections. In most cases, the participants did not recall hearing sermons on any of the topics. On the issues of abortion and immigration, only one person each time could correctly recall Jason giving a sermon on those topics. On the issue of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, one person recalled the sermon but could not remember what was said on the topic. Pastor Jason never preached specifically on the laws regarding homosexuality, but he had preached on homosexuality, in general. In this case, two people remembered his sermon, but they each remembered something slightly different from what Jason said he had preached.

The topic of hunger and poverty are somewhat of a special case for SPC because of how their missional focus is directly related to this. All the participants have heard sermons from Jason on this topic and all have agreed with what he has said on the issue. Jason believes the Bible places a strong emphasis on orphans, widows, and the disenfranchised and that if you ignore them you are ignoring a big part of what it means to be a Christian. The most common response of the participants from the congregation (mentioned by seven people) was that the church should be concerned about hunger and poverty and that people should help those (mentioned by six people) in need whenever they can. Citing food, the homeless, and the missional work SPC does in the local community were other popular themes. Table 3 shows each theme and how many times it was mentioned. Most of the participant's responses cited more than one theme,

Dan's response, "the church, people – everybody – should help those in need. [SPC] has done, as a church, a lot of things to address that locally," cited three themes: helping the needy, the church's role, and the missional work SPC does.

**Table 3 - Themes Used to Describe SPC's Views on Hunger and Poverty.**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Number of people that mentioned this theme</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Church's role	7	64%
Helping the needy	6	54%
Food	3	27%
Homeless	3	27%
Missional work	3	27%

Pastor Jason said that he had preached about the environment. Specifically, he stated that he preached that, because God created the environment, we all have the responsibility to care for it. Only four people recalled that Jason ever preached about the environment. Two of the four participants could not recall anything specific that was said. Of the other two, one recalled, "I don't remember him saying too much [about the environment], just to be responsible with the use of what God's given us" and the other recalled, "It was just more general, like we need to be good stewards of God's place." Although this data shows little specific information, it does indicate that some discussion of the environment occurred at SPC.

### **Interview Survey Results**

I interviewed the participants and asked each of them the same series of questions (see Appendix A). The interviews covered many topics, ranging from politics and the environment, to church and the Bible. Below is an overview of the results of some of the main topics from the interviews.

Sixty-four percent of the participants reported that they had donated money to an environmental group and 27% had volunteered with an environmental group in the past, but none of the participants had been a member of an environmental group.

Alicia, a 32 year old moderate Democrat, is a member of Restoring Eden, a Christian environmental ministry. Interestingly, all respondents who said they had moderate political views had donated money, while none of the liberals had ever volunteered with an environmental group.

When it came to giving money to, or volunteering with, a political campaign, the numbers were similar: 64% had donated money directly to a political campaign or had given money to a political action committee (commonly known as a PAC). Eighteen percent had given money only to a PAC. Only two people (18%) had volunteered with a political campaign. Not surprisingly, none of the moderates had volunteered with a political campaign, but a quarter of them had donated money directly to political campaigns in the past.

A small set of questions were asked about government spending, tax dollars, and environmental protection. The majority (73%) of the participants said that they would be willing to pay higher taxes for more effective environmental protection, 9% said maybe, and 18% said they would not. Another 73% agreed in one way or another that the government should protect the environment even if it limits other economic development. For many, their level of agreement would depend on the severity of the environmental damage and the impact on the economy. One of the participants, Dan, a 36 year old liberal Democrat, responded by saying,

I would say it depends. But, I mean, depending on the severity of the environmental damage being done, and conversely depending on the severity of the limitations of the economy, but I would probably say we should have the right to decide that, I guess. I think government should have the right to make the decision to protect the environment at the cost of something else; hopefully they wouldn't make the wrong decision.

All of the moderates had given money to an environmental organization in the past and they all agreed that government should spend more money to protect the environment.

When asked about global warming, 91% believe that global warming is a real issue and not a hoax, but only 73% think it is a vitally important political issue. Each participant was asked if global warming was an appropriate problem for church congregations to address and 91% did agree. Although, some (36%) thought it would be okay for churches to discuss global warming, they did think it would be a little odd and would not want it to detract from other more important aspects. Sharon, a 62 year old liberal Democrat, responded:

If a church wants to take that on as a project, I don't have any problem with that—I think there are more important things they could do. I think it could be distracting from other things. It could be kind of a “hip-church” kind of thing to do, but it's not like it would be a bad thing, necessarily.

When asked about what the Bible says about how people should interact with God's creation, caring for the environment was the most common thing people said, being mentioned by 82% of the participants. The other themes were: being responsible, using the environment, respecting the environment, stewardship of the environment, recycling, interacting with the environment, the beauty of the environment, and that the environment is God's creation. Table 4 shows each theme and how many times it was

mentioned. Often, multiple themes were used in one person's response; Lacey's response is a great example of this. She said,

I believe that [the Bible] says we and everything around us are God's creation...and, that we should respect everything and everyone, and the animals, and the trees, and the plants as if God was standing there, right next to it, right there saying, "This is my favorite plant!"

In her response she mentions both God's creation and respecting the environment. Dan gave a short response, but it cited five different themes (responsibility, respect, care, use, and beauty), he said, "I believe it's our responsibility to respect it and take care of it, and sort of use it responsibly, and admire its beauty."

**Table 4 - Themes Used to Describe What the Bible Says About How to Interact with God's Creation.**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Number of people that mentioned this theme</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Caring	9	82%
Responsibility	4	36%
Use	4	36%
God's creation	4	36%
Respect	3	27%
Stewardship	3	27%
Recycle	2	18%
Interact	2	18%
Beauty	2	18%

The participants were also asked about the conservative and liberal Christian movements, commonly referred to as the religious right and the religious left, respectively. Only one person (9%) said that they did not know about the religious right. On the other hand, just over half (54%) had not heard of the religious left at all. Even so, thirty six percent agree with the religious left movement. There were 73% who disagreed with the religious right, with 27% saying that they do not really like their

tactics and that sometimes they seem too extreme: “Religious right, to me, just sounds too... Nazi,” said Evan a 36 year old conservative Republican. None of the participants agreed completely with the religious right, including the three conservative Republicans. For both the religious right and the religious left, there were people that said they felt the movements were only for political gain. Other participants thought that there were people in the religious left and the religious right movements that were model Christians.

Almost half (45%) said that they would like to hear more expressions of religious faith and prayer from political leaders. Only 18% thought they had heard too much of it and another 18% figured they had heard the right amount. Over a quarter (27%) thought it was often fake or disingenuous and that it was only being done for political gain. Anna, a 32 year old liberal leaning Independent, said, “I just don’t trust them. I don’t know if it’s genuine. When they are talking about it, I don’t know if it’s real or because they want the support, because, like eight out of ten Americans claim that they are Christians, so it’s a way to win a vote.”

The participants were asked if they thought the Republican Party and the Democratic Party were friendly, unfriendly, or neutral toward religion. Six people (54%) thought that the Republican Party was friendly toward religion, with another three (27%) saying they were only friendly to conservative Christianity. When it came to the participant’s opinions about the Democratic Party, the results were quite different. Only 27% believe they are friendly toward religion, while 18% could not decide between neutral and unfriendly, there was another 27% that believe the Democratic Party is

unfriendly toward religion. Two different people mentioned that they thought the Democratic Party was certainly friendlier toward other religions and that they tend to be more respecting toward the idea of separation between church and state. Scott's response cited both:

I would say they're at least more open to other religions. They definitely have more of a... they make more of a point of being secular in state related functions and all that kind of stuff. Which, personally I'm perfectly fine with. But, I would say overall, that they are at least more accepting of other religions.

I asked each of the participants a multiple choice question about the Bible, in which they were able to elaborate on their responses if they wanted to. I asked them: "Is the Bible 1) the actual word of God and should be taken literally, word for word; 2) the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken word for word; 3) a good book; or 4) worth little today?" The majority of the participants (73%), including the pastor, believe the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken word for word. A little over a quarter (27%) mentioned in their response that the Bible was written by men and that there could be mistakes in it, or that the meaning of the language has changed over time. Only one person (9%) said anything about taking the Bible word for word; Craig, a 40 year old liberal leaning Independent, said that he believed the Bible was the inspired word of God, but that everything in it should be taken word for word. He was the only participant to take any sort of literal interpretation of the Bible. Although Craig said that he thought global warming was a real phenomenon, the majority of his other responses to environmental questions were more negative.

*Craig's Story and His Environmental Views*

Craig, who does consider himself to be a born-again evangelical Christian, grew up occasionally going to Pentecostal and Baptist churches. In 2008 he served one year in prison. He said that in that time he had an awakening and became very religious. When he was done serving his sentence, he and his wife went to a Church of God for a short time until it closed in 2010. They decided to come to SPC because he had seen Pastor Jason as a guest pastor at the Church of God once, so Craig felt that Jason's church might be a good fit.

Craig is not a member of an environmental group, nor has he ever donated money to, or volunteered with, an environmental group. He does not think the government should spend more money to protect the environment and he would not want to pay higher taxes for more effective environmental protection. He thinks that economic development should not be set aside in order to protect the environment either. In his opinion, global warming is real, but it is not a vitally important political issue. And, he feels the environmental movement is too secular. When asked about what he believes the Bible says about how people should interact with God's creation, he responded,

We should care for it. I know that contradicts some of what I said about the environment but you also got to understand I grew up in a logging town. If you want to save the spotted owl versus my dad's job, I'd say eat the owl, you know – fry it up with a little bit of brown gravy and it would be good. But, you know, I think God calls us in our own way to care for the environment. And, I think if everybody just did that on their own, there wouldn't be a need for government intervention.

From the responses that Craig gave to the environmental questions, there was often a negative or skeptical view of the government, especially in regards to the government's role in environmental protection. Having grown up in a logging town, environmentalists and the government were probably seen as the enemy of his family's jobs and the economy of his local community. This, along with the influence of his Pentecostal background, it should not be surprising that he has both slightly negative environmental views and a literal understanding of the Bible.

### **Conclusion**

From these results you can see that SPC is the kind of church Pastor Jason wanted it to be: an authentic, postmodern, missional church that was inclusive and active in its local community. There were particular people at this church that found themselves there because of these characteristics, especially the missional focus and inclusiveness of SPC. The members of this church had varying political views, most interestingly, is how many political moderates attend SPC. Although there were these political differences, most of the congregants have similar environmental views about protecting the environment.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church Movement**

Not all of the participants in this study identified themselves as an evangelical Christian, but the majority did. As the ECM is known to be a critique of conservative evangelicalism (Bader-Saye, 2006; Bielo, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Hunt, 2008; Moritz 2008), I anticipated that some of the participants of this study would prefer not to call themselves “evangelical.” Although the ECM is rooted in the evangelical tradition and an importance of evangelizing was present at SPC, this finding might suggest that not all emerging church members place an importance on evangelizing – at least not in the traditional sense of witnessing to non-believers. Others, like Lynn, who feel that the word “evangelical” is associated with a lot of “negative things,” are not comfortable self-identifying with the evangelical label. This is consistent with what Bielo found about emerging church members and the term, evangelical; he reported that “[his] consultants were either unconvinced of the effectiveness, or at odds with the principles, of the evangelizing methods they associated with conservative Evangelicals” (2011a, 119). At SPC, the tradition of evangelizing was made most obvious when the pastor was observed preaching, “Find someone that hasn’t met Jesus yet,” during one of his Sunday messages. In interviews, several of the participants even expressed a desire to be better at evangelizing.

Next to proselytizing, interpreting the Bible literally is another prominent element of the evangelical tradition. As Hunter (1983) reported, for evangelicals, the

Bible is to be understood in its plain and obvious sense. At SPC, a strong emphasis on a literal interpretation of the Bible was not seen. Even with a high percentage of the participants identifying as evangelical and born-again Christian, only one person said they believe the Bible should be interpreted literally.

Demographically, the members of SPC were similar to both traditional evangelicals and what is known about the members in the ECM—mainly middle-class and white. Unlike traditional evangelicals, the members of this study had higher levels of education.

### **The Emerging Church Movement and this Case Study**

This case study supports what is already understood about the types of churches that are in the ECM and their postmodern, authentic, and missional-centered philosophies. Although the focus of this study was on the environmental and political opinions of its members, through Jason's story and the origins of SPC, we can see that the creation of SPC as a postmodern church was intentional. Jason specifically wanted to raise his children in a church culture that was different from the evangelical churches he had been a part of in the past and he was determined to build a church where that could happen. Pastor Jason purposefully built SPC to be an authentic, intentional, relational, missional church community, that is, to be an emerging church.

Ancient-future was not a robust practice at SPC. Although this church used crosses, candles, and overhead screens alongside each other, and there were a few members that I observed kneeling while they were praying, the practice of ancient-future was not systematic. Other practices like chanting, rock-n-roll music, or incense,

which Bader-Saye (2006) and Moritz (2008) consider to be aspects of ancient-future, were not a part of the church services at SPC. The ambiance and the style of the church services at SPC were in keeping with the trends in the ECM – being definitely somewhere beyond the traditional-contemporary divide. There was the use of overhead screens and contemporary guitar music, but in a small space that felt a little bit more like a café or even your own living room. The preaching style was less formal than traditional oratorical preaching and on some Sundays a group discussion format was even incorporated into the service. This took the services at SPC away from the styles of contemporary “mega-churches” and also away from the more traditional styles of worship.

Orthopraxy, an element of the ECM (McFague, 2008; McKnight 2007), was something I observed at SPC. Although SPC and its membership value strong religious beliefs centered on the teachings of Jesus, the membership also recognizes the importance of simply doing the right thing. Scott, who isn't sure if he still believes in God, continues to attend because of the missional work the church does. His example shows that the goal of the church – to be the hands and feet of Jesus – is perhaps more important than the individual beliefs of its members. The implication of a church that has an emphasis on orthopraxy is that the church may be more successful in reaching its goal of helping the less fortunate people in its community, especially if the church is seen as being more inclusive.

The missional focus of SPC is central to the life of this church. A specific interest of SPC is the homeless people that live in areas near the church. Relationships are

cultivated with these people through food, clothing and supply giveaways, and weekly dinners for the homeless. Pastor Jason recognized the need in the area for a church community that could not only do church in a different way, but that could also help people in very tangible ways. By involving themselves in the lives of people they wish to help, they are better equipped to ask the people they serve what is needed, and meet those needs. The essence of being missional, like Bielo (2011a) said, is cultivating relationships in place of conversion, which is what SPC and the ECM is doing.

### **The Emerging Church Movement and Politics**

Politics did not seem to be a large issue at SPC. The members that participated in this study were not overly political either. Where traditional evangelicals have made a point to be politically active with a desire to influence politics (Nagel, 2008), SPC, like the rest of the ECM, has focused instead on being socially engaged with local issues, such as hunger, poverty, and homelessness (Moritz, 2008). Participants and the pastor both reported that political topics were not explicitly heard or discussed during worship services.

As Brewer, Kersh, and Petersen (2003) reported, someone is much more likely to hear calls for political action while at evangelical churches and calls for social action in mainline churches.<sup>19</sup> Unlike in most other evangelical churches, at SPC calls for political action were not observed, nor did any of the participants recall hearing such calls in the past. During my observations at this church, social action calls were heard regarding the

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<sup>19</sup> Brewer, Kersh, and Peterson say that a political action message “is one that urges the congregation to take an action directly involving the state, such as voting or contacting elected officials; or an effort to affect public policy, such as calls to attend mass rallies” and that a social action message “is one that summons congregants to less directly ‘political’ action: efforts to round up volunteers to make sandwiches for a local soup kitchen, for example” (2003, p. 128).

weekly dinners for the homeless, and in the more general, to “be the hands and feet of Jesus” in their community. It is not surprising that calls for social action were heard during observations and reported by participants because of the nature of this movement. If this phenomenon is common among all emerging churches, it would be another way in which the ECM is considerably different from traditional evangelicals.

Most people at this church did not agree with the conservative religious movement known as the religious right. SPC, like other churches in the ECM, did show some disillusionment with the politics of the religious right and other conservative evangelicalism. This finding was not surprising considering that the ECM has been a critique of conservative evangelicalism. On the other hand, very few people at SPC had heard of the progressive religious movement known as the religious left, which the ECM is thought to be a part of. This may be due to how the goals and organization of the religious left differ from those of the religious right.

Overall, evangelicals are often seen to be both religiously and politically conservative, but the ECM is believed to be more liberally-minded. However, it could not be said that SPC was monolithically liberal, as they were just as polyvocal as their traditional evangelical counterparts. The participants in this study represented all points on the political spectrum, from conservative Republican to moderate Libertarian to liberal Democrat. What was found in this case study was that the majority of the participants were actually moderates, with some of them tending to lean a little more liberal. If it is not simply a phenomenon of this case study, these findings might suggest that the members of this movement are more moderate because they are cross pressured

by the conservative leaning views of traditional evangelicalism and the liberal leaning views of progressive evangelicalism. More research will need to be done on the political ideology and affiliation of emerging church members to know if this is accurate.

### **The Emerging Church Movement and the Environment**

As predicted, the environmental views of the participants, as described in interviews showed an overall respect for the environment and for what they consider to be the creation of God. Little variance in the types of environmental views was seen in this study, with none of the views being particularly extreme in either direction. The location of this study has to be taken into consideration when talking about the environmental views of the people that participated. Oregon not only has a strong natural resources economy, but the state also has a strong tradition of environmentalism. Over the past few decades, environmental protection has been increasing in awareness especially as further research on global climate change is being done. This greater awareness for the environment, coupled with a religious belief that the environment is the creation of God, may have led to these environmental attitudes.

Most of the participants of this study were concerned about the environment and did seem to have an interest in protecting it. The topic of global warming was seen as a real and important issue by most, but when it came to the church's role in it, some questioned how important the role of the church should be, and felt that it could detract from other more important things the church could be involved in. This is most likely because the environment has not traditionally been a focus of churches in the past. It may also be because, as evangelicals, more important spiritual issues should be

addressed, or for emerging church members, more immediate human issues, such as hunger and homelessness, should be addressed. For this group, protection of the environment over economic concerns was greater than among other evangelicals. This is probably rooted in this group's political backgrounds being mainly liberal leaning moderates, which could be because of the surrounding political culture of Oregon. It was found that the republicans and conservatives in this study had a slightly lower concern for environmental protection and a slightly higher preference for the economy and business, but this is to be expected based on Woodrum and Hoban's 1994 research. It was also found that the one person that took a literal interpretation of the Bible did have a much lower education level, which also supports what Woodrum and Hoban had reported. Although there were no interview questions regarding "Creation Care," nor its founder, Rev. Richard Cizik, it was not mentioned by any of the participants in this study. This was probably due to this church's lack of environmental focus and the relatively small size of the Evangelical Environmental Network's Creation Care movement.<sup>20</sup>

The ECM does not just utilize different worship styles from traditional evangelicalism; its core beliefs are different as well. From this study, it seems that emerging evangelicals are more complex than their traditional evangelical counterparts. The ECM appears to have different political ideologies and more progressive environmental views, but in some ways they are very similar to traditional evangelicals.

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<sup>20</sup> The Evangelical Environmental Network's website states that it is a ministry, founded in 1993 that develops and publishes material for churches, ministries, families, and individuals "to use as they seek to know the Lord more fully, especially his care for all that he has made (Evangelical Environmental Network, 2011).

For example, both groups share a desire to positively affect the lives of the people around them. But they differ in the ways in which this is done: for traditional evangelicals this is often done through an engagement with the political process (Edsall, 2006), for the ECM it is more action-oriented.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Through a case study, this thesis attempted to describe one emerging church congregation in the state of Oregon and to analyze the environmental and political attitudes of its members. This study has added to the limited scholarship on the ECM in that it has expanded on what is already understood about the movement – the desire to be authentic, missional, postmodern Christians – and to what was not known before – the environmental and political opinions of its members. This project is one of the first of its kind and it should be considered a pilot study for future research.

With this project, I utilized the methods of content analysis of interviews and participant observations to explore the environmental and political opinions of the ECM through a case study of one emerging church congregation. The data I gathered in this study was analyzed and the results were compared with what is already known about traditional evangelicals in America. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used in interviews with 11 participants (this was approximately half of the regular attending congregation at this church). I employed participant-observation, which lasted for eight weeks, to increase validity of results in this project. I gathered significant qualitative data and used an iterative coding process to find themes within the data. The results of this study, though not fully generalizable, provide the beginnings of a new analytical understanding of the ECM.

Through the analysis of the observations and interviews for this study, it can be said that SPC was an ideal specimen of the ECM. This was exemplified by the

motivation and process in which Pastor Jason established this church. And, by its missional focus and inclusiveness of the homeless and of people with stories like Lacey and Craig, and also by people like Scott, who question whether God is an absolute real thing yet are still active members of this church because of the good it is doing. SPC really is a postmodern, missional, authentic church community; characteristics which are commensurate with the literature on the ECM.

From the results it appears that members of emerging churches are more moderate than their traditional evangelical counterparts, suggesting that the ECM is not necessarily as liberally minded as it has been thought. This study also found that political action calls, which are often heard at traditional evangelical churches, were not heard at SPC. On the other hand, social action calls were heard, which is something one is much more likely to hear in a mainline church. This was an interesting finding because it may point to another way in which the ECM is considerably different from traditional evangelicalism. Although most church members showed an interest in environmental protection, the environment was not a major issue at the church that was studied.

### **Research Limitations**

The limitation with the greatest potential impact on this study was the small sample size. Although the sample size was roughly half of the total population of the church, it was still small, which made drawing conclusions from this group difficult. While I spent over two months in the field (extended from only six weeks), and made almost weekly announcements to the congregation requesting participants, only 11

people agreed to an interview. Additional time in the field to obtain extra interviews would not have resulted in significantly more interviews from this congregation. If time and resources were not as limiting, I would have selected multiple churches to participant in this study. This would have produced more interviews and more observations, making the results more conclusive and generalizable.

### **Future Research**

The ECM is a uniquely complex and fascinating religious group that sits somewhere between traditional and progressive evangelicalism. Although at this point it is not known how long the ECM might last or how much it may grow, it currently offers a fascinating opportunity for future research. As this was a pilot study, the methods used in this project make it repeatable. More research needs to be conducted employing both qualitative and quantitative methods with larger sample sizes and geographical areas for results to be more conclusive and generalizable. In addition, with adequate sample sizes it may be possible to control for any possible geographic influences. Interesting areas for further study would be the political orientations of ECM members; how politically active emerging church congregations are, both in and out of church; clergy speech, including what types of calls congregants hear from their pastors – political and/or social calls – and how the perception of clergy speech influences congregants; and to what level environmental protection and global warming should be addressed by church congregations.

The practical implications of this study, and future ones like it, are significant for the scholarship of the ECM and of the people that call themselves emerging Christians.

The findings from this study can help further research on the ECM, increasing the analytical understanding of this movement and how it fits into America's religious landscape, and particularly, the potential importance of this group's political and environmental attitudes.

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## APPENDIX A: CHURCH MEMBER PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe yourself politically?<sup>1</sup>
  - extremely liberal
  - liberal
  - leaning liberal
  - independent
  - leaning conservative
  - conservative
  - extremely conservative
  
2. How would you describe your political affiliation?<sup>1,3</sup>
  - strong Democrat
  - moderate Democrat
  - leaning Democrat
  - Independent
  - leaning Republican
  - moderate Republican
  - strong Republican

3. How often do you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?<sup>1</sup>
  - most of the time
  - some of the time
  - not very often
  - never
  
4. Are you a member of an environmental group?<sup>1</sup>
  
5. Have you ever:
  - a. Given money to an environmental group?<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Volunteered for an environmental group?<sup>3</sup>
  
6. Have you ever:
  - a. Given money to a political campaign?<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Volunteered for a political campaign?<sup>3</sup>
  
7. Do you think government should spend more money to protect the environment?<sup>3</sup>
  
8. Would you be willing to pay higher taxes for more effective environmental protection?<sup>3</sup>

9. Do you think government should protect the environment even if this limits other economic development?<sup>3</sup>
  
10. Do you think global warming is a vitally important political issue?<sup>2</sup>
  
11. Do you think global warming is a real issue or is it a hoax?<sup>2</sup>
  
12. Whether or not global warming is important, do you think it is an appropriate problem for church congregations to address?<sup>2</sup>
  
13. Do you think the environmental movement is not welcoming of religious perspectives – that it is too secular?<sup>2</sup>
  
14. During the past year, have you heard a sermon, lecture, or group discussion in your church that dealt with protecting the environment?<sup>2</sup>
  
15. Does your pastor ever speak out:
  - a. On the issue of abortion?<sup>4</sup>
    1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
      - i. Do you agree?
  - b. On the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan?<sup>4</sup>
    1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?

- i. Do you agree?
- c. About immigration?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?
- d. About hunger and poverty?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?
- e. About the environment?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?
- f. About laws regarding homosexuality?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?
- g. On the issue of the death penalty?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?
- h. About candidates and elections?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. If yes, what has your pastor said about this issue?
    - i. Do you agree?

16. In your opinion, should churches or other houses of worship keep out of political matters or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?<sup>4</sup>
  
17. Do you think there has been too much, too little or the right amount of expressions of religious faith and prayer by political leaders?<sup>4</sup>
  
18. At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on government leaders and institutions such as the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court, or losing its influence?<sup>4</sup>
  
19. At the present time, do you think that religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?<sup>4</sup>
  - a. All in all, do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing?<sup>4</sup>
  
20. What do you think of the conservative Christian movement, sometimes referred to as the religious right?<sup>4</sup>
  
21. What do you think of the liberal or progressive Christian movement, sometimes referred to as the religious left?<sup>4</sup>

22. Do you feel that the Republican Party is generally friendly toward religion, neutral toward religion, or unfriendly toward religion?<sup>4</sup>

23. Do you feel that the Democratic Party is generally friendly toward religion, neutral toward religion, or unfriendly toward religion?<sup>4</sup>

24. How often do you attend church services or other activities at church?<sup>4</sup>

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once or twice a month

25. What do you believe the Bible says about how people should interact with God's creation?<sup>3</sup>

26. Is the Bible:<sup>4,5</sup>

- The actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
- The inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken word for word.
- A good book.
- Worth little today.

27. Would you describe yourself as an evangelical Christian, or not?<sup>4,6</sup>

a. If yes, do you consider yourself a born-again Christian?<sup>4,6</sup>

28. How important is religion in your daily life?<sup>3,4</sup>

29. Can you tell me a little about what originally brought you to this church?<sup>7</sup>

30. How long have you attended this church?

31. Can you describe to me your religious background?<sup>7</sup>

32. What was your total family income from all sources, before taxes last year? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to under \$20,000
- \$20,000 to under \$30,000
- \$30,000 to under \$40,000
- \$40,000 to under \$50,000
- \$50,000 to under \$75,000
- \$75,000 to under \$100,000
- \$100,000 to under \$150,000 [OR]
- \$150,000 or more

33. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school/GED
- Some college
- 2 year college degree
- 4 year college degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree

34. What is your age?

- 18 - 21
- 22 - 25
- 26 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- 61 or over

35. With which ethnic group do you identify? You may select all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- A group not included in this list (please explain if you would like)

**Notes:**

1. Smith & Johnson, 2010
2. Djupe & Olson, 2010
3. Woodrum & Hoban, 1994
4. Pew Research Center, 2010
5. Djupe & Hunt, 2009
6. Layman, 1997
7. Bielo, 2011a

## APPENDIX B: CLERGY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe yourself politically?<sup>1</sup>

- extremely liberal
- liberal
- leaning liberal
- independent
- leaning conservative
- conservative
- extremely conservative

2. How would you describe your political affiliation?<sup>1,3</sup>

- strong Democrat
- moderate Democrat
- leaning Democrat
- Independent
- leaning Republican
- moderate Republican
- strong Republican

3. How often do you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?<sup>1</sup>
  - most of the time
  - some of the time
  - not very often
  - never
  
4. Are you a member of an environmental group?<sup>1</sup>
  
5. Have you ever:
  - a. Given money to an environmental group?<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Volunteered for an environmental group?<sup>3</sup>
  
6. Have you ever:
  - a. Given money to a political campaign?<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Volunteered for a political campaign?<sup>3</sup>
  
7. Do you think government should spend more money to protect the environment?<sup>3</sup>
  
8. Would you be willing to pay higher taxes for more effective environmental protection?<sup>3</sup>

9. Do you think government should protect the environment even if this limits other economic development?<sup>3</sup>
  
10. Do you think global warming is a vitally important political issue?<sup>2</sup>
  
11. Do you think global warming is a real issue or is it a hoax?<sup>2</sup>
  
12. Whether or not global warming is important, do you think it is an appropriate problem for church congregations to address?<sup>2</sup>
  
13. Do you think the environmental movement is not welcoming of religious perspectives – that it is too secular?<sup>2</sup>
  
14. During the past year, have you given a sermon, lecture, or lead a group discussion in your church that dealt with protecting the environment?<sup>2</sup>
  
15. In a sermon or while leading a group discussion, have you ever spoken about:
  - a. The issue of abortion?<sup>4</sup>
    1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
  - b. The wars in Iraq or Afghanistan?<sup>4</sup>
    1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
  - c. Immigration?<sup>4</sup>

1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
    - d. Hunger and poverty?<sup>4</sup>
      1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
    - e. The environment?<sup>4</sup>
      1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
    - f. Laws regarding homosexuality?<sup>4</sup>
      1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
    - g. The issue of the death penalty?<sup>4</sup>
      1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
    - h. Candidates and elections?<sup>4</sup>
      1. If yes, what have you said about this issue?
16. In your opinion, should churches or other houses of worship keep out of political matters or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?<sup>4</sup>
17. Do you think there has been too much, too little or the right amount of expressions of religious faith and prayer by political leaders?<sup>4</sup>
18. At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on government leaders and institutions such as the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court, or losing its influence?<sup>4</sup>

19. At the present time, do you think that religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?<sup>4</sup>
  - a. All in all, do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing?<sup>4</sup>
20. What do you think of the conservative Christian movement, sometimes referred to as the religious right?<sup>4</sup>
21. What do you think of the liberal or progressive Christian movement, sometimes referred to as the religious left?<sup>4</sup>
22. Do you feel that the Republican Party is generally friendly toward religion, neutral toward religion, or unfriendly toward religion?<sup>4</sup>
23. Do you feel that the Democratic Party is generally friendly toward religion, neutral toward religion, or unfriendly toward religion?<sup>4</sup>
24. What do you believe the Bible says about how people should interact with God's creation?<sup>3</sup>

25. Is the Bible:<sup>4,5</sup>

- The actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
- The inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken word for word.
- A good book.
- Worth little today.

26. Would you describe yourself as an evangelical Christian, or not?<sup>4,6</sup>

- a. If yes, do you consider yourself a born-again Christian?<sup>4,6</sup>

27. Can you describe to me your religious background, including how long you have been with this church?<sup>7</sup>

28. What was your total family income from all sources, before taxes last year? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to under \$20,000
- \$20,000 to under \$30,000
- \$30,000 to under \$40,000
- \$40,000 to under \$50,000
- \$50,000 to under \$75,000
- \$75,000 to under \$100,000 (*continues on next page*)

- \$100,000 to under \$150,000 [OR]
- \$150,000 or more

29. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school/GED
- Some college
- 2 year college degree
- 4 year college degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree

30. What is your age?

- 18 - 21
- 22 - 25
- 26 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- 61 or over

31. With which ethnic group do you identify? You may select all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- A group not included in this list (please explain if you would like)

**Notes:**

1. Smith & Johnson, 2010
2. Djupe & Olson, 2010
3. Woodrum & Hoban, 1994
4. Pew Research Center, 2010
5. Djupe & Hunt, 2009
6. Layman, 1997
7. Bielo, 2011a