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ENCOURAGING CONVERSATION:
SHARING THE ORAL HISTORY OF NEPALESE REFUGEES THROUGH DIALOGICAL
PREACHING TO INSPIRE INTERCULTURAL COLLABORATION

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
Rev. Matthew Clark
January 2025

Approved by:

Dr. David Schmitt

MAP Advisor

Dr. Peter Nafzger

Reader

Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez

Reader

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This Major Applied Project is dedicated to the glory of God and to the Lord's people at Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri. It is a privilege to both sow and water the seed of the Word among you as God gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:6–7).

“Preach you the Word and plant it home to men who like or like it not, the Word that shall endure and stand when flow'rs and men shall be forgot” (*LSB*, 586:1).

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ILLUSTRATIONS | ix |
| TABLES | x |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | xi |
| ABBREVIATIONS | xiii |
| CHRONOLOGY..... | xiv |
| GLOSSARY | xv |
| ABSTRACT..... | xvi |
| CHAPTER ONE..... | 1 |
| THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| RESEARCH PROBLEM..... | 2 |
| RESEARCH QUESTION..... | 8 |
| RESEARCH PURPOSE..... | 10 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 13 |
| THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH..... | 13 |
| ORIGINALITY | 13 |
| Demographic Changes in the United States | 16 |
| US Demographic Change’s Effect upon Christian Churches..... | 18 |
| Ethnic Composition of the LCMS | 19 |
| Opportunity for Growth in Cultural Diversity in the LCMS..... | 23 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 24 |
| Oral History | 24 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Oral Voice..... | 28 |
| Particular Voice | 30 |
| Purposeful Voice | 32 |
| Transformative Voice | 33 |
| LEVELS OF CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT | 34 |
| Culture Studies..... | 34 |
| Three Levels of Cultural Engagement..... | 39 |
| Multicultural Level | 40 |
| Cross-Cultural Level | 41 |
| Intercultural Level | 43 |
| CHAPTER THREE | 47 |
| THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE | 47 |
| BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION..... | 47 |
| The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism..... | 47 |
| The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism—Scripture | 48 |
| The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism—Baptismal Liturgy | 54 |
| Horizontal Ecclesiology..... | 56 |
| Dialogical Preaching..... | 59 |
| What Is Dialogical Preaching? | 59 |
| Is the Sermon a Solitary Event? | 62 |
| How Do We Understand Dialogical Preaching from a Confessional Lutheran Perspective?..... | 65 |
| Where Is This Project Located in the Spectrum of Dialogical Preaching? | 69 |
| How Was Dialogical Preaching Used in This Project in Connection to Recorded | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Oral Histories of Members Who Are Refugees?..... | 72 |
| HISTORICAL CONTEXT | 81 |
| CHAPTER FOUR..... | 85 |
| THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY | 85 |
| RESEARCH DESIGN..... | 86 |
| Population Sampling..... | 86 |
| Cultural Factors for Population Sampling | 87 |
| Pragmatic Factors for Population Sampling..... | 93 |
| Implementation | 99 |
| Methodological Approach | 103 |
| Research Methodology | 106 |
| Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher | 108 |
| Implementation Timeline..... | 110 |
| CHAPTER FIVE | 112 |
| PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA | 112 |
| DATA ANALYSES | 113 |
| Meaning Units from Transcripts..... | 113 |
| Common Themes and Dichotomy Sets | 114 |
| Content of Pre-Service Videos | 123 |
| Video 1: What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal? | 125 |
| Video 2: Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?..... | 127 |
| Video 3: How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church? | 129 |
| Interaction with Oral History Interview Data in the Dialogical Sermons | 132 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Overview of Project’s Dialogical Sermon Series | 133 |
| Analysis of the Dialogical Nature of Each Sermon..... | 138 |
| FINDINGS..... | 146 |
| Sermon 1: Refugee and Citizen | 148 |
| Sermon 2: Persecution and Freedom | 154 |
| Sermon 3: Strangers and Family | 158 |
| CHAPTER SIX..... | 163 |
| SUMMARY..... | 163 |
| RESEARCH PROBLEM..... | 163 |
| RESEARCH QUESTION..... | 164 |
| RESEARCH PURPOSE | 164 |
| PROJECT’S VALUE TO MINISTRY SETTING | 165 |
| Value at Ascension | 165 |
| Inspiring Baptism as a Common Value That Forms Community | 166 |
| Inspiring Empathy toward the Hearers’ Ethnic Other | 167 |
| Inspiring Intercultural Leadership within the Congregation | 170 |
| Inspiring Evangelism and Witness among Those Who Are Non-Christians from Nepal..... | 172 |
| Inspiring Welcome to Other Cultural Groups at Ascension..... | 173 |
| Value in the Missouri District..... | 174 |
| Value in Other LCMS Congregations | 175 |
| Value at Christian Friends of New Americans | 177 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 177 |
| APPENDIX ONE..... | 179 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Full Transcript of Nepalese Oral History Interviews..... | 179 |
| APPENDIX TWO..... | 221 |
| PORTIONS OF THE ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE SERMON SERIES VIDEOS..... | 221 |
| APPENDIX THREE..... | 227 |
| ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS MEANING UNITS | 227 |
| APPENDIX FOUR..... | 242 |
| FULL TEXT OF DIALOGICAL SERMON SERIES SERMONS..... | 242 |
| APPENDIX FIVE..... | 256 |
| DIALOGICAL SERMON SERIES ORDER OF WORSHIP | 256 |
| APPENDIX SIX | 269 |
| PROJECT-RELATED DOCUMENTS | 269 |
| APPENDIX SEVEN..... | 276 |
| LINKS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW VIDEOS SHOWN IN WORSHIP | 276 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 277 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Composition among Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod | 20 |
| Figure 2. Immigrant Status among Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod | 21 |
| Figure 3. US Population by Generational Status | 22 |
| Figure 4. The Spectrum of Dialogical Preaching External and Internal to a Sermon | 67 |
| Figure 5. The Reflect, Plan, Act, and Observe Process for Continual Progress..... | 107 |

TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| Table 1. Comparison of Populations by Race Alone | 17 |
| Table 2. LCMS Statistical Data from 1962–2020 (Selected Years)..... | 19 |
| Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, Population Estimates, July 1, 2024 | 21 |

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I am thankful for my parents, Jonathan and Gail Clark, who brought me to the waters of Holy Baptism and faithfully ensured I heard the Word of the Lord at home, in worship, and in Lutheran schools. Because of my Christian parents, I cannot remember a time that I did not know Jesus is my Savior. In addition to my own parents, the Lord has blessed me with godly in-laws, Bill and Karen Stock, who have been a source of consistent encouragement.

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I am thankful for our children, Noah and Anna Clark, and the faith in Christ with which God has blessed them. As our son and daughter grow into young adults, I pray they continue to be an example to others in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

I am thankful for the leadership of Christian Friends of New Americans. I am amazed at the ways in which God continues to work through staff and volunteers to share the love of Christ with immigrants and refugees in the St. Louis area in tangible ways. There are many new Americans who would not yet be baptized if it were not for the partnership in the Gospel that

exists between this ministry and Lutheran congregations in St. Louis.

I am thankful for the congregation I am called to serve, Ascension Lutheran in St. Louis, Missouri, and its many lay leaders. I appreciate the time they have allowed me to invest in the Doctor of Ministry program and in this project in particular. I pray that my advanced studies have made me better able to serve them well as pastor. I am especially grateful for those who assisted significantly with the technological aspects of the recorded interviews in this project, including Matthew Bergholt, Mark Maxfield, and Vernon Schmidt.

I am thankful for the confessional and missional faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. I am grateful for the investment of time and sharing of insight from my readers, Dr. Peter Nafzger and Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez, and the director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Dr. Mark Rockenbach. This project would not have been possible without the vital wisdom, experience, and creativity of my advisor, Dr. David Schmitt.

I am thankful for the keen eye of my proofreader, Emily Hatesohl. She not only suggested edits and style corrections that made this project better, but did so in a way that was respectful and collaborative.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------|--|
| AC | Augsburg Confession in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., <i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). |
| CFNA | Christian Friends of New Americans |
| EIIT | Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology |
| IRB | Internal Review Board |
| LC | Large Catechism |
| <i>LSB</i> | Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> . St. Louis: Concordia, 2006. |
| LCMS | The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod |
| RSO | Recognized Service Organization |
| SA | Smalcald Articles, <i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). |
| US | United States |

CHRONOLOGY

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| April 2023 | Submitted MAP Proposal and IRB paperwork |
| July 2023 | Received approval for MAP proposal from advisor, readers, and Director of Doctor of Ministry program |
| August 2023 | Wrote Chapter One of MAP and submitted to advisor |
| December 2023 | Conducted recording of oral histories from Nepali church members and analyzed data |
| January 2024 | Wrote Chapter Two of MAP and submitted to advisor Composed dialogical sermon series using data from oral history interviews as a measure of what to include |
| January–February 2024 | Preached dialogical sermon series |
| February 2024 | Wrote Chapter Three and submitted to advisor |
| April 2024 | Wrote Chapter Four and submitted to advisor |
| May 2024 | Wrote Chapter Five and submitted to advisor |
| June 2024 | Wrote Chapter Six and submitted to advisor |
| January 2025 | Shared initial draft of MAP with advisor |
| January 2025 | Began process of submitting MAP to readers |
| February 2025 | Submitted application for oral exam |

GLOSSARY

- Cross-Cultural Cross-cultural engagement goes beyond a mere awareness of another culture and moves into the context of another culture making “bridges” from one culture to the other.
- Dialogical Preaching Dialogical preaching allows for conversation in connection with the sermon. While the preaching event is always communication, dialogical preaching allows the sermon’s content to include voices from the priesthood of all believers. This, however, does not necessarily mean that other individuals other than the pastor will be speaking during the preaching event.
- Intercultural An intercultural level of engagement involves collaboration between ethnic groups and can lead to deeper relationships and a healthy interdependence in a congregation.
- Multicultural A multicultural level of engagement is simply a matter of awareness of another culture in one’s congregation. In a multicultural setting, ethnic groups exist parallel to each other with little interaction.
- Oral History “Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format.”¹

¹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

ABSTRACT

Clark, Matthew J. “Encouraging Conversation: Sharing the Oral History of Nepalese Refugees through Dialogical Preaching to Inspire Intercultural Collaboration.” Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2025. 286 pp.

The project attends to the context of Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri, where a minority group of church members are refugees from Nepal. As Ascension grows in ethnic diversity, however, much of the congregation has only a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

The project seeks to answer the question, “How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension’s refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?” Field research included recording the oral histories of four key Nepali leaders in the congregation. The data of these interviews directly shaped the content and focus of the dialogical sermon series. The project views dialogical preaching as being collaborative by nature, and incorporating voices from another culture makes this project’s sermons collaborative in a distinctly intercultural way. The bibliographic research for this project includes an examination of oral histories as a research tool. It also explores the field of cultural engagement, focusing on three levels of engagement proposed by Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez. Additionally, research explored the horizontal dimension of baptism between those in a multicultural church. Finally, the theological implications of the homiletical practice of dialogical preaching were surveyed from a Confessional Lutheran perspective.

The purpose of this project’s research is to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of church members who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration. The aim of this collaborative and conversational sermon series is to inspire people of different cultures to work together.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The week after I was installed as pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri, I received a phone call from Rev. Dr. Al Buckman of Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA) informing me that twenty-one refugees from Nepal had become connected to our congregation and were waiting to be baptized. I had been the divinely called shepherd of Ascension for only a matter of days, and already people were lining up to be baptized. I was off to a great start as pastor! To be honest, this already established queue to the baptismal font made it clear that this work of outreach was most certainly not my doing. I felt as though I was in a similar position as Apollos in 1 Cor. 3:6–7 where the apostle Paul writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”¹ Others before me at Ascension and CFNA had planted the Word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the hearts of Nepali refugees, and now it was time for me to water and nurture what was planted, trusting that God would give the growth.

In the months following my phone conversation with Dr. Buckman, regular bilingual instruction in both English and Nepali took place as I led baptismal candidates and catechumens through Luther’s Small Catechism. The Sunday then arrived for these new Nepali Christians to be baptized. Our church nave was full of Ascension members as well as volunteers from CFNA, all watching as a line of refugees came up to the font one by one to be baptized. Children, adults, and older adults who looked different, spoke differently, and dressed differently from most of those sitting in the congregation. Yet, these individuals were baptized with the very same water

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

and God's Word. "Beema, Anju, Ran ... I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Following the baptism of these former Hindus and Buddhists, the familiar words of welcome from *Lutheran Service Book* were spoken,

In Holy Baptism God the Father has made you members of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs with us of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We receive you in Jesus' name as our brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

To this, a sanctuary full of nearly entirely Caucasian Americans dutifully proclaimed in unison, "Amen. We welcome you in the name of the Lord."²

Even as these words of welcome were on the lips of longtime members of Ascension, I wondered what kinds of questions were already in their minds—questions that I shared as pastor. Yes, these Nepali people were now brothers and sisters in Christ through baptism, but what would happen now? What exactly did it look like for us to hear His Word and receive His gifts "together"? How could we be in dialog with each other as different ethnic groups? Was there a way to look at our relationship together theologically, perhaps in the context of a sermon? As different cultures within the same congregation, do we simply coexist side by side with limited interaction, or are there ways we can collaborate in shared ministry?

Research Problem

Ascension's congregation and pastors rejoice that the Lord is working through us to fulfill His Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

² Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 271, hereafter *LSB*.

commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20). Yet the reality of cultural differences, such as country of origin, dress, language, food, music, and more, can make unity a challenge—even among those who are brothers and sisters in Christ through baptism. Our congregation publicly welcomed newly baptized new Americans answering, “Amen” in response to the words of the baptismal rite, “We receive you in Jesus’ name as our brothers and sisters in Christ” (*LSB*, 271). Yet, Ascension’s American-born members may not fully appreciate or engage with those of a different culture as fellow members of God’s family or as fellow citizens of God’s kingdom. They may not fully comprehend, or live out, the horizontal dimension of baptism, where water and God’s Word not only unite us to Christ Jesus, but also to one another.

Insight provided in the area of cultural studies helps address this problem. Numerous models can help illustrate different levels of cultural engagement. For instance, from a perspective of secular culture studies, Craig Storti writes about cultural engagement in terms of “Stages of Cultural Sensitivity.” These stages include denial, defense, minimization (all classified as “ethnocentrism”), acceptance, and adaptation/integration (classified as ethnorelativism).³ Another model is provided by the founder of the multicultural Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas, Mark DeYmaz. He presents a continuum of cultural engagement that moves from destructiveness to blindness to awareness to sensitivity to competence.⁴

While this project later includes a brief survey of different models, or frameworks, for cultural interaction, it interacts primarily with the theoretical framework for assessing levels of cultural engagement proposed by Leopoldo Sánchez. Informed by the work of Latin theologian

³ Craig Storti, *Understanding the World’s Cultures* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2017), 152–54.

⁴ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), 103.

Carmen Nanko-Fernández and cultural studies scholar Néstor Medina,⁵ Sánchez’s framework incorporates first article wisdom and theological understanding. His framework identifies “three levels of interaction with the cultural other, namely, multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural engagements—the third option being the more involved or deeper (and yes, healthier) form of interaction to work towards.”⁶ Sánchez’s framework originated as a way to assess the cultural engagement of first-year incoming students at Concordia Seminary.⁷ His levels of interaction also provide a clear way to not only assess an individual, but also an entire congregation such as Ascension, which makes his framework ideal for this project. Additionally, Sánchez has presented and written extensively concerning cultural studies utilizing this same three-level framework.

Distinctly Confessional Lutheran resources that reference any framework for cultural engagement can prove difficult to find. Utilizing Sánchez’s framework allows this project to engage with the many Confessional Lutheran resources authored by him that use the language of multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural.⁸

A multicultural level of engagement is simply a matter of awareness of another culture in one’s congregation. In a *multicultural* setting, ethnic groups exist parallel to each other with little

⁵ Carmen Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en EspanGLISH: Context, Community, and Ministry* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010) and Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009).

⁶ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Salsa Music and Cultural Health,” Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, February 23, 2022, 1.

⁷ Sánchez, “Salsa Music and Cultural Health,” 1.

⁸ For examples, see the following: Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “I Believe in One Catholic Church: Thinking about Diversity as a Christian,” *Other Faculty Scholarship*, 2020, 9, <https://scholar.csl.edu/jofs/9>. The presentation was for the Equip Conference of the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS.

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Re/Kindling Creativity and Imagination,” Concordia Seminary, Blog Series, February 23, 2022, <https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2022/02/salsa-music-and-cultural-health/>.

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Hispanic Is Not What You Think: Reimagining Hispanic Identity, Implications for an Increasingly Global Church,” *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 233.

interaction. In contrast, *cross-cultural* engagement goes beyond mere awareness of another culture and moves into the context of another culture making “bridges” between cultures. There is a risk, however, that this crossing can be one-sided and not mutual. Most preferred is an *intercultural* level of engagement, which involves collaboration between ethnic groups and can lead to deeper relationships and a healthy interdependence in a congregation. In this ideal level of engagement, people from different cultures move from being strangers to recognizing and treating each other as baptized brothers and sisters in Christ. Intercultural collaboration allows for interdependence in ministry between different cultures.

It is difficult to assess a congregation’s level of cultural engagement. Without a framework for evaluation, there is an ambiguous feeling that the multiethnic community at Ascension is not as well connected as it could, or should, be. However, Sánchez’s framework helps to give both a name to Ascension’s ethnic engagement as well as a description of it, allowing for a clearer understanding of the problem this project seeks to address.

Viewing Ascension Lutheran through the framework of cultural engagement that Sánchez illustrates, the congregation could be best classified as “multicultural.” The condition of the problem is that the congregation’s different ethnic groups—primarily Caucasian and Nepali—have had limited interaction with one another. As a result, congregation members have not fully experienced the baptismal reality of being “brothers and sisters in Christ” as the baptismal rite so beautifully states. Thus, the following is this project’s research problem: As Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

Through water and the Word, God has indeed connected members of Ascension not only to

Him, but also to each other. There is a vertical dimension to baptism between the one who is baptized and their connection to Jesus' death and resurrection. At the same time there is a horizontal dimension to baptism that connects the newly baptized to others in the family of God. Robert Kolb recognizes the vertical and horizontal facets of baptism, writing, "Paul taught that the Baptism which recasts our identity before God by joining us to the crucified and risen body of Christ also has placed us in a new set of horizontal relationships, above all in that body of Christ which is his gathered people, the church."⁹ This connection to one another in the body of Christ transcends cultural boundaries.

There are many different facets of congregational ministry that can help address the problem of this project; however, this MAP will focus on preaching as a key part of the solution. The proclaimed Word in the sermon has the broadest impact possible in the congregation as the preaching act reaches members of all ethnic groups and provides the opportunity to proclaim the baptismal identity that is explored more in Chapter Three.

More specifically, this MAP will engage with the practice of dialogical preaching in particular. While the preaching event is always communication, dialogical preaching allows dialog to extend to include the priesthood of all believers. This can be accomplished through feed-forward dialog that occurs in preparation before the sermon or through feedback following the sermon. Dialog can also occur inside the sermon in a scripted or unscripted way. Additionally, dialogical preaching recognizes that, as the Lutheran Confessions attest, the Gospel is delivered not only through the office of preaching, but also through the mutual conversation of brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.¹⁰ In turn, this communication can shape what is preached by

⁹ Robert Kolb, *Make Disciples Baptizing: God's Gift of New Life and Christian Witness* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Publications, 1997), 55.

¹⁰ SA III 4, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the*

the pastor in the sermon.

Specially related to this project, the dialog produced in a series of oral history¹¹ interviews with Nepali refugee members will be a measure of what content is included in dialogical sermons. These sermons will seek to also foster dialog among members of the congregation and a greater sense of unity through a common identity as baptized children of God. A goal is for sermon dialog to beget additional congregational dialog in order to address the problem of a shallow multicultural engagement at Ascension. Dialogical preaching, and its implications for addressing the problem of this MAP, will be explored further in Chapter Three of this project.

The oral history informed dialogical preaching in this project strives to reflect the preaching of the universal Gospel that Martin Franzmann writes about:

We place no bars—racial, political, or social. The Lutheran Church is not a German church, an English church, or a Chinese church; it is neither a white man’s church nor a black man’s church; neither a rich man’s church nor a poor man’s church. The Gospel that we preach is a universal Gospel and the grace it offers is a universal grace.¹²

Following Franzmann’s assertion that the preached Gospel is universal, it is reasonable that the nature of preaching lends itself well to addressing, and encouraging, an ethnically diverse congregation. The truths that are proclaimed in the preaching task are for all people to hear. When dialogical preaching is employed in particular, the story of salvation, as well as the story of God’s work in the lives of Nepali refugee members, is not “their” story or “my” story, but the congregation’s shared story.

Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 319.

¹¹ Concordia Historical Institute has recently made use of oral history interviews. For a recent example see Michael R. Wilke, “In their Own Words: An Oral History of Issues, Etc.,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 97, no. 3 (Fall 2024): 39.

¹² Martin Franzmann, “So We Preach,” *The Lutheran Witness*, April 1947, as quoted in Richard N. Brinkley, *Thy Strong Word: The Enduring Legacy of Martin Franzmann* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 15.

There are significant costs if the problem of this MAP is not addressed and Ascension continues to have only a shallow multicultural level of interaction among ethnic groups in the congregation. If cultural division continues to grow and different ethnic groups merely exist side by side, the church will neglect to reflect the oneness and unity that God desires for His people.¹³ Additionally, continued division at Ascension would be a barrier to collaboration between different cultures. Neglecting this collaboration would mean missed opportunities for a richer and more vibrant congregation as new mission and ministry could be explored together. Without a deeper level of cultural interaction, Ascension fails to be a reflection of the new reality of the familial unity that God creates in baptism between brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of ethnic background.

Research Question

The research question for this project is as follows: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation? Since the research question of this MAP is directly related to the refugee population at Ascension, the term "refugee" is important to define, especially in contrast to the term "immigrant." In his work *Harvest Waiting*, Donald Moorman makes a helpful distinction between these names. He writes:

The United States is a nation of immigrants and refugees from all over the world. Immigrants came in order to find a better life for themselves and their children. Life in their country of origin was difficult and offered few opportunities for the future, and so they came seeking "greener pastures." Until the twentieth century, most who came to the United States entered as immigrants. Refugees came because they faced religious, racial, or political persecution. It was no longer feasible for them to

¹³ See, for instance, Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.

continue life in their country of origin, for life there meant danger, suffering, and quite possibly, death.¹⁴

Another way to state the difference between an immigrant and a refugee is that an immigrant leaves their country of origin and comes to a new nation by choice, while a refugee is forced from their home by outside circumstances and may, or may not, have say in where they and their family relocate.

“Refugee” may be defined in nuanced ways by different nations. Under United States law in particular, a refugee is defined as someone who, before coming to the United States:

- Is located outside of the United States
- Is of special humanitarian concern to the United States
- Demonstrates that they were persecuted or fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group
- Is not firmly resettled in another country
- Is admissible to the United States¹⁵

Ascension’s Nepali members were admitted to the US under refugee status specifically because of persecution due to their nationality. As Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan, they were unwelcomed by either country and were placed in refugee camps before coming to the US. Some of our members lived in these camps for well over ten years. This MAP asks how oral history informed dialogical sermons can help Ascension become an even fuller place of welcome to an ethnic group that has experienced unwelcome by others. This project seeks to demonstrate how dialog can inspire dialog, which inspires dialog. Dialog was sought through the recording of oral histories of Nepali refugee members. The content from these oral histories provided for collaborative sermon preparation between myself and the stories told. Dialog continued through oral history-informed dialogical sermons. Finally, sermons inspire dialog among congregation

¹⁴ Donald Moorman, *Harvest Waiting* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 9.

¹⁵ “Refugees,” US Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed July 11, 2023, <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees>.

members, specifically among those of different ethnic backgrounds.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. This study has endeavored to inspire intercultural engagement in the congregation specifically by sharing oral histories. “Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format.”¹⁶ Thus, an oral history is more formal than individuals simply having a conversation about the past. This particular project gathered oral histories from four members who are refugees and key leaders in Ascension’s Nepali community. Portions of these recorded oral histories were then organized by theme. Excerpts from these video-recorded oral histories were shared with the congregation in connection to a three-week series of dialogical sermons. Thus, the recorded oral histories of members who are refugees shaped what was shared in the dialogical sermon series.

The practice of dialogical preaching helps to form community. An early proponent of dialogical preaching, Reuel L. Howe, observes, “It [the Church] becomes community when as persons, the members enter into dialogue with one another and assume responsibility for their common life.”¹⁷ Thus, this dialogical preaching practice will help to accomplish the purpose of this project as it seeks intercultural collaboration in the community of the congregation.

¹⁶ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 1.

¹⁷ Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 5.

Moreover, dialogical preaching can be highly beneficial when seeking to understand and collaborate with those from other cultures. John S. McClure emphasizes this value of dialogical preaching using the term “other-wise homiletics.” He writes, “Other-wise homiletics is homiletics that is, in every aspect, other-inspired and other-directed. It is homiletics that strives to become wise about other human beings—to gain wisdom about and from others for preaching.”¹⁸ This MAP utilized the content of gathered oral histories to shape the content of the dialogical sermons preached so individual hearers could come to a realization that the sermon was not about “them” or “me” but rather “us” as the baptized children of God at Ascension. Gaining wisdom and perspective from refugees informed what was preached while still rooting the sermon in textual exposition, theological confession, and evangelical proclamation.

Martin Luther King Jr. is often quoted as saying, “I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that 11 o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hours in Christian America.”¹⁹ As our congregation gathers for the Divine Service at 11 o’clock on Sunday mornings, Ascension has been blessed to be a congregation where people of different ethnic groups worship in the same church building. However, an internal segregation of sorts has developed as different cultural groups exist parallel to one another with limited interaction. This MAP seeks to overcome this division through a series of dialogical sermons that are informed by the recorded oral histories of members who are refugees. Stated another way, again using the language of 1 Cor. 3, this MAP utilizes oral histories and dialogical preaching to water the seeds that have been planted at Ascension,

¹⁸ John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), preface xi.

¹⁹ “The Most Segregated Hour in America—Martin Luther King Jr.,” Meet the Press, accessed July 11, 2023, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8.

trusting that God will work through this effort to grant growth.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

Chapter Two of this MAP explores the first article elements related to this project. The term “first article” relates to the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, which confesses, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther gives explanation to this article, writing that one who confess it believes that God has given me, among other things, “my reason and all my senses.”¹

This chapter will examine the originality of this project. Specifically, the way in which the multicultural composition of Ascension is distinctive among LCMS congregations and creates an exceptional opportunity for pursuing intercultural collaboration. Chapter two will also look at the godly reason-informed research that has been published related directly to the purpose of this project. Again, the purpose of this project is to “incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.” Specifically, this chapter will focus on the discipline of oral history as well as the discipline of cultural studies, including a detailed evaluation of Dr. Leopoldo Sánchez’s three levels of cultural engagement. This literature review will highlight the ways in which these academic disciplines relate to the scholarly significance of this project’s research topic.

Originality

In one respect, the problem that this MAP seeks to address is two thousand years old. This MAP attends to the same first major challenge faced by the New Testament Church. As the Holy

¹ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 16.

Spirit called an ethnically diverse group of people by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to form the Christian Church on earth, division between cultural groups quickly arose. For instance, as early as Acts chapter 6, two different groups of Jewish Christians saw each other as the ethnic “other.”² The Hellenists, Jews who embraced Greek language and culture, complained because the Hebrews, Jews who spoke Aramaic and were resistant to Greek culture, seemed to be shown favoritism when it came to aid for their widows. This cultural conflict precipitated the calling of the first church council meeting in Jerusalem. This is just one of many examples in the book of Acts where it is evident that as the early church grew in its ethnic diversity, it became a challenge for different ethnic groups within the Church to understand how to best interact with each other. Thus, the problem this project seeks to address is a perennial one and must be addressed by each generation of Christians until Christ’s return.

Ascension has a long history of supporting the international mission work of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The congregation has, for many years, supported global outreach through programs like Together in Mission, which aids LCMS missionaries and their families. Recently, however, the congregation has seen not only opportunities for sharing the Gospel with different ethnic groups globally but also locally as well. In the past, if Lutheran Christians from St. Louis wanted to share Christ with individuals from Nepal, it would be necessary to fund a missionary to travel the roughly seven thousand miles to this central Asian country. Today, however, through the arrival of Nepali refugees, the Lord has opened a door for the Gospel in our local community.

Ascension has partnered with Christian Friends of New Americans, a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS. CFNA is located in urban south St. Louis in a neighborhood

² See Acts 6:1–7.

where many refugees initially find housing. CFNA’s mission statement is “Christian Friends of New Americans is an outreach ministry to immigrants and refugees in the greater St. Louis area. Our mission is to be involved in relationships with New Americans with whom we can share the Gospel through caring words and actions.”³ CFNA cares for new Americans through programs such as English as a Second Language classes, United States citizenship classes, health screenings, driving lessons, after-school tutoring for children, dance lessons, swim lessons, and more. This wide-ranging work is more than any one RSO or congregation can do on its own, especially with the limited resources that are so common in urban ministry. Much of what CFNA does is made possible by donations and volunteers from local LCMS congregations. Ascension is one of many congregations in the St. Louis area that intentionally partners with CFNA in this work of caring words and actions through which the Gospel is shared.

In turn, one of the primary objectives of CFNA is to help refugees find a new church “home” in a local LCMS congregation.⁴ Ascension has become a church home for Word and Sacrament ministry to families and individuals from Nepal and Bhutan. These new Americans almost certainly would not have found this home at Ascension if it were not for the connections that exist between our congregation and CFNA.

With the blessing of a growing ethnic diversity at Ascension comes challenges: specifically, in the level of engagement members have with others in the congregation who are from different cultural groups. For instance, I remember the Monday following the baptism of twenty-one Nepali individuals at Ascension. Since they were officially baptized members of our congregation, our capable, veteran administrative assistant now worked to enter their information

³ “Our Mission,” Christian Friends of New Americans, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.cfna-stl.org>.

⁴ See Allan Buckman, “Draw, Bridge, Home,” essay not published, shared with author in 2019.

into our membership database, but she encountered challenges. The information provided by these new members did not quite “fit” the way Ascension was used to doing things. Calling me into her office, we sat down together to work through issues such as these: How do we enter contact information for more than one family living under the same address? What do we do when a person’s maiden name is the same as her married name because her last name is actually the title of her caste or class? With these challenges, it is easy to slip into a divisive mindset of “us” and “them” between different cultures. It is also tempting to assume that when it comes to practical matters, such as membership data entry, “our” way of doing things as a long-established congregation is the right way.

For the church in this multiethnic context, the challenges, unknowns, and messiness that come with ethnic diversity in a congregation can cause fear. While writing about the current ethnic makeup of the United States and its relationship to the church, James Nieman and Thomas Rogers note, “The problem for us today, however, is not this long history of cultural diversity itself, but that we have chosen to fear rather than welcome it.”⁵ Twenty-four hours after the baptisms of Nepali refugees, our administrative assistant and I were beginning to understand the challenges that come with being a multicultural congregation, and the even greater challenge of striving to become an intercultural church community. I began to wonder if the practice of preaching could help our congregation work toward intercultural collaboration.

Demographic Changes in the United States

The challenges and opportunities that ethnic diversity brings at Ascension at a local level is a reflection of the demographic changes that are taking place in the United States at the national

⁵ James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 8.

level. New Americans are rapidly changing the ethnic makeup of the US. Commenting on newly released data from the 2020 US Census, the Brookings Institute observes, “The new estimates show that nearly four of ten Americans identify with a race or ethnic group other than white, and suggest that the 2010 to 2020 decade will be the first in the nation’s history in which the white population declined in numbers.”⁶ In other words, roughly 40 percent of the US population are now people of color, and it appears that this number will only continue to grow.

In his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, Larry Vogel further observes concerning US demographics, “A country that was once dominated by Whites of European descent, with one significant minority group—African Americans or Blacks of African descent—is today a diverse rainbow of colors with Hispanics now outnumbering Black and with Asians as the most rapidly increasing population segment.”⁷

Table 1. Comparison of Populations by Race Alone.⁸

| Group | 2010 Population | 2010 Percentage | 2020 Population | 2020 Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| White alone | 223.6 | 72.4% | 204.3 | 61.6% |
| Black alone | 38.9 | 12.6% | 41.1 | 12.4% |
| Asian alone | 14.7 | 4.8% | 19.9 | 6.0% |
| Am.Ind./NativeAlas. | 2.9 | 0.9% | 3.7 | 1.1% |
| Nat.Haw./Pac.Isl. | 0.54 | 0.2% | 0.69 | 0.2% |
| Some Other Race | 19.1 | 6.2% | 27.9 | 8.4% |
| Population in millions | | | | |

⁶ William H. Frey, “The Nation Is Diversifying Even Faster Than Predicted, according to New Census Data,” The Brookings Institute, accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>.

⁷ Larry Vogel, “Behind the Numbers: A Traditional Church Faces a New America” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2023), 24.

⁸ See Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 60. United States Census Bureau indicates that changes in the White population were related to question design, emphasizing “how people prefer to self-identify.” “Racial and Ethnic Composition.” See also Eric Jensen et al., “2020 US Population More Racially and Ethnically Diverse Than Measured in 2010,” August 12, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html>. See also Hansi Lo Wang and Ruth Talbot, “This Is How the White Population Is Actually Changing Based on New Census Data,” NPR, August 22, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/22/1029609786/2020-census-data-results-white-population-shrinking-decline-non-hispanic-race>.

US Demographic Change's Effect upon Christian Churches

The increasingly ethnically diverse demographics of the US have the potential to directly affect Christian churches and shape their ministry. While secular news sources have long noted the decline in the number of active Christians in the US, they have also recently acknowledged that there is new hope for the church in America. For instance, after interviewing “religious scholars,” a CNN article shares their hope for the future of the church in the US, “They said the American church is poised to find new life for one major reason: Waves of Christians are migrating to the US. And they said the biggest challenge to Christianity’s future in America is not declining numbers, but the church’s ability to adapt to this migration.”⁹ This article from a secular news outlet recognizes new Americans as a great opportunity for “new life” and growth in the church in the US, but questions the church’s ability to seize this opportunity.

Demographic research cited by Vogel in his dissertation, “Behind the Numbers,” affirms that significant opportunities for growth exist for Christian churches in the US that embrace a welcoming of new Americans from different ethnic groups. Vogel notes, “One finds that the churches that are the healthiest from a demographic standpoint are those marked by either one or both of two particular traits: a high rate of fertility on the part of female membership or a high percentage of members who are from non-White or immigrant populations.”¹⁰ Vogel also cites the hopeful insight of Soong-Chan Rah of Fuller Seminary, “Contrary to popular opinion, the church is not dying in America; it is alive and well, but it is alive and well among the immigrant and ethnic minority communities and not among the majority white churches in the United

⁹ “Predictions about the Decline of Christianity in America May Be Premature,” CNN, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/08/us/christianity-decline-easter-blake-cec/index.html>.

¹⁰ Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 122.

States.”¹¹

Ethnic Composition of the LCMS

It is helpful to take an assessment of current ethnic composition of the LCMS as it exists in a nation that is swiftly growing in its cultural diversity. As the following table illustrates, the reports of the LCMS have documented a decades-long decline in both baptized and communicant members.

Table 2. LCMS Statistical Data from 1962–2020 (Selected Years).¹²

| Year | Baptized Members | Confirmed Members (“Adults”) | Child Baptisms | Youth Confirmed | Adults Conf. or Bap. | Total Members Gained |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1962 | 2,611,695 | 1,677,943 | 83,604 | 51,536 | 31,480 | 61,391 |
| 1967 | 2,847,425 | 1,901,339 | 70,592 | 58,490 | 26,074 | 62,435 |
| 1972 | 2,878,406 | 2,028,728 | 62,066 | 56,878 | 27,758 | 54,873 |
| 1977 | 2,766,958 | 2,052,180 | 55,948 | 40,926 | 30,306 | 55,562 |
| 1982 | 2,725,623 | 2,051,168 | 60,682 | 38,296 | 29,048 | 59,605 |
| 1987 | 2,707,134 | 2,041,567 | 55,768 | 30,699 | 26,684 | 55,268 |
| 1992 | 2,617,272 | 1,958,747 | 50,241 | 26,299 | 21,226 | 53,364 |
| 1997 | 2,603,036 | 1,951,391 | 46,984 | 32,481 | 29,549 | 55,504 |
| 2002 | 2,512,714 | 1,907,923 | 35,606 | 25,542 | 19,197 | 44,031 |
| 2007 | 2,383,084 | 1,835,064 | 27,913 | 21,079 | 14,112 | 29,383 |
| 2012 | 2,196,787 | 1,707,509 | 24,917 | 18,470 | 14,735 | 29,522 |
| 2013 | 2,163,698 | 1,685,597 | 21,318 | 15,877 | 10,789 | 23,189 |
| 2014 | 2,097,258 | 1,641,679 | 25,551 | 18,585 | 14,856 | 29,986 |
| 2015 | 2,060,514 | 1,609,100 | 23,500 | 16,830 | 14,147 | 27,621 |
| 2016 | 2,017,834 | 1,584,251 | 28,507 | 21,493 | 16,092 | 32,287 |
| 2017 | 1,968,641 | 1,545,124 | 21,087 | 15,512 | 14,105 | 26,236 |
| 2018 | 1,913,015 | 1,504,610 | 19,605 | 14,974 | 11,091 | 19,401 |
| 2019 | 1,864,800 | 1,470,208 | 16,871 | 13,282 | 10,991 | 18,866 |
| 2020 | 1,807,408 | 1,433,378 | 12,649 | 12,010 | 7,483 | 11,072 |
| % of decline over 60 years | 30.80% | 14.58% | 84.87% | 76.70% | 76.23% | 81.96% |

¹¹ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 15.

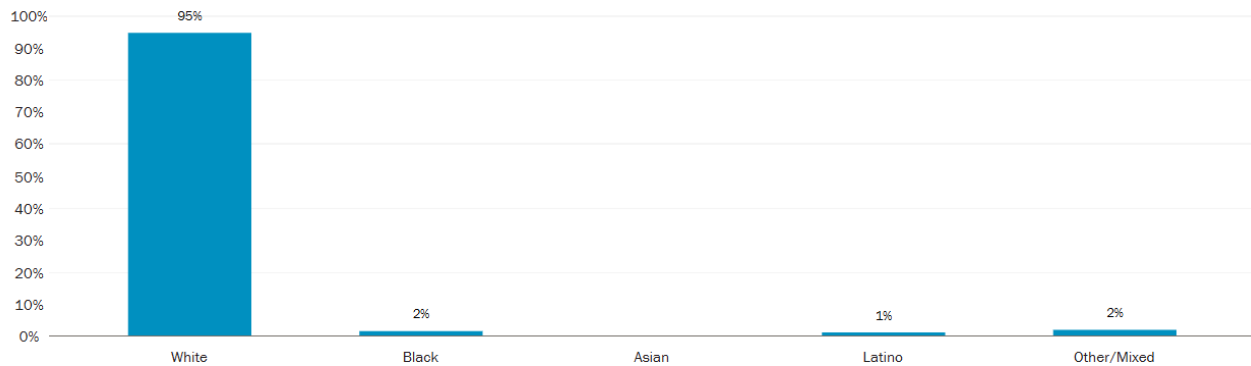
¹² See Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 155. Data from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Department of Human Resources, *Statistical Yearbook* (St. Louis: Concordia, published yearly until 1981) and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Annual* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published yearly with statistical data included after 1982).

Could a factor in the decline of membership in the LCMS be its struggle to reach and retain individuals from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds? When one compares the number of minorities in the US at large and in the LCMS in particular, the reality is that a significant gap exists. In fact, the LCMS is among the most ethnically homogenous Christian denominations in the US. For example, according to a recent study conducted by the Pew Forum on the racial and ethnic composition of members of the LCMS, it was found that the denomination is 95 percent White, 2 percent Black, 1 percent Latino, and less than 1 percent Asian.¹³

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Composition among Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Racial and ethnic composition among members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

% of members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod who identify as...



This is in comparison to the general US population which, according to July 1, 2022 estimates, is 58.4 percent White (non-Hispanic), 13.7 percent Black Alone, 19.5 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 6.4 percent Asian Alone.

¹³ “Members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,” Pew Research Center, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/>.

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, Population Estimates, July 1, 2024. ¹⁴

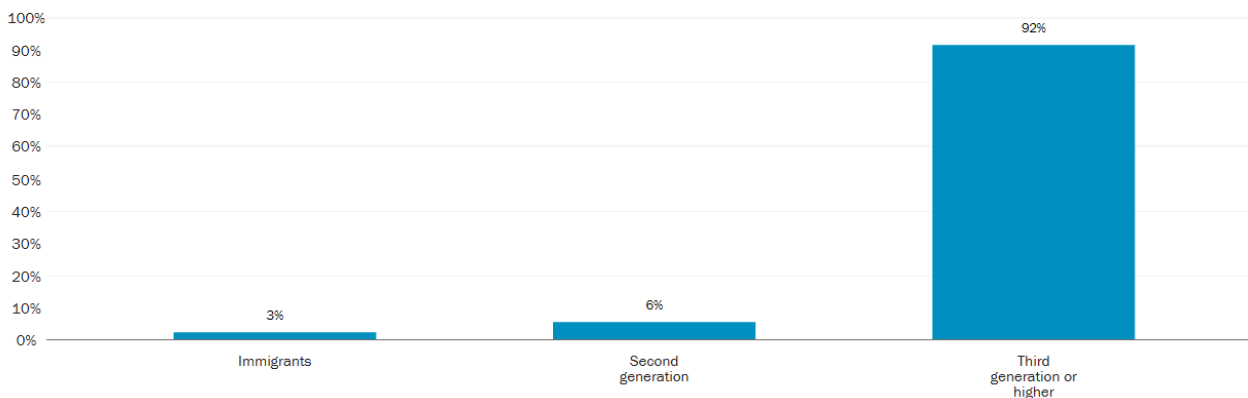
| Race and Hispanic Origin | Population of US |
|--|------------------|
| White Alone Not Hispanic or Latino | 58.4% |
| Black Alone | 13.7% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native Alone | 1.3% |
| Asian Alone | 6.4% |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone | .3% |
| Two or More Races | 3.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 19.5% |

There are also statistics from the Pew Forum that relate directly to the immigrant composition of the LCMS. Through examining the immigrant status of members of the LCMS, it was found that the percent of LCMS members who are third-generation citizens of the US or higher is 92 percent, second-generation citizens equaled 6 percent, and first-generation immigrants were at only 3 percent.

Figure 2. Immigrant Status among Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. ¹⁵

Immigrant status among members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

% of members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod who are...

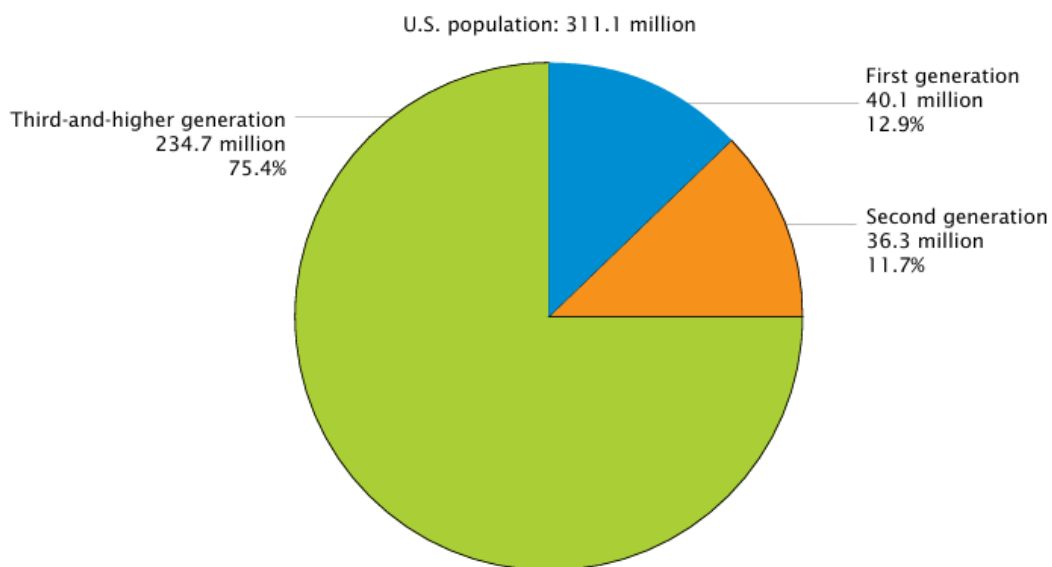


¹⁴ “Race and Hispanic Origin, Population Estimates, July 1, 2024,” United States Census Bureau, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045224>.

¹⁵ “Members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,” Pew Research Center, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/>.

This means the LCMS contains significantly fewer newer Americans when compared to the US general population which reflects that third-generation citizens of the US or higher is 75.4 percent, second-generation citizens is 11.7 percent, and first-generation immigrants are 12.9 percent of the population. As these statistics indicate, the LCMS is not a reflection of the cultural context in which it exists. Ascension Lutheran is distinctive among LCMS congregations in its composition of members from different ethnic groups.

Figure 3. US Population by Generational Status.¹⁶



Even though the ethnic makeup of the LCMS may not reflect the general population of the US, this is not to say that the LCMS does not value outreach—specifically among different ethnic groups in the US. In fact, just the opposite is true. A brief overview of the history of mission in the LCMS will be presented in the “Historical Context” section in Chapter Three of this project.

¹⁶ “Characteristics of the US Population by Generational Status: 2013,” United States Census Bureau, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/P23-214.pdf>.

Opportunity for Growth in Cultural Diversity in the LCMS

As the downward trend of membership in the LCMS continues, great opportunity exists for growth and revitalization through intentionally witnessing to those of different ethnic groups. Lutheran author Donald Moorman encourages, “As we reflect on the historical circumstances which have brought millions of immigrants and refugees to this country, we realize that God has had a hand in bringing them here. They did not come by accident.”¹⁷ For a congregation to fulfill the commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), it is not necessary to travel overseas. In addition to international mission work, Moorman emphasizes that the Lord has brought immigrants and refugees to our own country. The nations continue to come to the US, and congregations, such as Ascension, have the opportunity to baptize and make disciples.

Some church leaders today, specifically those such as Rick Warren and others in the church growth movement, would see no issue with the homogenous makeup of the LCMS. In fact, Warren and others would likely argue in favor of this homogeneity saying that ethnic diversity is not necessarily biblically mandated or even desirable in the context of local congregations. Therefore, according to church growth principles, an intentional effort for mission among immigrants and refugees is not pragmatic and should perhaps even be avoided.¹⁸ Along these lines, Warren has written, “The easiest people for you to reach for Christ are those who are most like you. Explosive growth happens when the type of people in the community match the type of people that are already in the church.”¹⁹ Often times this vision for church growth is called the homogenous unit principle. However, this model greatly risks overlooking the culturally diverse

¹⁷ Moorman, *Harvest Waiting*, 57–58.

¹⁸ Lisa Washington Lamb, *Blessed and Beautiful: Multiethnic Churches and the Preaching That Sustains Them* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), 30–31, 44.

¹⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 176–77.

biblical temporal and eschatological vision for the Church.²⁰

Part of the desire for churches to remain homogenous, or at least hesitant to welcome those from different ethnic groups, is fear. Vogel speaks of a reluctance of pursuing a church that is catholic, or universal, in ethnic composition: “We are raised with such slogans as ‘Stranger, Danger.’ We feel drawn to those who look and speak and act the way we do. To confess the catholic Church is therefore to challenge a human instinct—a sense of self-preservation based on familiarity.”²¹ This project seeks to overcome this fear of the stranger through the sharing of the recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are Nepalese refugees through a dialogical sermon series.

Literature Review

Oral History

Oral history is a first article discipline that can be a helpful tool for better understanding Ascension members who are refugees and inspiring intercultural collaboration. An example of what oral history is, and its benefits, can be seen in my conversations with John Gurung. I have been blessed to serve as mentor to John, who is a student in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program at Concordia Seminary. EIIT is a specialized program of preparation for men who want to serve as pastors and women who want to serve as deaconesses in immigrant and ethnic minority communities.²² John is preparing to serve as a pastor to the Nepali people in St. Louis. As I have met with John to help guide him in his studies, I have had the opportunity to converse with him and learn more about his life. He has shared stories with me about his time in

²⁰ See, for instance, Matt. 28:18–20 and Rev. 7:9–17.

²¹ Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 383.

²² See “Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology,” Concordia Seminary, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.csl.edu/academics/programs/ethnic-immigrant-institute-theology/>.

Nepal, what living in a refugee camp was like, how he came to faith in Jesus Christ, how his family reacted when he shared that he had become a Christian, and his adjustment to life in the US. All of these stories were not only fascinating, but also helped me grow a greater appreciation of who John is as a person and how his individual story reflects the Nepali refugee community's story as a whole. Not only this, but my outward sincere interest in John's retelling of his life history also affirmed for him that his story is one worth telling and sharing.

It is important to define more thoroughly what oral history is before exploring why one should use it. As I learn more about John's life, I have been moved to tears more than once. To hear firsthand about the ways in which God has powerfully worked in his life and circumstances is truly inspiring. However, as I hear John share these accounts with me, I have regretted that I am the only one hearing them and there is not a broader audience to also benefit from listening to his words. This is in large part why this project focuses on oral history as a means by which the stories of John and other refugees can be shared with our congregation.

Oral history is a first article gift that can serve as a multifaceted instrument for research.²³ The definitions section at the beginning of this project uses Donald Ritchie's words to describe "oral history": "Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio

²³ Leaders in the discipline of oral history include British sociologist and oral historian Paul Richard Thompson, who is recognized as a pioneer in developing oral history as a discipline. Prior to retiring, Thompson held the position of Research Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. Thompson is commonly recognized as the most authoritative oral historian and will be cited most extensively in this project. Donald A. Ritchie is another authoritative voice in oral history and has authored the premier guidebook (*Doing Oral History*) on conducting oral history. He served as Historian of the United States Senate and was president of the Oral History Association. Also cited in this project are Cliff Kuhn, executive director of the Oral History Association; Marjorie L. McLellan, who chairs the Oral History Association's Education Committee; Joanna Bornat, Emeritus Professor of Oral History at the Open University, United Kingdom; and Lynn Abrams, Professor of History at the University of Glasgow and a Fellow of the British Academy. See this project's bibliography for additional information on publications authored by these oral history scholars.

or video format.”²⁴ Drawing from other leaders in the area of oral research, their definitions of this discipline help to reveal different dimensions of this tool used for this project. Paul Thompson emphasizes the people-centered nature of oral history, “Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope.”²⁵ In her definition of oral history, Lynn Abrams notes the way oral history can analyze how and why stories are shared, “Oral history is a practical method for obtaining information about the past by means of conducting an interview, but in the process of eliciting and analyzing the material collected, researchers quickly understand that what is said is just one element in a complex communication event.”²⁶ In their definition, Cliff Kuhn and Marjorie L. McLellan note how oral history is unique in its collaborative style, “Unlike any other source, an oral history interview is collaboratively generated and created deliberately for historical purposes.”²⁷ Oral history is a research tool that is ideal for the purpose of this project as I collaborate with our Nepali members as interviewer and the interviewees share their unique stories.

Those who advocate for oral history also acknowledge that this discipline can receive criticism from those who claim that written, rather than oral, histories are a more reliable source of information about the past. Critics argue that written history is objective, while oral history is subjective.²⁸ Oral historians typically do not dismiss forms of history that are written, but they also see value in not confining research or knowledge of the past to simply what is in print.

²⁴ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 1.

²⁵ Paul Thompson, Joanna Bornat, and Lynn Abrams, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22.

²⁶ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 22.

²⁷ Cliff Kuhn and Marjorie L. McLellan, “Oral History,” *OAH Magazine of History* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 4.

²⁸ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 10.

Thompson observes that oral history broadens the horizons of research and brings specificity to that research, “The confines of the scholar’s world are no longer the well-thumbed volumes of the old catalogue or the desk-bound sources of the internet catalogs. Oral historians can think now as if they themselves were publishers: imagine what evidence is needed, seek it out, and capture it.”²⁹ In the context of this project, oral history allows evidence about the history of refugee members of our congregation to be sought out and captured.

Having defined oral history, it is also important to evaluate why it should be used by researchers, and specifically in this project. Part of oral history’s value often noted by its advocates is its long, even ancient, use. While the term “oral history” may be relatively new in academic research, the act of sharing the past in a spoken form is long-standing. Thompson makes a compelling point when he writes, “In fact, oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history.”³⁰ Oral history is not too dissimilar to the oral tradition of Holy Scripture, especially portions of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures, as it was passed on in spoken form before being written. Thompson celebrates the recovery of oral history’s use today saying, “It gives history a future no longer tied to the cultural significance of the paper document. It also gives back to historians the oldest skill of their own craft.”³¹ Even as oral history gathering grows in popularity among researchers today, it is not simply a passing trend, but has a long-standing history of use.

In this project’s literature review, an analytical pattern will be used to identify key terms from research that relate to oral history and the value of its use specifically to record the stories of refugees who are now members of Ascension. The terms considered will be viewed by the

²⁹ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 5.

³⁰ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 23.

³¹ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 70.

“voice” they contribute to the story of new American members and to the shared narrative of the congregation. These four voices include oral voice, particular voice, purposeful voice, and transformative voice.³² Viewed through the framework of these four voices, it is evident that oral history is a helpful tool to accomplish the purpose of this project.

Oral Voice

The oral voice of oral history is beneficial to this project. This is seen within the context of ministry at Ascension. For those, such as refugees connected to Ascension, who are coming out of the setting of a refugee camp and persecution from a government, there are very few, if any, written histories that chronicle their story.

James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers speak to this vacuum of written history and its implications for the importance of oral history to those who have faced suffering and displacement.

Especially for ethnic groups that have faced suffering in both the past and the present, oral language has been a particularly valuable resource. With no written histories to preserve key memories, such groups depend upon passing down stories and traditions to be learned by all members. These procedures are often the most readily available tool for keeping ethnic identity alive.... While societies oriented toward writing tend to privilege novelty and innovation, orally rooted groups treasure the repeated and trustworthy. On the one hand, this can seem to outsiders like being mired in tradition. On the other hand, however, this conservatizing approach is a powerful strategy for survival.³³

The retelling of stories and sharing of stories is a practice already familiar to members of Ascension who are refugees, but this project will provide a means for their story to be shared with a broader audience, which includes brothers and sisters in Christ from Ascension. The

³² I have devised the fourfold identification of different “voices” in order to review the work of multiple oral history scholars in an analytical way. The purpose of these different voices is to provide this project with a framework for organizing information over multiple sources that treat oral history. Oral historians use these, or similar terms, in their writing as well, albeit not in the structure of a fourfold distinction of voices as I use it here.

³³ Nieman and Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew*, 36.

theory of an oral voice benefits this project since it provides voice to those in society, and in the Church, whose words are often unheard and unseen in published written histories. This fact allows for histories, viewpoints, and wisdom to be shared from ethnic groups that may have been overlooked by written histories in the past. Thompson points out, “Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the wisdom of the powers that be. Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-class, the unprivileged, the defeated.”³⁴ He also acknowledges that oral history is an ideal instrument to be utilized among individuals who are immigrants or refugees: “They [oral historians] can even approach from the inside the history of migrants—a type of history which has become crucially important worldwide, but often first documented only from outside as a social problem.”³⁵

The oral voice is also a means by which the story of the individual reflects the shared story of the broader community of which that person is a part. For this project, the recorded histories of individual members who are leaders among our refugee population will help our congregation understand the corporate experience of all our refugee members who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Joanna Bornat observes how the individual can reveal the community: “Though the planning and outcomes of oral history projects will often speak of community and identity-specific groups, migrant, industrial, generational, gendered, ethnic, or racialized, the oral historian’s starting point is the individual recalling the past in dialog with another person. Memory begins with individuals.”³⁶ This individual/corporate dichotomy is another strength of

³⁴ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 6.

³⁵ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 7.

³⁶ Joanna Bornat, *Research Methods for Memory Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 29.

the oral voice of this project.

Relating the oral voice to the idea of a “narrative theology” helps to further see how the oral voice facet of oral history can be applied to Ascension’s context. Alan Jacobs, Professor of Humanities at Baylor University, writes about the relationship between community and individual as well. He ultimately relates this to the life of the church. He examines the relationship between what he calls the narrative theology of the church and the narrative theology of individual Christian lives.³⁷ He emphasizes the power of story as individual Christians seek not only to witness to others outside the church, but also to strengthen and encourage those inside the church. Concerning storytelling that reflects faith, he writes, “I do not know whether human beings naturally or instinctively make their own lives into stories; I only believe that this is something that Christians are *obliged* to do.”³⁸ Thinking more deeply about how the life stories of individuals relate to each other, Jacobs recognizes ways in which the Christian life is both different and the same for each believer. “Despite the astonishing variation of life genres among the many members of the body of Christ, every Christian life conforms in some degree to this Christly pattern.”³⁹ Through oral histories, this project highlights “life genres” that are starkly different from many of our members at Ascension, but at the same time, these oral histories also show the many commonalities even among different ethnic groups, chiefly because of our life together in Christ.

Particular Voice

The particular voice of oral history lends itself well to this project. In the context of

³⁷ Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–2.

³⁸ Jacobs, *Looking Before and After*, 12.

³⁹ Jacobs, *Looking Before and After*, 95.

Ascension, there is no published book from which the rest of the congregation can learn about the life and times of Ascension's members who are refugees. This reality is one of the reasons oral history is appropriate for this project. This is because the voice and story of our Nepali members is too particular to be published in written form.

Oral history's particular voice allows inquiry into areas that simply cannot be investigated by research in the library or on the internet because of their particular nature, such as the lives of new Americans within our congregation. According to Donald Ritchie, one of the hallmarks of oral history is to collect new data that is unavailable elsewhere. "Oral history should be collecting not what is already known but information, observations, and opinions unavailable elsewhere."⁴⁰

The truly unique information gleaned through oral histories at Ascension is autobiographical in nature. "Oral history provides a source quite similar in character to published autobiography.... Oral historians may choose precisely whom to interview and what to ask about."⁴¹ This allows oral history to be particular and have a narrow focus on stories that are relevant to communities and congregations such as Ascension.

Applying this dimension of oral history to Ascension, knowing the particular voice of our Nepali members can lead to a greater comfort and interaction between ethnic groups. In his work *Understanding the World's Cultures*, Craig Storti recognizes the importance of learning about those who are ethnically different and a part of our particular church community. "The more we retreat from the culture and the people, the less we learn about them; the less we know about them, the more uncomfortable we feel among them; the more uncomfortable we feel among

⁴⁰ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 35.

⁴¹ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 5.

them, the more inclined we are to withdraw.”⁴² The sharing of oral histories is one way to create an opportunity to not only know more about those of a different ethnic group at Ascension, but to also feel more comfortable amongst them and to seek intercultural connections.

Purposeful Voice

The purposeful voice of oral history is well-suited for this project. The recording of oral histories for this project is not simply to view or to listen to them on their own, as interesting as that would be, but to incorporate their content into sermons that recount these stories informed by God’s Word. This purposeful voice is another hallmark of oral history. Oral histories serve a specific purpose. Thompson writes about one of the purposes oral history has served, “It [oral history] can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside.”⁴³ The purpose of oral history in this project is to break down barriers between ethnic groups by incorporating selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are Nepali refugees.

In application to this project, the dialogical nature of oral history is an ideal way to inform and complement dialogical preaching. Ritchie comments on this dialogical aspect, “Oral history interviewing may not be easy, but it can be enormously satisfying and rewarding to meet and engage in dialogue with memorable individuals and to make sure that otherwise neglected aspects of the past will be preserved for the future.”⁴⁴ As mentioned in this project’s introduction, dialog is at the center of this Major Applied Project. Dialog from oral history leads to dialogical preaching, with the goal of leading to intercultural dialog.

⁴² Storti, *Understanding the World’s Cultures*, 12.

⁴³ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 3.

⁴⁴ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, xv.

Transformative Voice

This project will also benefit from the transformative voice of oral history. At Ascension, there is a need for transformation from multicultural to intercultural engagement between ethnic groups. The transformational voice of oral history can aid greatly in facilitating this change. Combining the words recorded in oral histories with the Word of the Lord in a series of dialogical sermons creates a truly transformative voice—both for those who were interviewed and those who listen to the interviews.

The distinctly human quality of oral history makes its content truly transformative for the interviewee, interviewer, and those with whom the content of the oral history is shared. As the interviewer, I came to oral history interviews with an openness to learn from those I interviewed and to be transformed by their stories. Thompson encourages this posture of learner for the interviewer. “For the historian comes to the interview to learn: to sit at the feet of others who, because they come from a different social class, or are less educated, or are older, know more about something.”⁴⁵ In the context of a sermon series, I have encouraged this same posture of learner in the congregation as they heard portions of oral histories from those who are part of a different ethnic group.

The deeper understanding of an individual different from oneself that oral history brings helps to overcome divisions. This may be especially true of differences of ethnic and cultural division. Addressing urban oral history, Thompson writes, “City-based projects often document the stories of migrants and their cultures, hoping both to give respect and pride to the migrant inheritance, and also more mutual understanding with the host population.”⁴⁶ In this respect, oral

⁴⁵ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 10.

⁴⁶ Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 17.

history is mutually transformative in nature.

In applying the transformative voice of oral history to this project, the *recording* of the oral histories helps to affirm among our Nepali members that their stories are important and worth sharing. The *sharing* of oral histories with the congregation helps members learn who their brothers and sisters in Christ truly are in a deeper way.

The discipline of oral history is one way in which this project engages first article knowledge. The incorporation of oral histories of Ascension members who are Nepali refugees helps to serve the purpose of this project as these interviews are incorporated in a series of dialogical sermons.

Another first article gift that serves the purpose of this project is the model of cultural interaction that utilizes the framework of multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural engagement. This framework helps contextualize Ascension's present ministry, and future formation, in a multiethnic setting.

Levels of Cultural Engagement

Culture Studies

In the field of culture studies, there is much literature concerning how different and deeper levels of engagement and interaction are possible with one's cultural other. When people who are refugees from Nepal began to worship at Ascension, it was evident to the rest of the nearly entirely Caucasian congregation that they were different. At the same time, it was also apparent to the Nepalese worshipers that the rest of the congregation was different from them. Each ethnic group had language, dress, customs, singing, music, perception of worship, concept of time, and more that was different from the other group.

These differences led to our Nepalese worshipers initially sitting together, separate from

the rest of the congregation. They would be gathered together in back of the nave on the lectern side. When I asked some of our Nepali leaders why they chose to sit separately, their response was, “because the other people are different from us.” When I inquired of some of our American elders why they did not sit with the Nepali worshipers, their response was essentially the same—“those other people are different from us.”

Both ethnic groups saw those they sat separate from as the “other.” The term “other” is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as, “one (such as another person) that is psychologically differentiated from the self.” Another definition given, typically as a proper noun with capitalization, for “the Other” is “one considered by members of a dominant group as alien, exotic, threatening, or inferior (because of different racial, sexual, or cultural characteristics).”⁴⁷ This term likely originated with the phenomenologist and philosopher Edmund Husserl.⁴⁸

The meaning of the term “other” is helpfully nuanced by James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers in their work, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*, as they note that cultural anthropology uses the term “other” in the sense that the other are “those who are irreducibly different from us.”⁴⁹ Using the definition provided by Nieman and Rogers, the term “other” simply acknowledges the differences between people, oftentimes individuals of different ethnic groups. In this sense, the other is not viewed as a threat or one who is inferior, rather the other is simply different from oneself.

It is this particular concept of the cultural other that is used in the context for this project.

⁴⁷ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Other,” accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/other>.

⁴⁸ Hisashi Nasu, “How Is the Other Approached and Conceptualized in Terms of Schutz’s Constitutive Phenomenology of the Natural Attitude?” *Human Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 385–96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-005-9004-3>.

⁴⁹ Nieman and Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew*, 11.

At Ascension, both our Nepali members and American members looked across the aisle, or a few pews over, and saw people they considered “other.” Specifically, they saw them as their ethnic or cultural other. This outlook toward individuals who are “different” is linked to the problem that this project is addressing: As Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

Recently, the church at large has appropriated first article disciplines connected to culture in many different ways. What follows is a brief overview of the ways in which Christian scholars have utilized different cultural theories within the context of the church. A cursory survey of these theories will aid this project as it next turns to Sánchez’s threefold evaluation of cultural engagement.

From a secular perspective, Craig Storti uses first article knowledge of cultural studies as he writes about cultural engagement in terms of “Stages of Cultural Sensitivity,” building upon the earlier work of Milton Bennett. These stages include denial, defense, minimization (all classified as “ethnocentrism”), acceptance, and adaptation/integration (classified as ethnorelativism).⁵⁰ The stages highlight the progression of how one views their cultural other. It is a spectrum that at one end is denial and an ethnocentric belief that one’s culture is the singular valid one. At the other end of the spectrum is an adaptation/integration that characterizes an ethnorelative view of the cultural other.

The founder of the multicultural Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas, Mark DeYmaz, presents a continuum of cultural engagement that moves from destructiveness to blindness to

⁵⁰ Storti, *Understanding the World’s Cultures*, 152–54.

awareness to sensitivity to competence.⁵¹ He bases this model on the first article knowledge work of Cristina López of the National Council of La Raza.⁵² This continuum can be used to determine an individual's or a congregation's perception of those who are their ethnic other.

Destructiveness views one's own culture as the only valid one. Blindness assumes cultural norms and characteristics can be interchangeable from one ethnic group to another. Awareness is characterized by a sensitivity to other ethnic groups and a respect for those who are different. Sensitivity seeks to learn from those of a different culture and benefit from their insight and experiences. Finally, competence is a proficiency in working with people from a different culture and in valuing ethnic diversity in their social interactions.

The text *Preaching to Every Pew* treats the challenge of preaching in an ethnically diverse congregation. Nieman and Rogers suggest that the pastor study the congregation through the first article tool of four cultural frames: ethnicity, class, displacement, and beliefs. Concerning the value of these frames, they write, "To engage these hearers deeply, especially when we do not share their cultural home, requires that we regard them as the neighbor. Cultural frames offer a practical, disciplined process for understanding that neighbor with seriousness and care."⁵³ For Nieman and Rogers, the frame of ethnicity examines the groups to which an individual most deeply belongs and how that shapes their perceptions. Class is a person's placement within a social structure and hierarchy. Many different facets can contribute to a person's class, such as income, education, and ethnic background. Displacement is a cultural frame that separates a person from the cultural patterns that they are familiar with and have helped define who a person

⁵¹ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), 103.

⁵² The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is a private, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization focused on reducing poverty and discrimination, and improving opportunities of Hispanic Americans.

⁵³ Nieman and Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew*, 17.

is. The refugee experience of coming to the United States, for instance, can be understood through the frame of displacement. Belief is a frame through which a person's religious convictions can be understood. Those of different cultures may hold beliefs that are less prevalent in the US, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, the former religions of Ascension's Nepali members.

In his essay contained in the text *Inviting Community*, Bruce Hartung unfolds the "Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory," which he borrows from the work of Colleen Kelley and Judith Meyers.⁵⁴ This first article tool focuses on skills that can be developed in order to effectively interact with the cultural other on an individual basis. These four areas are flexibility/openness, personal autonomy, perceptual acuity, and emotional resilience.⁵⁵ Flexibility/openness is characterized by a comfort with interacting with people who are different from oneself. Personal autonomy is a mark of someone who is not dependent upon their environment for their identity. Perceptual acuity is an attentiveness to the verbal and nonverbal ways that someone communicates with them. This is especially important when interacting with a person of a different ethnic group. Emotional resilience is an overcoming of the confusion or frustration that can come when engaging with someone who is one's ethnic other.

All of these examples from cultural theorists utilize first article knowledge to engage with cultural studies. Many of them include a spectrum of cultural engagement or understanding that can help to both evaluate and improve one's relationship with those who are one's ethnic other. The first article cultural model this project will primarily work with, however, is a similar spectrum of cultural engagement proposed by Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. In contrast to other

⁵⁴ Colleen Kelley and Judith Meyers, *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Manual* (n.p., 1993), 27.

⁵⁵ Bruce Hartung, "Empathy and Community: Inviting Community in the Midst of Cultural Diversity," in *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 63.

cultural theorists, Sánchez uniquely uses this first article model as a foundation for building a greater understanding of how cultural studies extend and relate to second and third article matters and other dimensions of Lutheran theology.

Three Levels of Cultural Engagement

The most beneficial cultural studies tool for this project is the model of cultural engagement suggested by Leopoldo Sánchez as informed by the work of Latina theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernández⁵⁶ and Hispanic Canadian theologian Néstor Medina.⁵⁷ Indeed, the problem and purpose of this project has been shaped directly by Sánchez’s work. This is specifically seen in the research problem, which recognizes a current shallow “multicultural” level of engagement at Ascension, and the research purpose, which seeks to inspire “intercultural” collaboration between ethnic groups in the congregation.

It is important to note that the foundation of Sánchez’s three levels of cultural engagement is an emphasis on the catholicity of the church. This concept of catholicity will be more deeply explored in Chapter Three of this project, especially in relationship to the horizontal nature of baptism and ecclesiology. Yet, Sánchez’s remarks in a presentation for the Equip Conference of the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS help to give an understanding of how the catholicity, or universal, nature of the church shapes his levels of cultural engagement. Sánchez shares:

Catholicity is a mark, an attribute, of the church. It is one way the church can be recognized on earth. The Church is a church that is of all nations, all tribes, and all language. If anything, catholicity means that the church on earth is not mono-cultural. It’s not mono-ethnic. It’s not mono-linguistic. It’s just not one group, one language. But it is a diversity of groups and languages; tribes and nations. The church’s very nature is to be catholic.

⁵⁶ See Carmen Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en EspanGLISH: Context, Community, and Ministry* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010).

⁵⁷ See Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009).

The church is one too—one confession, one Gospel, one faith, one Lord, one baptism. But that oneness is manifested also in a diversity of peoples, a diversity of gifts, throughout the whole world in all times and places. We rejoice in this gift of catholicity. I think it is important to think of the church as one and as catholic. It's both, and.⁵⁸

Thus, Sánchez's three levels of engagement help provide a model for a church like Ascension where a oneness in faith exists between different ethnic groups, but this diversity of cultures within this one body of Christ may not always be celebrated.

In a presentation for the Wabash Center, Sánchez lays out his levels of cultural engagement, or interaction, and the origin for this model as a seminary professor. He writes,

I was assigned to assist first-year incoming students with an initial way to assess their levels of cultural engagement. As a theoretical framework for this initial assessment, I suggested thinking in terms of three levels of interaction with the cultural other, namely, multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural engagement—the third option being the more involved or deeper (and yes, healthier) form of interaction to work towards.⁵⁹

In what follows, each of these three levels will be examined both in terms of the cultural theory itself and how it relates within the context of Ascension. Special emphasis will be given to the third level of engagement that serves as the purpose of this project, which is intercultural collaboration.

Multicultural Level

The first level of engagement is multicultural. Sánchez provides the following definition for a multicultural level of engagement:

The *multicultural* level merely signals an awareness of the presence of people from multiple cultures in our midst. Such an awareness is a first step in cultural engagement and may lead to knowledge of the other at a theoretical level. The image

⁵⁸ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "I Believe in One Catholic Church: Thinking about Diversity as a Christian," Other Faculty Scholarship, 2020, 9, <https://scholar.csl.edu/jofs/9>. The presentation was for the Equip Conference of the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS.

⁵⁹ Sánchez ., "Salsa Music and Cultural Health," 1.

that comes to mind is that of parallel planets (worlds) that are aware of each other from afar but do not have meaningful contact with one another. It is the least demanding form of cultural health.⁶⁰

It is a great blessing for an LCMS congregation to have a multicultural makeup, and stands in contrast to a monocultural congregation that is homogeneous in its ethnic makeup. To have people in the pews who recognize the other “planet” their fellow worshipers are from is indeed good. While this is a sufficient starting point for multicultural engagement, a church should not be content to remain at this level, which is void of meaningful contact.

Much of the congregation at Ascension engages with the “other,” who has a different ethnic background, at a multicultural level. For instance, worshipers have a knowledge of each other, with American members aware of the presence of Nepal members in the congregation. However, there is little meaningful contact on a personal level with many only seeing those of another culture during corporate worship without much additional interaction. It is this level that is the problem this project recognizes, noting that much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement.

Cross-Cultural Level

A cross-cultural engagement is a deeper level of interaction beyond multicultural engagement. It involves interaction and actually crossing over into the culture of the other.

Sánchez defines this cross-cultural level, explaining:

The *cross-cultural* level moves beyond awareness of the cultural other toward movement into the other’s cultural world. An apt image for this level is a *bridge*, which provides a path from one world into the next. Although cross-cultural language can promote more involvement with the cultural other, it can also fall prey to unilateral forms of engagement where the “higher” culture crosses into the “lower”

⁶⁰ Sánchez, “Salsa Music and Cultural Health,” 1.

culture to change it—a one-sided crossing that gives rise to unhealthy paternalism and dependency.⁶¹

Elsewhere, Sánchez recognizes that at a cross-cultural level, “The crossing happens on one side, or comes from both sides, but it can often be—practically speaking—unilateral in that one side typically sees itself as being the main contributor in the exchange.”⁶²

While cross-cultural interaction can be beneficial to a congregation, it should not be the end goal for Christian community, especially since a cross-cultural level of engagement is oftentimes the dominant culture crossing over into the minority culture to impose customs. This could be done with the assumption that assimilation is the goal. That is, the minority culture should simply conform to the majority. This type of assimilation would not reflect the true ethnic diversity of the church. The bridge and planet imagery provided by Sánchez can be helpful to illustrate this potential pitfall. If a bridge connected one planet to another, cross-cultural engagement could fall into the trap of crossing over this bridge in order to bring people from one planet to the other. This kind of assimilation, which involves moving our ethnic other to “our” planet, does not allow for mutual exchange between cultures.

At Ascension, there are American members who engage with Nepali members at a cross-cultural level. Some have intentionally sat with people from another ethnic group during worship, given rides to doctor appointments, and even invited their ethnic other into their home. This cross-cultural interaction is something for which to give thanks.

It is easy, however, for this cross-cultural engagement to become one-sided. For instance, if the purpose of sitting with an ethnic minority during worship is only to show them the “right” way to worship, then this interaction, while well-intended, may be unhelpful. There is a

⁶¹ Sánchez, “Salsa Music and Cultural Health,” 1–2.

⁶² Sánchez, “Hispanic Is Not What You Think,” 233.

temptation to think that worshipers, perhaps especially in the cultural minority, must check their ethnicity at the church's front door. However, as the church strives to make disciples of all nations, those of other nations can, and should, retain their culture while still being baptized brothers and sisters in Christ.

This project seeks to avoid giving the impression of engaging with Ascension's Nepali members at only a cross-cultural level. For instance, in an effort to avoid giving the impression that the dominant culture at Ascension expects assimilation of the minority, this project records and shares the oral history of Ascension's Nepali refugee members only, rather than also record and share the oral histories of American members. Still relatively new to the US, Ascension's Nepali members have spent much time learning from Americans, but this project provides an opportunity for Americans to learn from them. This project seeks to give a voice to those who are refugees through sharing their recorded oral histories in a series of dialogical sermons.

Intercultural Level

The third level of cultural engagement highlighted by Sánchez is the one that is most desirable. Rather than viewing the church as being in ministry *to* another ethnic group (as is the case in cross-cultural engagement), the church is instead in ministry *with* another ethnic group. This reflects a mutual respect and collaboration. It is also the level of interaction that this project seeks to inspire in Ascension as a congregation. Sánchez explains this level, saying:

Which leads us to the *intercultural* level, the most demanding engagement. The image of a *team* working together toward a common goal, with each member contributing something unique to the community, best gets at the goal of intercultural collaboration. Hopefully, such collaboration leads to deeper relationships of mutual interdependence in which cultural others move from being strangers toward living as neighbors and friends.⁶³

⁶³ Sánchez, "Salsa Music and Cultural Health," 2.

Sánchez also uses the example of a marriage to illustrate intercultural thinking. He explains:

Think of a partnership, perhaps like a marriage, where each member, while retaining his or her uniqueness, nurtures the other, and where both partners develop their relationship over ongoing, sustained, creative, and faithful engagement. Partners are critical and constructive of each other, but they also seek to build something of value together. We have a model that, while taking into account particularity, works toward common values and community.⁶⁴

This picture of a marriage helps to show how intercultural engagement reflects both the catholicity and oneness of the church. Similar to a marriage, in an intercultural church there is no longer only “you” or only “me,” but now “us.” While the church celebrates its ethnic diversity, at the same time, the church celebrates a oneness of salvation, doctrine, and mission that can be built upon together.

Sánchez also asks questions of how the church, and Lutherans in particular, can become increasingly intercultural, especially in preaching, worship, and scholarship. He asks:

How do you move from cross-cultural to intercultural engagement, that is, from crossing into another’s culture with our toolbox of gifts to collaborating with people of other cultures in joint projects that foster mutual learning and incorporation of global contributions to Lutheranism into our sermons, Bible studies, devotional practices, visual and musical arts, approaches to mercy/justice, course syllabi, and theological scholarship? How do we fully live out, and indeed reclaim the promise of Lutheranism as truly global, catholic, or universal church in the world for the sake of the world?⁶⁵

These are powerful questions and important ones to answer. This project seeks to answer Sánchez’s challenge by highlighting the global contributions of Lutherans in our corner of Christ’s kingdom at Ascension. This project aims to give a voice to our Nepali members through a dialogical sermon series to work together in shared ministry while also recognizing the catholic nature of the church.

⁶⁴ Sánchez, “Hispanic Is Not What You Think,” 233.

⁶⁵ Sánchez, “Hispanic Is Not What You Think,” 233.

In order to visualize intercultural engagement, seminary graduate student Christian Dollar suggests an additional visual. He suggests, “One might propose two lines: one blue and one yellow. Instead of remaining parallel or only intersecting at one point, these two lines run on top of each other—at certain points more blue than yellow, at others more yellow than blue—sometimes even green!”⁶⁶ This giving and sharing is a hallmark of intercultural interaction as different cultures collaborate together. Or to use Sánchez’s illustration again of a bridge connecting two planets, in intercultural engagement, the bridge no longer only has one-way traffic. Instead, the bridge is much traveled between two cultures that share ideas mutually and are united in purpose.

To be clear, this sharing between cultures and ethnic groups does not include a compromise of faith where one culture’s religious beliefs start to blend with another’s. That could lead to the danger of syncretism and would deny the oneness of the church in matters of faith.

While he does not use the specific term “intercultural,” Donald Moorman advocates for a similar type of cultural integration that reflects the church as the body of Christ. He quotes Col. 1:18 where the apostle Paul writes that Christ “is the head of the body, the church.” He goes on to also quote 1 Cor. 12, saying:

In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul says, ‘The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts.... Now the body is not made up of one part, but many.... If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.’”

Moorman then draws conclusions from these verses for the life of the church observing, “Because Christ joins all of us in a Spirit-given unity, we are each free to be unique, Spirit-gifted people. This picture of the church, then establishes the principle that in the church we participate

⁶⁶ Christian Dollar, “Reflections on the Dangers of Community Building in a Polycultural Context,” *Grapho: Concordia Seminary Student Journal* 3, no. 1 (2021): 19.

in a grand unity while retaining our individual uniqueness.”⁶⁷ There are paradoxes that exist in an intercultural church. It is at once united, yet unique; one, yet catholic/universal; faithful to doctrine, yet celebrating ethnic diversity.

At Ascension, there have been glimpses of intercultural engagement. Nepali members are beginning to serve in leadership roles such as the church ministry council and board of elders. Ascension’s EIIT student is leading elements in worship during the divine service in both the Nepali and English languages. Nepali members and American members have given rides to each other’s children to school or confirmation instruction. Even though it sounds simple, the act of empathic listening to the stories and opinions of someone who is an ethnic other has been beneficial. While there is still much work to be done as church leadership aspires for intercultural engagement, there are inroads to becoming more of a team, a family, and the body of Christ.

As this project seeks to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together, it is important to remember that the ideal of intercultural engagement is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. Bruce Hartung puts it well in his essay when he states, “It is God’s work in our congregations and communities where the body of Christ exists that makes human connection across personality styles, and types, across existential pain and joy, and across diverse cultures really, deeply, and holistically possible and also makes policy and norm changes possible.”⁶⁸ May God grant this intercultural connection at Ascension and His church in every place.

⁶⁷ Donald Moorman, *Harvest Waiting*, 122.

⁶⁸ Hartung, “Empathy and Community,” 66.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of the research in this Major Applied Project is to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. The goal is for members of the same congregation, yet from different ethnic backgrounds, to work together interculturally.

This goal is rooted in a theological understanding of the “horizontal” nature of the Church as well as the nature of preaching in the Church. This chapter will begin by considering the horizontal dimensions of Holy Baptism in light of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the liturgical order for baptism as found in *Lutheran Service Book*. Also treated will be the horizontal dimension of the Church’s ecclesiology, which exists among God’s baptized people. Then, this chapter will focus on dialogical preaching and the ways in which it is an ideal means by which oral histories may be shared and horizontal relationships built as an act of intercultural collaboration.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism

Over the past ten years, I have been blessed to attend many naturalization ceremonies during which one of our congregation’s refugee members from Nepal has become a citizen of the United States of America. Typically held at the Thomas F. Eagleton United States Courthouse in downtown St. Louis, these ceremonies are moving events where dozens of people from all walks of life, and originating from nations around the world, are joined by family and friends as they are welcomed as citizens of the United States. I am always impressed by the strong relational

language of the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America that each new American makes.

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.¹

While becoming a naturalized citizen of the United States and becoming a baptized citizen of heaven are certainly not identical in nature, there are still parallels that exist. When a newly naturalized person becomes a citizen of the United States, their relationship changes with their former, and new, nations. Their relationship with their fellow citizens in their new nation changes as well. So also in baptism, God works a new relationship, not only with Himself vertically, but also with fellow citizens of God’s kingdom horizontally.

The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism—Scripture

Scripture wondrously emphasizes the vertical dimension of baptism extensively, that is, the ways in which baptism shapes a person’s standing before God and relationship with God. As Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions attest, “It [baptism] works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”²

¹ “Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America,” US Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/the-naturalization-interview-and-test/naturalization-oath-of-allegiance-to-the-united-states-of-america>.

² *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 23. See also Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3–5; Col. 1:13–14; 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 3:21; and Titus 3:5–6.

There are, however, key verses where the essential horizontal significance of baptism is emphasized. These portions of Scripture attest to the change in relationship that baptism works between fellow baptized believers in Christ Jesus. This chapter explores some of the metaphors and images that the apostle Paul uses to express this horizontal baptismal unity.

For instance, as he addresses Gentile Christians who have been baptized into Christ Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul uses the image of a building. He writes, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). Recognizing their purchase and redemption with Jesus' blood, Paul goes on to talk about how this has changed not only the relationship of these non-Jewish Christians with God, but also with others. He writes, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:19–21). Connected to Jesus' death and resurrection through the waters of Holy Baptism, these Gentile Christians are no longer strangers and aliens, but are now also citizens and family. Through Christ, these Gentiles have a new horizontal relationship with all others who are citizens of heaven and members of God's house, and this relationship transcends ethnic differences between Gentile and Jew. Using the picture of a building, all the baptized are part of the same household of God, built on the same foundation, having the same cornerstone. There is no qualifier concerning how one's ethnicity determines whether or not they are included in this household. Their relationship with other members of the house transcends cultural differences.

Paul emphasizes this change in horizontal relationship that baptism brings in two other key passages. In both of them, Paul uses the metaphor of body to express the unity that exists

between those baptized into Christ.

The first passage is 1 Cor. 12:13, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Here, Paul is expressing the body politic. The collective body of Jews and Greeks are bound together by virtue of their baptism. This truth may have been shocking to both Jewish and Gentile Christians because of the significant cultural and ethnic differences that divided them. Yet, baptism is a way in which God creates Christian unity across cultural differences.

A second key section of verses is Eph. 4:4–6, where Paul again works with the picture of the body to express unity. He states, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The oneness of the church is centered in the one Lord Jesus in whom Christians are baptized. This one baptism is through water and the Word in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is the one baptism into which Christians are baptized and joined to one another.

Paul continues in Eph. 4 and expresses how this horizontal dimension of baptism practically works. He again uses the metaphor of the body, writing:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:11–16)

In these verses, we see a vast diversity in the gifts and callings that have been given to Christians. Yet, all the saints are united in the work of ministry and building up the body of

Christ, of which they themselves are a part. Paul continues to speak of the body with Christ as the head and Christians as various parts of the body. When a person is baptized, he or she is not merely part of the body of Christ as an isolated individual. All the baptized are parts of the same body which builds itself up in love. Again, in these words from Eph. 4, no exclusions to the body based on ethnicity are given.

Commenting on the horizontal emphasis in these same Pauline texts about the body of Christ, Robert Kolb notes, “Paul also taught that the Baptism which recasts our identity before God by joining us to the crucified and risen body of Christ also has placed us in a new set of horizontal relationships, above all in that body of Christ which is his gathered people, the Church.”³ Kolb continues, “Every attempt to divide Christ’s people into classes on the basis of any standard of evaluation contradicts the unity which he establishes on the basis of his baptismal action.”⁴ Thus, a division in the body of the Church based upon ethnicity would contradict the unity God Himself brings about in baptism.

Also commenting on the horizontal-focused baptismal and body language in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4, the text *Confessing the Gospel* supports Kolb’s assertions saying, “By Baptism, all are made members of the body of Christ, whether they are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. Differences such as nationality, culture, gender, and social status are irrelevant in determining membership or status in the body of Christ.”⁵ God creates a horizontal unity among His people. Thus, baptized fellow citizens and fellow household members should not be divided in any way, including ethnicity.

³ Kolb, *Make Disciples Baptizing*, 55.

⁴ Kolb, *Make Disciples Baptizing*, 56.

⁵ Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumpp, and Howard W. Tepker, eds., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 2:805.

Another way of describing the horizontal oneness expressed by Paul is with the language of relationship. In the examples given earlier, Paul uses the language of relationship in various ways. He speaks of fellow household members, fellow citizens, and parts of the same body. Baptism is about relationship, and this means of grace changes the relationship of the baptized with both Christ and the fellow baptized.

Baptism brings Christians into a saving relationship with Christ and places them into a serving relationship with one another.... Consequently, the Holy Spirit through Baptism incorporates them through faith into the body of Christ where they are in union not only with Christ, the head of the church, but also with all other Christians regardless of ethnic or cultural differences.⁶

In baptism, relationships are changed. Vertically, the baptized are brought into a saving relationship, and horizontally, the baptized are brought into a serving relationship—serving one another and their neighbors. Additionally, there is a union created in baptism between all the baptized that transcends ethnic and cultural differences. This is not to say cultural differences cease to exist, but rather that these different cultures should not cause manmade divisions.

James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers make a connection to ethnic groups who, like the Nepalese church members in this study, are displaced. They write, “Alienation serves as a powerful metaphor for the relational dimension and impact of displacement. The displaced are aliens, estranged from persons they have known all their lives. They are outsiders in their own families.”⁷ For those who have experienced social displacement and alienation, either by coming to a different country, or by becoming a Christian and suffering persecution for the faith, it is a comfort to know they are citizens of heaven and members of God’s household. The comfort is invaluable when life circumstances, such as displacement, may hide the unity that exists among

⁶ Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 804–5.

⁷ Nieman and Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew*, 89.

Christians or trouble it. While the scriptural truths of the horizontal unity of baptism may not take away the hiddenness or trouble, God’s Word equips us for addressing them. Come what may, the reality is the baptized from any nation or ethnicity have a home and a horizontal relationship with their fellow baptized in that home. Again referencing 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4, *Confessing the Gospel* attests to the importance of the horizontal dimension of baptism, declaring,

Taken together, these and other New Testament texts (1 Cor 12:12–13; Eph 4:4–6) clearly indicate that it is the Lord’s will that the church is to bring unbelievers not only into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, but also into a close relationship with all the members of the body of Christ. They are to be brought into the church where God builds them up in the faith and enables them to serve both Christ and their fellow Christians.⁸

This mission of the church to baptize and bring members of the body of Christ into close relationship is reflected in the purpose of this project as it seeks to inspire people of different cultures to work together.

The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism—The Communion of Saints

Before exploring the ways in which the horizontal dimension of baptism is expressed in the baptismal liturgy of *Lutheran Service Book*, it is important to note that Martin Luther also emphasized the horizontal aspect of baptism in his Baptismal Booklet. “The Baptismal Booklet, based on medieval baptismal rites, was originally published in 1523. It was included in the second edition of the Small Catechism published in 1529.”⁹ Luther’s motivation for writing this booklet was out of concern that those in the gathered congregation who participated in a baptism were not aware of what was happening.

⁸ Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:806.

⁹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 371.

In the booklet, Luther certainly addresses the vertical significance of baptism, between the baptized and God, but he also notes the horizontal nature of baptism. Luther envisions a corporate nature to the sacrament of baptism and seeks to instruct the people in a faithful partaking in that event. For instance, Luther admonishes: “Ah, dear Christians, let us not value or treat this unspeakable gift so half-heartedly. For baptism is our only comfort and the doorway to all of God’s possessions and to the communion of all the saints. To this end may God help us. Amen.”¹⁰ Luther declares that baptism is the doorway “to the communion of all the saints,” and thus creates a horizontal relationship with the saints for all who are baptized.

In his Large Catechism, Luther spends significant effort defining what the “communion of saints” noted in his Baptismal Booklet and expressed in the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed is. He defines the communion of saints by writing, “This is the meaning and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism.”¹¹ Luther may or may not have had cultural differences in mind when he wrote about “sect or schism,” yet it remains that there should be no divisions in the communion of saints formed in baptism based upon ethnic differences.

The Horizontal Dimension of Baptism—Baptismal Liturgy

Chapter One of this project contained a description of Nepali refugees being baptized at Ascension and then an address to the newly baptized that said:

In Holy Baptism God the Father has made you members of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs with us of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and

¹⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 371.

¹¹ LC, The Creed, in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 438–39.

apostolic Church. We receive you in Jesus' name as our brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

The nearly entirely Caucasian congregation responded with words of welcome from the baptismal liturgy in *Lutheran Service Book*, "We welcome you in the name of the Lord."¹² This recognition of the newly baptized as "brothers and sisters in Christ" is one of many examples in the baptismal liturgy that emphasizes the horizontal reality of baptism.

Just as the baptismal liturgy in Luther's Baptismal Booklet from over five hundred years ago noted the horizontal dimension of baptism, so also does the baptismal liturgy used in many LCMS congregations today. *Lutheran Service Book*, pointing the congregation to baptism's implications for our relationship together, includes a prayer for the one being baptized, which says, "Grant that *he/she/they* be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers." (*LSB*, 269). These words imply that, similar to believing Noah and his family, those who are baptized are all fellow passengers on the same ark of the Church and are a community that baptism sets apart from unbelievers.

In the final prayer of the baptismal liturgy, the horizontal significance of baptism is repeated, again using familial citizenship language.

Almighty and most merciful God and Father, we thank and praise You that You graciously preserve and enlarge Your family and have granted *names(s)* the new birth in Holy Baptism and made *him/her/them a member/members* of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and *an heir/heirs* of Your heavenly kingdom. We humbly implore You that, as *he/she/they has/have* now become Your *child/children*, You would keep *him/her/them* in *his/her/their* baptismal grace, that according to Your good pleasure *he/she/they* may faithfully grow to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name and finally, with all Your saints, obtain the promised inheritance in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (*LSB*, 271)

¹² Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 271, hereafter *LSB*.

This prayer's acknowledgment of entering God's family and having an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom reflects the language of Eph. 2, which was cited earlier, and calls Gentile Christians "fellow citizens" and "members of the household of God." The prayer also numbers the baptized among the saints of God. When this petition is prayed, the Church recognizes that baptism creates the horizontal reality of a new family member, a new heir, and a new saint being made by water and the Word, regardless of ethnic background. This horizontal relationship continues among baptized Christians for all eternity.

Horizontal Ecclesiology

Evidence from this discussion concerning the horizontal dimension of baptism as seen in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the baptismal liturgy of *Lutheran Service Book*, bear witness to the reality of a horizontal ecclesiology. The horizontal component of baptism is a key element in why a horizontal ecclesiology is of the *esse* of the true church. In his Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation titled, "Behind the Numbers: A Traditional Church Faces a New America," Larry Vogel, using an ecclesiological approach, emphasizes the church's universality, or catholicity, as an essential element of the Church.

In what he calls a "horizontal catholicity," Vogel focuses on the biblical reality that the church is composed of the baptized from all nations. As such, Vogel concentrates on the "transcultural" or "catholic," that is, universal, dimension of the one holy Church—the *Una Sancta*. Vogel writes,

Horizontal catholicity—that is, inclusion of the many peoples God has created—is of the *esse* of the true church because the true church comes "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9). The *Una Sancta* is catholic both in faith or doctrine (vertical catholicity in the sense of the Athanasian Creed), and catholic in the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world (horizontal catholicity since the gospel is a catholic, universal message). The horizontal dimension of catholicity requires the true church to proclaim the gospel to those nearby and most

like “us,” and with those who are far off, who are, to our eyes, “aliens and strangers” (Eph. 2:19).¹³

Again, connecting baptism to Vogel’s writing, it follows that Christ’s command, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20), bears witness to our Lord’s desire that all be baptized and taught the Gospel regardless of ethnicity.

Writing further on the horizontal reality of catholicity, Vogel again refers to the closing verses of the Gospel of Matthew, “When Christ sends the apostolic church to all nations (Matt. 28:19), radiating from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately, beyond the horizon to the ends of the earth, the Church is marked as a catholic communion. She is the ‘home of all the nations,’ the fulfillment of the promise that the Lord of Israel’s ‘salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.’”¹⁴ Vogel is a convincing advocate for seeking to evangelize all nations, recognizing that this is not only what the Church is called to *do*, but also that this catholic, or universal, composition is who the Church is called to *be*.

For this project, it is helpful to pair Vogel’s horizontal reality of the Church’s catholicity with the horizontal reality of baptism as reflected in the local congregation. In their work, *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, Michael Root and Risto Saarinen emphasize that a person is baptized into both the local and universal church. They write,

It is generally agreed ecumenically that baptism is always both into a particular local church and into the church universal. In normal situations baptism is carried out by some local church and constitutes entry into the concrete life and care of that community. One cannot belong to “the church in general” without belonging to a

¹³ Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 8–9.

¹⁴ Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 261.

concrete, historical particular body ... He or she is baptized by a particular church into the one church.¹⁵

When, for instance, Nepalese refugees were baptized at Ascension, these former Hindus became members of the catholic, universal Church. At the same time, they were also welcomed into the church family of Ascension Lutheran in particular. They became baptized members of the local congregation.

In many respects, this project builds on the foundation that Vogel has laid. While he, however, emphasizes the horizontal reality of the Church as a call to intentionally witness to the nations, this project instead focuses on what is to be done *after* those from different nations and ethnic backgrounds have received the Gospel and have been baptized. That is, how can a congregation work toward reflecting their horizontal baptismal and ecclesiastical reality by becoming an intercultural community?

Sadly, baptism can be thought of as far less than this and reduced to a ritual that happens once, rather than an event that creates a new reality for not only the baptized individual, but also the church. Even though the secular world may divide people by ethnicity or culture in terms of our identities, in the church, a Christian's identity is a baptismal one that all in Christ have in common. It is a great challenge for the church to overcome a fallen world that often divides based on ethnicity. This projects seeks to meet this challenge through preaching. The role of preaching can proclaim the horizontal relationship created by baptism that Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions attest to. Specifically, this project proposes that one means to overcome ethnic divisions, or shallow multicultural engagement, is to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees into a series of dialogical sermons.

¹⁵ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, *Baptism and the Unity of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 15.

Dialogical Preaching

This section of the project will seek to show how a series of dialogical sermons is an ideal means by which to share the content of the oral histories of Ascension’s Nepali members with the rest of the congregation with the goal of inspiring intercultural collaboration. This section will not only attend to dialogical preaching in general, but will also focus on aspects of this type of homiletical practice in relation to the research purpose of this project in particular.

What Is Dialogical Preaching?

Dialogical preaching is a practice that integrates dialog into the form, content, or function of the sermon. Dialogical preaching reflects a theological approach to preaching that first and foremost emphasizes the power of God’s Word. The term “dialog” implies the act of hearing and speaking. At the heart of dialogical preaching is the efficacy of God’s Word in the lives of the hearers as God speaks, people listen, and they respond.¹⁶ Scholars who advocate for a dialogical approach to homiletics often focus on the relationship between God’s Word, the community, and the one serving as preacher.¹⁷

While dialogical preaching has foundations in both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, as will be illustrated later, its modern revival in the era of the New Homiletic is

¹⁶ See Rom. 10:5–10 for an example of the interplay between God speaking, people hearing, and then responding faithfully:

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

¹⁷ Authorities in the field of dialogical preaching include O. Wesley Allen Jr., Ronald J. Allen, Shauna K. Hannan, Reuel L. Howe, Lisa Washington Lamb, David J. Lose, John S. McClure, and Doug Pagitt. This project will seek to be in conversation with these communicators and homileticians, both affirming and challenging their views on dialogical preaching.

largely recognized as being initiated by Reuel Howe in his text, *The Miracle of Dialogue*. For Howe, dialog is essential to the relationship between the Church and the world and should be embraced in one's vocation, including the calling of preacher. He writes in his passionate opening chapter, "This is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship into being, and it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died."¹⁸ He specifically addresses dialog's centrality to the Church's ministry, writing, "The Church may dare to speak in each age only if it listens both to God and men."¹⁹ In terms of preaching, listening to others, especially within one's congregation, is essential to the composition of a sermon and can shape both the preaching of Law and the proclamation of Gospel.

Another key work in the field of dialogical preaching is John S. McClure's highly practical work, *The Round-Table Pulpit*. McClure refers to this form of preaching as "collaborative," and helpfully defines what it is as well as what it is not. Speaking of what collaborative preaching is, he writes, "Collaborative preaching is a method that involves members of a congregation in sermon brainstorming. Preaching becomes a 'rhetoric of listening' through which the biblical interpretations and theological insights of the congregation find a voice in the pulpit."²⁰ For McClure, "collaborative" simply means working together as pastor and hearers to inform the content of preaching.²¹ For instance, this collaboration could take place in the form of a Bible study discussion between laypeople and a pastor during a lesson taught the week before the sermon is preached. The Bible class conversation may help to form the content of the next week's sermon.

¹⁸ Howe, *Miracle of Dialogue*, 3.

¹⁹ Howe, *Miracle of Dialogue*, 136.

²⁰ John S. McClure, *The Round-Table Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 7.

²¹ McClure, *Round-Table Pulpit*, 48.

McClure also expresses what, in his view, collaborative preaching is not. He asserts, “I will not suggest that preachers actually hold conversations from the pulpit or that they attempt two or three party ‘dialogue sermons.’”²² Here, McClure dispels a misconception held by some that collaborative or dialogical preaching necessarily means that there is a literal dialog, or conversation, that takes place during the course of the sermon event. To view dialogical preaching only as a literal dialog between pastor and people taking place during the sermon is to have a narrow, and misinformed, view of this homiletical practice.

McClure’s definition of dialogical preaching is supported by Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, Jr. in their work *The Sermon without End*. They echo his description of dialogical preaching stating, “We are not advocating for substituting dialogue sermons for monological preaching so much as assuming a conversational perspective, approach, and tone in the pulpit. Indeed, conversational preachers should always employ the single most important quality for exegesis, theological reflection, hermeneutics, and the shaping of the sermon: listening.”²³ Again, dialogical preaching does not mean the abandonment of the monological sermons. Dialogical preaching does, however, place a greater emphasis on the preacher as listener as he engages God’s Word and God’s people.

Another term to describe dialogical preaching is “conversational.” This is the descriptor used in *Under the Oak Tree*, which is a series of essays edited by Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen, Jr. In one of the featured essays, David J. Lose writes a piece titled, “Preaching as Conversation.” There he comments on conversational preaching, casting it

²² McClure, *Round-Table Pulpit*, 8.

²³ Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 116.

as “an activity that is variously described as collaborative, conversational, and participatory.”²⁴ He sees this conversation in the Christian community taking place before the sermon, shaping the content of what is preached (feedforward), as well as after the sermon, shaping and forming hearers following the proclamation of the Word (feedback). Thus, the conversation around the sermon can be extended to have a more far-reaching effect both before and after the preaching event.

Is the Sermon a Solitary Event?

A main tenet of dialogical preaching is that the sermon is not written in isolation. This is made manifest in two primary ways. The first way is the sermon’s connection to God’s Word. Dialogical preaching is informed by the written Word, centered in Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, and is itself the Word of God in the act of preaching. The preacher does not simply write matters of his opinion or content that comes solely from within himself. Instead, the content of the sermon is informed by, and based upon, Holy Scripture centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—who is the incarnate Word. The preacher then is in dialog with the biblical text as the sermon is being composed and preached. In the pastor’s proclamation of the sermon, the preached word is also the word of God as it comes to his hearers externally. The Lutheran Confessions attest to the importance of hearing the Gospel in the preached word. Perhaps one of the most familiar places where preaching is equated with God’s Word is in Luther’s explanation of the Third Commandment, “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”²⁵ In his explanation, Luther sees

²⁴ David J. Lose, “Preaching as Conversation,” in *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*, ed. Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr. (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 77.

²⁵ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 13.

preaching as synonymous with God’s Word. So closely are they linked that in this meaning Luther even speaks of preaching and the Word in the singular “it” rather than in the plural “them.”

The second way the sermon is not written in isolation is that dialogical preaching emphasizes the role of the Church in forming the content of the sermon. In her work, *The Peoples’ Sermon*, Shauna K. Hannan encourages sermons to not be written in isolation but to be shaped by the baptized people of God, saying, “Preaching is not a solo endeavor. It is a communal practice.” She goes on to emphasize that a collaborative ministry should be reflected in collaborative preaching: “Directly to the point of this book, if ministry is understood to be collaborative, and preaching is ministry, then sermon preparation should be the work of the community together rather than the work of one person.”²⁶

Dialog that informs a sermon can take place within the congregation, but can also extend beyond one’s call as a pastor to everyday interactions that a pastor has with individuals as he lives out his varying vocations in the world. In *The Sermon without End*, Allen and Allen write, “Conversational preachers make meaning for their larger lives through encounters with the wide and deep range of voices in the world in their day-to-day interfacing with family and friends, coworkers, people, and groups they encounter in the community, the news, the personal events of the day (such as visits to the hospital and the food bank), social movements and the arts.”²⁷ It is rare that a pastor’s weekend sermon is not shaped, intentionally or unintentionally, by his interactions with people throughout the week. Even if he may not use the term “dialogical preaching,” such influences in the sermon are still a form of this homiletical practice.

²⁶ Shauna K. Hannan, *The Peoples’ Sermon: Preaching as a Ministry of the Whole Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2021), xv.

²⁷ Allen and Allen Jr., *Sermon without End*, 124.

This dual dialog that happens between the pastor and God's Word, as well as the pastor and God's people, in the composition of the sermon is described well by Thomas Long in his work,

The Witness of Preaching:

When preachers go to the scripture, then, they must take the people with them, since what will be heard there is a word for them.... We must self-consciously embody the needs and situations of others, especially those who are different from ourselves. Some preachers find it helpful, as part of the process of interpreting the scripture, to visualize the congregation that will be present when the sermon is preached. They survey the congregation in their mind's eye, seeing the familiar faces and the lives behind them.... When preachers turn to the scripture, all these people go with them.²⁸

It is true that sermon preparation without biblical study would be unfaithful. However, it also stands that biblical study in preparation for a sermon without the people of God in mind would be unloving. God has called pastors to serve in a particular congregation in a particular place. It is incumbent upon the pastor to take those he is called to serve into consideration when preparing a sermon.

What Long is recognizing is the balance between the preaching office and how the people of God in a particular congregation inform, and form, a sermon. The Lutheran homiletician Richard Caemmerer acknowledged the importance of this balance as well. He recognized the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as a foundation for a mutual conversation in the sermon.²⁹ It was Caemmerer's desire that the preaching of the sermon not be entirely one-way, as he warns that "very easily the sermon can deteriorate simply to a message from the preacher to the people."³⁰ It seems as if Caemmerer's desire to make the sermon more than a message "to" the people is what motivated him to change the title of his text from *Preaching to the Church* to

²⁸ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 74.

²⁹ See 1 Pet. 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

³⁰ Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 56.

Preaching for the Church in a later edition.

The Lutheran Confessions also support preaching that takes into account the community in which a pastor serves. Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, “Concerning Church Government (Order),” states, “Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper call.”³¹ The “proper call” that Article XIV speaks of is to a specific people in a specific place. Expanding on this specificity of location in the Office of Ministry, *Confessing the Gospel* states, “By accepting the congregation’s call, the pastor exercises the functions of his office on behalf of and with accountability to the church that has called him.”³² Thus, the pastor does not preach in a vacuum, but to, and among, a unique group of people. To know and to be in dialog with the church that has called him, as well as with the community in which this church is placed, is a great benefit to his preaching.

How Do We Understand Dialogical Preaching from a Confessional Lutheran Perspective?

As this section explores the theological significance of a dialogical preaching sermon structure, it is helpful to understand this homiletical approach from a biblical and confessional point of view. Similar to the discussion of the practice of dialogical preaching along the external/internal spectrum that was treated earlier, David Schmitt also highlights that the theological emphasis of dialogical preaching can be viewed along a spectrum as well. At one end of the spectrum is an emphasis on the office of preaching and at the other end is an emphasis on the mutual consolation of the saints (brothers and sisters). These poles are two different truths concerning the same ministry of the Word of God. They do not contradict each other, neither are

³¹ AC XIV in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 319.

³² Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:992.

they mutually exclusive, but rather they are mutually supportive of each other. In an effort to demonstrate this, what follows is a part-by-part comparison of the office of preaching and the mutual consolation of the saints.

Figure 4. The Spectrum of Dialogical Preaching External and Internal to a Sermon.



The office of preaching emphasizes the authoritative nature of the Word proclaimed by the pastor as God’s mouthpiece. It recognizes that the pastor fulfills a pastoral role in delivering the sermon. Such a view is supported by Scripture in numerous places, including 1 Tim. 3; 1 Cor. 12:29; and Rom. 10:15.

The Lutheran Confessions speak to the office of preaching—most notably, the Augsburg Confession. Article V, “Concerning the Office of Preaching,” states: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those

who hear the gospel.”³³ Article XIV, “Concerning Church Government (Order),” says:

“Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publically teach, preach or administer the sacraments without a proper call.”³⁴

At the same time, the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints is also recognized by the Lutheran Confessions as a means by which the Gospel is shared. This mutual conversation and consolation stresses the shared experience of the people of God and the gift of bearing witness to the Gospel. It acknowledges the priestly role individual Christians have in forming, but not preaching, the sermon. Examples of the mutual consolation of the saints appear in the epistles of the apostle Paul in places such as Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19.

The Lutheran Confessions’ mutual consolation of the saints is specifically found in SA III 4, “Concerning the Gospel.” The Smalcald Articles were completed by Martin Luther in 1537 in anticipation of a council which was called by Pope Paul III. Not only did these articles articulate the confession of the Reformers, but they were also personally important to Luther and considered by many his last will and testament of sorts. In SA III 4, Luther lists five ways by which the Gospel comes to people.

We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]:
“Where two or three are gathered ...”³⁵

Luther recognizes that the church, which is formed by the call of the Gospel,³⁶ is given the

³³ AC V in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

³⁴ AC XIV in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 46.

³⁵ SA III 4 in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 319.

³⁶ “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but

opportunity to share that same Gospel through the consolation of the saints. The Gospel, in other words, can not only be shared through the spoken word of an individual, but also through the mutual sharing among baptized Christians.

The following is a deeper examination of the mutual consolation of the saints as well as the office of preaching. A part-by-part comparison of both of these will be highlighted. Both of these are ministries of the Word. However, the mutual consolation of the saints reflects the ministry of the Word in a wide sense, in contrast to the office of preaching which manifests the ministry of the Word in a narrow sense.

The mutual consolation of the saints reflects that the means of grace are given by God to His Church. In the section titled “Ministry of the Word: Wide and Narrow Sense” in *Confessing the Gospel*, it states:

God has entrusted the means of grace, Word and sacraments, to all believers. As the apostle Peter affirms, they are God’s royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Christ’s mandate to his church (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15) makes every Christian a witness for the gospel. God builds and preserves his church through the ministry of the Word. The Church owes its existence to the Word of God, not vice versa ...

Recognizing that the ministry of the Word is given to the Church, the text then goes on to distinguish between the wide and narrow sense of this ministry.

Ministry has both a wide and narrow sense. In the first sense it refers to the rights, duties, and responsibilities that belong by Christ’s ordering to the totality of the spiritual priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9; Matt 18:17; John 20:23; 1 Cor 3:21–23). Every Christian—young or old, man, woman, or child—shares in this ministry as a believing, baptized child of God.³⁷

For the purposes of this project, it could be added that every Christian, not only regardless of age but also regardless of ethnicity, also shares in this ministry of the Word.

the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 17.

³⁷ Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:987.

The office of preaching is also essentially the ministry of the Word as the priesthood of all believers calls a pastor to serve by administering the means of grace in the context of public worship.

For the sake of the church on earth (Acts 20:24; Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 4:1), God instituted an office into which a qualified man is to be called by the believers gathered together at a specific place. The rights and responsibilities of the spiritual priesthood belong to all Christians, but they are not each to administer the means of grace publically, as valid and efficacious as this would be. By divine institution the members of the royal priesthood are to call—that is, elect, choose, or appoint—qualified individuals to do this on their behalf, in their name and stead (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Acts 14:23; Ephesians 4:11; Rom 1:1).³⁸

Dialogical preaching aims to carry out the ministry of the Word in both the wide and narrow sense as the royal priesthood helps to form the content of the sermon as informed by God’s Word, and the called servant of the Word publically preaches and delivers the sermon. In dialogical preaching, it is possible to honor the mutual consolation of the saints as well as the office of preaching in the composition and content of a sermon.³⁹

Where Is This Project Located in the Spectrum of Dialogical Preaching?

To better understand the varied ways that dialogical preaching is carried out in the congregational setting, David Schmitt has offered a helpful spectrum of tasks. The spectrum ranges from those activities that are external to the sermon to activities that are internal to the sermon.⁴⁰

³⁸ Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 988.

³⁹ The work of Richard Caemmerer reflects the homiletic tradition of the LCMS in the mid to late 20th century. It was with a desire for the office of preaching (AC 5) and the mutual consolation of the saints to support each other (SA III 4), that Caemmerer advocates for the voices of the people to be considered in preaching. For Caemmerer, to neglect the dynamic of mutual conversation would be a detriment to the preaching event, as he states, “very easily the sermon can deteriorate simply to a message from the preacher to the people.” Further evidence of Caemmerer’s support for a form of dialogical preaching can be seen in his choice to change the title of his homiletical text from *Preaching to the Church* in the first edition to *Preaching for the Church* in later editions.

⁴⁰ See Figure 4.

Those activities that are external to the delivery of the sermon can take place before (feedforward) or after (feedback) the sermon. Those that take place before the sermon include, but are not limited to, congregational study groups, local clergy text groups, and videos posted on social media that deal with the Scripture readings for the upcoming sermon. Tasks that happen following the sermon include response groups, discussion groups, and interactive blogs. Activities before the sermon serve to shape the content of what is preached, while practices after the sermon work to foster a culture of conversation about preaching and its message.

Activities that are internal to the dialogical sermon itself range from scripted dialog to unscripted dialog to directed progressional dialog to free progressional dialog. Scripted dialog could include interaction with another “voice,” such as a biblical figure or a chancel drama. Unscripted dialog could include an interview with an individual such as a missionary or text messages that are submitted from the congregation and then included in the sermon. Directed progressional dialog could include answering prepared questions posed by the congregation during the course of the sermon and then offering prepared biblical teaching that helps to bring clarity. Free progressional dialog may offer the hearers open-ended questions and the preaching event becomes collaborative in nature without an authoritative word from the preacher.⁴¹ Such a free progressional dialog does not lend itself well to the scriptural and confessional understanding of the preaching office as earlier described.

The dialogical sermons preached for this project can be viewed both external to the sermon and internal to the sermon. This will help to situate this project’s sermon series within the

⁴¹ For instance, Doug Pagitt advocates for congregations avoiding sermons that are monological, or what he has labeled, “speaching.” Instead, he states his goal writing, “What I’m advocating is that we become communities who listen to the preachers among us, not just the preacher standing in the front of us.” Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 6. Other advocates for free progressional dialog include Lucy Rose in her work, *Sharing the Word*.

spectrum of dialogical preaching.

The work done external to this project's sermon series was done before the sermon was written and preached. This step was crucial, as Hannan recognizes, "A commitment to 'preaching with' begins before the sermon is preached—that is, in the preparation process, or, what is commonly called feedforward."⁴² The content used to feedforward were the oral history interviews that I conducted with four members of Ascension who are refugees and leaders among the Nepali community in our congregation. Listening to and learning from the insights, struggles, and joys of these refugees helped form sermons that allowed their voices to be heard and listened to in the context of Holy Scripture.

In this project, the recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees were used external to the sermon to inform the content of a series of dialogical sermons; this type of feedforward directly shaped the content of the sermon. Dialogical preaching benefited this project because it allowed for the sharing of new perspectives, specifically, that of what might be titled "the other." This may be classified as "other-wise homiletics," which can be defined as "homiletics that strives to become wise about other human beings to gain wisdom about and from others for preaching."⁴³ In the context of Ascension, the "other," or minority group, is refugees from Nepal.

Internal to the content preached in this project's series of sermons is a scripted dialog. As the preacher, I interacted with the voices of members who are refugees and connected this conversation to biblical texts chosen for the sermon series. A series of three videos, shown before the Invocation, featured portions of the interviews with our Nepali members. Each video

⁴² Hannan, *Peoples' Sermon*, 72.

⁴³ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, preface xi.

featured answers to a question that was asked. These three questions were: “What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?” “Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?” and “How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?”

How Was Dialogical Preaching Used in This Project in Connection to Recorded Oral Histories of Members Who Are Refugees?

In order to best express how dialogical preaching was used in this project, this section will first provide an outline of the three-part sermon series that was in dialog with the interviews conducted with four of our refugee members from Nepal. The summary of these sermons will help to illustrate what information from the oral histories was included in the sermons as well as how this material was used. If a sermon series about our Nepali refugees was preached without the benefit of their recorded oral histories, it would have been much blander, ill-informed, and not have given voice to our Nepali members as an important part of the priesthood of all believers. Instead, the content of the oral history interviews was of great value as a measure which informed what was included in the series of dialogical sermons.

The complete texts of the sermons preached for this project are included in Appendix Four. The complete transcripts of the oral history interviews, as well as the portions of the interviews highlighted in three videos which informed these sermons, are also in this project’s appendices.

The oral history informed dialogical sermon series for this project was preached during three weekends in the season of Epiphany in 2024. The time of Epiphany in the church year highlights the theme of Jesus coming as a Savior for all nations and peoples. As such, it was an ideal time to recognize the ethnic differences among members of Ascension, but also affirm the unity which exists through baptism. The sermon series was titled “Savior of the Nations,” reflecting a Christ-centered Epiphany theme. The title of each of the three individual sermons

reflected a dichotomy that exists for the congregation's Nepali refugee members, but by extension also had direct implications for all members of Ascension. Each sermon also highlighted content from a seven- to eight-minute video clip from the oral history interviews that was shown to the congregation before the Invocation. Each video featured all four of the Nepali refugee members interviewed and their responses to a specific question. The videos shown were extremely moving, eye-opening, and left a lasting impression on me and the congregation.

The first sermon is titled "Refugee and Citizen," and was based on the text of Matt. 2:13–23, which highlights the Holy Family's flight to Egypt.⁴⁴ The question from the oral history recording highlighted in the pre-service video was, "What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?"

The sermon made parallels between the political reasons behind both the displacement of Jesus and His family as they relocated to Egypt and our Nepali members and their families as they were forced into refugee camps. Comparisons were made to what life may have been like in Egypt for Jesus and what life was like in a refugee camp for the Nepali people. Content from our Nepali members' interviews included accounts of sickness, beds made of mud, roofs made of

⁴⁴ Matt. 2:13–23: Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

tarps, lack of food, and a longing for a home. The sermon highlighted the truth that God had a purpose for Jesus to move to Egypt as His life was preserved for our salvation. Similarly, God had a purpose for our Nepali members to live in refugee camps. The sermon highlights a portion of Gagan Gurung's oral history interview where he shared that the refugee camp is where he heard the Gospel and became a Christian. In a meager refugee camp, he received all the riches of heaven.

The sermon then moved on to the sermon series' common theme of baptism as it highlighted the "citizenship" motif of baptism. In our Nepali members' naturalization ceremony, they made a pledge to renounce all foreign princes, and in baptism they also renounced the prince of this world, making them citizens in God's kingdom. This same citizenship belongs to all Christians regardless of ethnicity.

The title of the second sermon is "Persecution and Freedom." It uses for its Bible text Acts 16:16–34, the account of Paul and Silas being imprisoned and then set free.⁴⁵ The question that

⁴⁵ Acts 16:16–34: As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at

the oral history video clip dealt with was, “Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?”

The sermon began with the account of the German immigrants from Saxony who eventually established what would become the LCMS, highlighting religious freedom as the primary motivation for their relocating to the US. The account of Paul and Silas was shared from Acts 16 noting the lack of religious freedom that led to their imprisonment. A connection was made between the persecution suffered by this duo, and the persecution experienced by Ascension’s Nepali members. In Nepal where Christianity is a small minority, and followers of Jesus are considered the lowest of castes/classes, being a Christian is difficult. Portions from the oral history interviews were referenced which shared experiences of no longer being welcomed in the homes of family members, being avoided by former friends, and even being beaten with a bamboo stick all because they converted from Hinduism to Christianity.

The baptismal life is not always easy, but it is one that brings ultimate freedom. This freedom was given through water and the Word to the jailor and his family in the Acts 16 text, to Ascension’s Nepali members, and to all the baptized. This spiritual freedom is greater than any secular religious freedom and transcends culture and circumstances. An account was shared from an oral history interview where a former persecutor of one of the Nepali members became a Christian and received the freedom that comes from the Gospel.

The third sermon in the three-part dialogical sermon series was titled “Strangers and Family,” with the account of Pentecost from Acts 2:1–11; 37–47 serving as the text.⁴⁶ The

once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

⁴⁶ Acts 2:1–22; 37–47: When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled

question answered by the oral history video of four of Ascension’s Nepali members was, “How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?”

The sermon was preached following the seventy-ninth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. This was used as an example of just how far discrimination based on another’s ethnicity can extend. In contrast, there was no discrimination on God’s part on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord went to great lengths for people from many nations to hear the mighty works of God proclaimed in a way they could understand. The sermon referenced the oral history interviews, highlighting in particular John Gurung’s observation connected to baptism. He notes, “When we were baptized in Christ we became the children of God. There is not any discrimination, not any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if we are speaking a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We are all in Christ.” This provided an opportunity to explain the horizontal dimension of baptism.

with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ...

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The sermon continued with an emphasis on family and home, referencing part of Gagan Gurung's interview highlighted in the pre-service video. Gagan spoke of Ascension as a safe home in an unfamiliar and often challenging new land. "We came to the United States with no friends. No one of our skin color. No one knows our language. Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place; breathing a long breath."

Another interviewee, Meena Rai, was referenced as she spoke about the congregation saying, "Ascension Lutheran, when we become members everyone helps us. In every difficult situation you give a hand. A helping heart." A quote from Shiva Gurung's interview was also shared, "Ascension Church is my house, my home. I feel this is my family. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I am sad. Like when my husband passed away."

The sermon also recognized that Ascension is not a perfect home, nor is its pastor or people perfect. There will, however, be a perfect home for all the baptized when Christ returns and ushers in the new heavens and new earth. We get a glimpse of what this home will be like in Rev. 7 where John writes about a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. There will be no discrimination in our eternal home with Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Having summarized the dialog-informed content of each of these three sermons, what follows is a survey of the theory that highlights the value of composing sermons at the intersection of oral history and dialogical preaching. Connections will also be made to the sermon series preached to illustrate how this theory was applied to this project.

As I interviewed refugees and recorded their oral histories, the task of humbly listening in order to learn was key. In her work *Blessed and Beautiful*, Lisa Washington Lamb writes about the importance of preacher as "listener," especially when it comes to understanding the pain

endured by different immigrant and refugee groups.

They [preachers] need to become adept story-listeners, with ears attuned to the pain endured by individuals. Some of that pain comes from family, career, or physical illness. But an often overlooked dimension is the pain endured while in other countries, where some have endured famine, ethnic cleansing, repressive regimes, or civil war. Many have experienced subtle or overt racism in North America.⁴⁷

Ascension members who are refugees have experienced heartache for both political and religious reasons before coming to the US. This is highlighted in the first and second sermons preached in this series, which focused on the questions asked during the oral interviews, “What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal? Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?” Connections were made to texts from Matt. 2:13–23 and Acts 16:16–34.

This project seeks to work toward intercultural collaboration in a multicultural congregation. Lamb speaks to how this can be accomplished by sharing the experiences of members who may have different pasts in a way that will connect with all listeners.

Preachers who wrestle with how to unite ethnically diverse congregations must strive to narrate experiences in ways that allow listeners to make connections between their own histories and the radically different histories of some in their midst. This comes through a process of careful listening and of bringing forth and empowering symphonic testimony, drawn forth from many voices throughout the congregation.⁴⁸

Even though the content of the oral histories shared in this project’s dialogical sermons is radically different from the experience of Ascension’s members from the US, there are still touchpoints that bring connection and common ground. Such connections that were made in the sermon series included a reference to the inscribed poem inside the base of the Statue of Liberty, near the port of entry that many of the ancestors of our Caucasian congregation members entered

⁴⁷ Lisa Washington Lamb, *Blessed and Beautiful: Multiethnic Churches and the Preaching That Sustains Them* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), 132.

⁴⁸ Lamb, *Blessed and Beautiful*, 87.

through as they migrated to the US.⁴⁹ Another illustration was retelling the account of the German immigrants who eventually formed the LCMS. Their plight for religious freedom was paralleled to the religious freedom sought by our Nepali members.

These commonalities help in forming what Lamb calls a “third culture space” in our congregation.

Preachers in those [ethnically diverse] settings will need to strengthen their practices of recognizing, reminiscing, and reminding, consciously preaching out of and into multiple communities of memory. They will honor and celebrate those communities while forging a third culture space, a new community of lively memory.⁵⁰

In a congregation that finds people of different ethnic groups present, there is the risk of focusing on ethnicity and not welcoming those who are of a different ethnic group than the dominant culture. There is also a different, yet equally dangerous, risk of simply ignoring the cultural identity of the group that is an ethnic minority, denying their identity and who God has uniquely made them to be. Lamb advocates for congregations to avoid these risks and instead forge a third culture space.

Lamb’s concept of third space reflects Sánchez’s intercultural level of engagement. In both of these cultural theories, different ethnic groups come together to form a new and unique community. Their cultural differences do not disappear, but they are able to collaborate and have a new shared story. As the introduction of this project states, a goal of this MAP is for those in the congregation to not hear “their story” or “my story,” but rather “our story” as a congregation. The sermon series sought to emphasize this shared story through common identity which was shared as baptized children of God—brothers and sisters in Christ—recognizing that baptism transcends culture and creates community

⁴⁹ Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” first appearing in *The New York Times*, 1903, public domain.

⁵⁰ Lamb, *Blessed and Beautiful*, 88.

In their work *Preaching to Every Pew*, Nieman and Rogers speak to how the oral histories of refugees can help bring about new and fresh insights into biblical texts. Viewing the Bible through the lens of these oral histories (and viewing oral histories through the lens of the Bible) can bring insights for the pastor, refugee, and congregation.

Knowing more about an ethnic group obviously gives substantive materials that permit an immediate connection with the lives of our hearers both before and during the sermon. Mentioning these insights is also an important way of validating ethnic groups that have often been ignored or undervalued.... Biblical texts begin to speak in vibrant new ways when the preacher is committed to a particular ethnic group.⁵¹

The oral histories of refugees from Nepal helped form themes that were addressed in light of God's Word. These "little stories" of refugee members were told through the "big story" of the Gospel work of salvation as revealed in Scripture.⁵² For instance, the account of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt in Matt. 2 took on a much deeper meaning in light of the displacement that our Nepali members experienced. The persecution and opportunity for witness that Paul and Silas had in Acts 16 were more deeply appreciated having heard the account of the opportunities for witness in the midst of persecution that our Nepali members shared.

If dialogical preaching can sometimes be risky in a congregation, the incorporation of the oral histories of refugees into that preaching may be even more unsafe. Lamb recognizes this, writing:

Stories that highlight memories of a minority will simply not immediately appeal to everyone.... They [preachers] must be willing to risk offering that material to their congregations, even when it will not yield the desired fruit of immediate resonance that a more readily accessible illustration will. This will develop the congregation's capacity for empathy, both within their walls and as they go out into the world.⁵³

As Lamb reminds, there is a risk that a preacher takes in highlighting the stories of an ethnic

⁵¹ Nieman and Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew*, 31.

⁵² See McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 115.

⁵³ Lamb, *Blessed and Beautiful*, 192.

minority in the context of a sermon. However, this risk is well worth taking and can bear fruit of empathy and intercultural collaboration both inside and outside congregational life.

Historical Context

There are a number of past developments that inform this project's topic of study and development. The history of mission work among ethnic minorities in the US for the LCMS in general, and for Ascension's congregation in particular, is important to note. This history gives context for the importance of working toward intercultural collaboration between different cultures for shared ministry—at both a synodical and congregational level.

From the time of its formation, the LCMS has prioritized mission and Christian witness, including evangelizing a diversity of cultures within the US. Paul Heerboth, LCMS missionary and former Director of Administration for the Board for Mission Services of the LCMS, emphasizes the role mission played in formation of the synod. He writes,

If we were to put the original colony of the Saxon Lutheran immigrants in Perry County, Missouri, out of our minds for a minute and consider the origin of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, there is one fact that would impress us, namely, that the LCMS was, in the words of the late Dr. Roy A. Suelflow, “basically, at its inception, a mission synod.”⁵⁴

In the early years of the LCMS, there was a zeal for mission and witness among different ethnic groups in the US.

For example, not long after the establishment of the LCMS in 1847, there was a proposal for mission work among Native Americans brought before the synod in 1849. Under the organization and leadership of pastors such as Konrad Wilhelm Loehe and August Craemer, an

⁵⁴ Paul Heerboth, “Faithful and Missional from the Beginning: One Hundred Years of LCMS Mission,” *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 1 (2016): 59.

outreach specifically to “heathen Indians and non-Christian settlers” was established.⁵⁵ Another example of early mission among different ethnic groups was a partnership with the Synodical Conference, a group of conservative Lutheran synods, including the LCMS, which began mission work among Black Americans. Remarkably, this was not long after the conclusion of the US Civil War.⁵⁶

These are just a few of many examples of the early mission work of the synod. This work was done domestically in the US, recognizing that great opportunity for outreach existed among different ethnic groups locally. In many respects, outreach to different ethnic groups in the US is nothing new for the LCMS. Seizing opportunities for outreach among new immigrants and refugees who are new to the US today is very much in line with the history of evangelism as a “missional synod.”

Yet, even as the synod has had the desire to be missional, the LCMS has a history of struggling with being intercultural. This historical context relates to the intercultural focus of this project. There has been an element of a one-way direction to evangelism, in the sense that the mission work of the synod has, in some instances, insisted on other ethnic groups adopting existing cultural practices. As Chapter Two of this project notes, this reflects a cross-cultural level of engagement rather than an intercultural one. An emblematic example of this is the insistence of Lutheran missionaries using the German language in their evangelism efforts. In the synod’s commendable outreach to Native Americans, sadly, very few Lutheran missionaries learned the Indian languages. In one report, there was a plea that someone be found who could at least speak English to assist with mission work among the Indians. “The Indians, understandably,

⁵⁵ David C. Ratke, *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 147.

⁵⁶ Heerboth, “Faithful and Missional from the Beginning,” 62.

had no appreciation of the missionary's German."⁵⁷ Larry Vogel references these same well-meaning early missional efforts of the LCMS, writing, "Whether it was Loehe's efforts with the Native Americans or the South, there were at least some efforts to reach beyond Germanic immigrants and horizontal catholicity was certainly not denied. But neither was it given much attention, either in catechesis for the laity or in doctrinal theology."⁵⁸ These early missional efforts illustrate the praiseworthy domestic missional history of the LCMS, but also recognize that these efforts were not always necessarily intercultural nor collaborative.

The local history of Ascension Lutheran Church is also important to reflect on since it is the specific ministry context for this project. Ascension was founded in 1936 with the help of Professor William Arndt of Concordia Seminary, who recognized the new development of a community which would come to be known as St. Louis Hills.⁵⁹ For most of Ascension's history, the congregation has been pastored by Caucasian ministers from Germanic backgrounds. The congregation has also been historically Caucasian as well, with many members who are college educated and work in professional careers. Throughout Ascension's history, the congregation has enthusiastically supported mission work, albeit typically international mission, through LCMS initiatives such as Together in Mission.

In 2011, the congregation began forming a partnership with Christian Friends of New Americans, a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS. This provided Ascension members with the opportunity to serve and work with immigrants, and primarily, refugees who were new to the US and had recently settled in St. Louis City. Through this work, new Americans, primarily from Nepal and Bhutan, began participating in worship and Bible class at Ascension.

⁵⁷ Heerboth, "Faithful and Missional from the Beginning," 62.

⁵⁸ Vogel, "Behind the Numbers," 367.

⁵⁹ See the work, *50 Year History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ascension*.

Over the past twelve years, our congregation has been blessed to celebrate baptisms and confirmations of numerous Nepali people who have come out of the darkness of Hinduism and Buddhism, and into the light of Christ. Currently five Nepali children attend our Lutheran elementary school, Word of Life, and hear the Gospel on a daily basis.

While Ascension gives thanks to God for the call of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of our Nepali members, challenges still remain. As this project's research problem states, as Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction. With the use of dialogical preaching in combination with the recorded oral histories of Ascension's Nepali refugee members, the Word of God shared in the preaching act can be a means by which the congregation develops into an increasingly intercultural community.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Following the Practical Theological Framework, the content in the earlier chapters of this Major Applied Project has helped to inform and shape this project's design and methodology. Chapter One introduced the project as it attended to self and world. It specifically examined the challenges and opportunities in the multicultural ministry context at Ascension Lutheran Church. Chapter One also identified this project's research problem, research question, and research purpose.¹ Chapter Two then explored this project in the context of recent research. Engaging first article knowledge, the chapter included a literature review of oral history as well as cultural studies, specifically, Sánchez's three levels of cultural engagement. Chapter Three attended to the theological perspective of the project. Seeking to give a biblical and theological foundation to this project, the chapter explored the horizontal dimension of Holy Baptism as well as the theological significance of the practice of dialogical preaching.

Informed by the content of this project's earlier chapters, Chapter Four now aims to focus on implementing godly guidance and leadership. That is, it seeks to explore how this project utilizes its research in order to help identify how the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serves the dialogical preaching task in the congregation. Research provides guidance in serving God and neighbor, and in the context of this particular

¹ Research problem: As Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

Research question: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?

Research purpose: incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.

project, this means providing pastoral leadership through incorporating selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of this project's research, including research design, methodological approach, research methodology, as well as assumptions and limitations connected to my role as researcher.

Research Design

This section of the project seeks to provide a blueprint for my study with the goal of describing the research in such a way that it could be duplicated. In what follows, each step of the research will be recounted in detail. This detailed description will aid in the presentation and evaluation of this research's data later given in Chapter Five of this project.

Population Sampling

This project's research design, including its intentional and purposeful population sampling, seeks to answer this project's research question: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation? To answer this question, I conducted research in the form of recording by video the oral histories of Ascension members who are key leaders among our congregation's Nepali refugee population. I then utilized these histories as a measurement of what content I should include in this project's dialogical sermon series. The oral histories directly informed the content of my sermons. This action research was qualitative in nature as it sought to give voice to a minority ethnic group at Ascension. This voice then helped to create the "dialog" in which the dialogical sermon series engaged.

Four research participants were identified from Ascension's Nepali members. While this

may admittedly be a smaller than typical population sampling for action research, this intentional sampling size best serves in answering the research question of this specific project. The size of the population sampling, as well as the specific individuals included in the sampling, was informed by two primary factors. One, the choice of sampling was guided by the culture with which this research interacts. Two, the sampling was shaped in a more pragmatic way that would best serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregational setting as guided by this project's research question. The following paragraphs provide greater detail as to both cultural and pragmatic factors that informed the composition and number of research participants for this project's research.

Cultural Factors for Population Sampling

A key factor in the research problem, question, and purpose of this project is culture. As such, cultural factors were a major consideration in determining the most beneficial population sampling for research. Specifically, cultural factors were taken into account when determining the size and composition of the population sampling. What follows is an examination of the two cultures with which this project interacts, different cultural norms within these two cultures that are pertinent to this project, and how the population sampling of this project can aim to best honor the Nepali culture in particular.

Two Cultures: Nepali and American

The dynamics of this project involve two cultures: Nepali and American.² Both of these cultures have been considered in designing the research, including the population sampling, for

² The term "American" when referring to culture can be ambiguous. For the purpose of discussing the cultural factors of this project's population sampling, American refers to the norms that are commonly held in the US. These cultural norms are often reflected in the members of Ascension who are second-generation US citizens or higher.

this project. Members of Ascension who are Nepali are engaged in this project's research through the recording of oral histories. These histories then shaped the content of a dialogical sermon series preached to the entire congregation at Ascension. Members of Ascension who are Americans are an important part of this project as well, serving as hearers of the dialogical sermon series with the hope that they will be shaped by the content of what is preached. Both the Nepali and American cultures were considered in the design of the research of this project with a recognition that both cultures are included in this project's purpose. The sharing and receiving of the oral history informed dialogical sermon series involving two different cultures is the means by which the project carries out an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.

Different Cultural Norms

There are different cultural norms, or standards, that shaped the population sampling of this research. One of these key factors is the contrast between the Nepali culture, which reflects primarily an ascribed status, and American culture, which is more familiar with an achieved status. The establishment of the terms "ascribed" and "achieved" status is attributed to anthropologist Ralph Linton. In his work *The Study of Man*, he defines these two types of status in the following way: "Ascribed statuses are those which are assigned to individuals without reference to their innate differences or abilities. They can be predicted and trained for from the moment of birth."³ In contrast, "The achieved statuses are, as a minimum, those requiring special qualities, although they are not necessarily limited to these. They are not assigned to individuals from birth but are left open to be filled through competition and individual effort."⁴ The way in

³ Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1936), 114.

⁴ Linton, *Study of Man*, 115.

which ascribed status in the Nepali culture is made manifest is in the form of the caste structure, which shaped the selection of those in this project's research sample.

The Nepali caste system is complex and is shaped by the ascribed status of family groups and individuals. Some castes are of higher status, such as the Brahmin class, while other castes are of lower status, like the Sudras caste.⁵ The Nepali members of Ascension are nearly entirely from the "Gurung" caste with a smaller number from the "Rai" caste. This made it important to select a population sample for research that reflected the castes of those in the congregation. What many American congregation members assume is the last name of a Nepali individual is actually their caste title.

Yet, even within individual castes there is also a strong sense of who is a "leader" within the caste. Interestingly, while an individual's caste is determined by an ascribed status, the leadership within a caste is typically determined by an achieved status. That is, qualities and achievements help to determine one's place within a caste. It was culturally important that those interviewed were viewed as key leaders among the Nepali people in our congregation, and even within their own caste. For this reason, the four participants of this project's research were intentionally chosen. These four participants are well respected within the two Nepali caste groups that worship at Ascension. If a larger population sampling was used, it could result in members of the Nepali community taking offense at a caste population at Ascension being over- or underrepresented. Offense could also be caused by the recording of leaders being shown alongside others who may be seen as not due the same level of esteem or honor as the leader within a caste. What follows is a brief biographical sketch of each of the four individuals

⁵ See Jon Burbank and Josie Elias, *Cultures of the Word: Nepal* (New York: Cavendish Square, 2014), 50–51.

interviewed for this project's research. Their descriptions focus on the ways in which they are recognized as leaders among the Nepali people at Ascension.

The four leaders who were interviewed are respected by both the Nepali community as well as the American community at Ascension. The following description highlights a number of key factors that has led to these individuals being viewed as leaders. Their real names are used in the brief biographical sketches that follow rather than simply a more confidential and ambiguous label for each person such as "participant 1." This is because it was necessary for the identities of the four individuals interviewed to be known by the congregation since their video recorded oral histories were shared with the congregation in the setting of public worship.

John Gurung is a student in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program at Concordia Seminary. He is in his final years of studies and is classified as a vicar by the seminary. John regularly serves as a worship leader reading the assigned Scripture readings in both Nepali and English. He also conducts other elements of the liturgy as appropriate and preaches in the Nepali language under the supervision of myself as his mentor. John has two sons, one of whom attends the parochial school in association with Ascension, Word of Life Lutheran School.

Meena Rai is a wife and mother of a son and daughter. Her oldest child attends Word of Life Lutheran School. Even though she is relatively young, Meena fulfills a matriarchal role of sorts among the handful of Nepali members at Ascension who are a part of the Rai caste. Meena's interview was meaningful to other members of the Rai caste as they saw her representing them and their collective story. Additionally, Meena has become instrumental in facilitating employment for many Nepali new Americans. She was the first of our Nepali members to work at a local food processing and packaging company and has recruited and

trained a significant number of Ascension's Nepali members at this company.

Shiva Gurung is the wife and mother of the first family to become members of Ascension. Shiva, her husband, and two children were the first Nepali individuals to be baptized and catechized. This took place approximately twelve years ago, before my installation as pastor of the congregation. Her immediate family has served as a nucleus of sorts for the Nepali community at Ascension as it grew. Membership now includes Shiva's widowed father as well as two brothers and their families. Shiva's daughter attends college part time and works full time. Her son is in grade seven at Word of Life and may attend Lutheran High School South.

Gagan Gurung is a leader both at Ascension and at Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA). For the past five years, Gagan has worked on a part-time basis at Ascension in a position called "Nepali Evangelist." As such, Gagan intentionally shares the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those in the non-Christian Nepali community in St. Louis. He does so effectively as someone who knows the culture and language of the Nepali people—many of whom are still Hindu. Gagan also assists with translating Bible studies and confirmation classes led by me from English into the Nepali language. CFNA has identified Gagan as a capable leader among the Nepali ethnic group and has contracted with him to work part time as their "Nepali Facilitator." In this role, Gagan connects other Nepali people to CFNA and the resources that it provides. He also facilitates communication between the organization and its active clients who are Nepali. Gagan has a son who attends Word of Life and a daughter who will begin attending our school's preschool in the fall.

Additionally, the four individuals interviewed are also among those Nepali people who have been at Ascension the longest time. As such, they are known, or are at least recognizable, by many of the congregation's American members. Since the four key leaders who were

interviewed each hold a high level of esteem within the Nepali community, they were best equipped to articulate the lived experiences of not only themselves as individuals, but also the Nepali people collectively. From an American individualistic perspective, it might seem as though these four leaders may be less equipped to represent the community as a whole since they are not the norm, but rather leaders. However, this highlights another difference between Nepali and Americans cultures.

American culture can be classified as individualist. In his text *Understanding the World's Cultures*, Craig Storti defines an individualist culture, writing, "People identify primarily with self, and the needs of the individual are satisfied before the needs of the group. In general, there is more psychological and emotional distance from others."⁶ Because America is an individualist culture, it would generally be difficult for Americans to see someone as speaking for them or for their culture.

Yet in the less individualistic, and more community- or collectivist-minded Nepali culture, the voices of these leaders are more readily seen as speaking for the community as a whole.⁷ Storti describes some of the key characteristics of "collectivist" communities in the following way: "One's identity is in large part a function of one's membership and role in a group.... Harmony and the interdependence of group members are stressed and valued." On a spectrum between individualist and collective community types, our Nepali worshipers reflect more collectivist qualities. As such, those Nepali individuals who were not interviewed for this study did not perceive themselves as being marginalized or voiceless. Instead, they heard the voice of their community echoed in the interviews conducted among this project's population sampling.

⁶ Storti, *Understanding the World's Cultures*, 28.

⁷ Storti, *Understanding the World's Cultures*, 28–29.

This project's research intends for the interviews of these four leaders to be seen by the Nepali community as representative of their collective voice.

Honoring the Nepali Culture

This project has endeavored to give serious consideration to the key cultural factors that contribute its research's population sampling and size. Such factors have included a recognition of the differences between Nepali and American culture. In particular, special attention has been given to the distinction between achieved and ascribed status and the roles these two types of status play in both the caste structure and leadership within those castes. This informed the research sampling by guiding both which caste groups should be included as well as which leaders within those castes should be interviewed. The contrast between individualistic and collectivist cultures has also been taken into account as the Nepali leaders interviewed speak, in many ways, for the collective group. Thus, the decision to have four individuals who are leaders in Ascension's Nepali community serve as the research sample was made to honor the Nepali culture and also best serve the research question and purpose of this project.

Pragmatic Factors for Population Sampling

Pragmatic factors strongly influenced limiting the number of Nepali people interviewed to a group of four. This small group of leaders served the dialogical preaching task of this project best in the context of Ascension's unique congregational setting.

A key consideration in this decision is that the recorded oral histories were edited and shown in the context of weekend worship services. Pragmatically, it would be difficult to include the content of the recorded oral histories in video form of more than four interviews before worship. A larger population sampling of more than four people would supply more data than

could be shown before the Invocation of the Divine Service. In a larger population sampling, those whose interviews would not be included in the video, simply due to video length, would likely feel left out or undervalued. A smaller population sampling of four individuals insured that all video interviews would be shown to the congregation pre-worship, and avoided any interviews being excluded from the video presentation.

Yet, these four oral history interviews still provided ample data for addressing this project's research question: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in the congregation? Again, limiting research to four participants best served the dialogical preaching task in our congregation.

Even though a primary qualification of research participants for this project was their position of leadership, their age and gender were also considered. Participants recruited were legal adults over the age of 18, and included two men and two women. I spoke to each potential participant individually to briefly explain what their interview would entail and asked if they would be open to participating in this project. Each participant was remarkably eager to participate and be interviewed. They expressed an appreciation of the opportunity to share their story and experiences as a refugee in the United States. They were also grateful that their pastor, and in turn the congregation at Ascension, had an interest in hearing their story. Only one participant was initially hesitant to be recorded on video due to her level of English. When assured that the videos would include closed captioning to provide a clearer understanding of her words, she was quite willing to participate.

After they agreed to participate, I met with each individual privately in my office at Ascension to further explain what my project was, how they would be involved, and the goals of my research in general terms. During my meeting with them, I requested informed consent for

one ninety-minute interview, prior to the actual interviews taking place. A copy of this informed consent form is in Appendix Six.

I also requested that those who were interviewed sign a “Deed of Gift.” In order to not infringe upon US copyright laws, oral history researcher Donald Ritchie advises researchers to secure a Deed of Gift, warning, “If the oral history project or any researcher publishes excerpts from their interviews beyond ‘fair use’—a relatively small number of words—without a deed of gift or contract that permits such use, then the interviewee could sue for copyright infringement.”⁸ A copy of the Deed of Gift is included in Appendix Six of this project.

Since all four research participants speak English as a second language, great care was taken in explaining the content of the informed consent form and Deed of Gift. The documents were read to participants aloud while participants also read written copies themselves. Pauses were taken throughout the reading of the documents so questions could be asked and answered. Only when all questions were answered and participants fully understood the content of the documents were they finally signed. The informed consent form and Deed of Gift form indicated that their video-recorded interviews will be kept indefinitely, and that recordings may be used at future events such as conferences.

The instrumentation of the interviews was done following the practical detailed guidelines for successfully recording oral history research as outlined by Donald A. Ritchie in his text, *Doing Oral History*. Ritchie advocates for oral histories to be recorded via video. He states, “Transcripts, audio recordings, and videos all impart the same basic information, but video provides an extra dimension to oral history interview. Transcripts reduce language to written symbols. Audio recordings convey tone, rhythm, volume, and speech patterns. But the facial

⁸ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 62.

expressions and body language captured by video reveal even more of an interviewee's personality."⁹ The video was recorded via a digital camera, and audio was captured by an external microphone.

Participants were asked to answer questions during an oral history interview where I was the interviewer and they were the interviewees. Questions were designed to encourage open-ended responses rather than simple "yes" or "no" answers. Follow-up questions were also used to provide an opportunity for elaboration and detailed responses. Following oral history practices, which include a "funnel" approach, initial questions were more broad in nature with later questions becoming more narrow and specific.¹⁰

Throughout the interviews, it was important for me to keep the research question before me. As the interviews took place, I made an effort to bring the conversation back to the research question of this project: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?

While the conversation that took place in the course of the interview was a factor in shaping what questions were asked, and what prompts were given, there were also a group of prepared questions that were intentionally asked of those being interviewed. These "core questions" were written down prior to the interview with the expectation that interviewees' answers to these particular questions would serve the task of this project and the overall goal of the research question. Core questions were meant to help the purpose of this project as well, which includes incorporating selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might

⁹ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 137.

¹⁰ See Paul Thompson, Bornat, and Abrams, *Voice of the Past*, 315–16.

inspire people of different cultures to work together. The core questions that were directed toward participants during the recording of their oral histories included the following. The questions may not have always been asked verbatim, that is, word for word, but the content of each question was asked in each interview.

Can you please share about how you and your family became refugees? The term “refugee” is one that is unfamiliar to many members of Ascension Lutheran. This question provided the opportunity for those in the congregation to not only learn what a refugee is, but also how a person becomes a refugee. The account of becoming a refugee aids in illustrating the experience of finding oneself unwelcome and without a home. Opportunity exists in a dialogical sermon to make connections to the home that our refugee members, and all congregants, have in our church family and in the Church at large.

Can you please tell me about what life was like for you in a refugee camp? Some members of Ascension have had personal conversations with our Nepali members where they have learned about life in a refugee camp, but most worshipers have not. This question could potentially be the most eye-opening for people in worship. As I already heard firsthand in conversation with our Nepali members, the descriptions of conditions in a refugee camp are a stark contrast to life in the US. I anticipated that hearing this account of refugee life directly from our Nepali members could help inspire compassion and understanding.

Additionally, this question led to also asking another question that became key: *Can you please tell me about times that you were persecuted because you were a Christian?* Oftentimes Christians in America hear accounts of the persecution of Christians secondhand, but Ascension members would have the opportunity to hear anew about suffering for the sake of Christ from people in their own congregation. These firsthand accounts were events of persecution not

primarily at the hand of the government, but endured from friends, family, and the community at large. Connections were able to be made in dialogical preaching that reflected on forms of persecution or marginalization for the sake of following Christ Jesus that other members of Ascension may encounter.

Can you please tell me about how you became a Christian? Every Christian can recount how they became a follower of Christ. Answering this question provided parallels between how God worked faith in the lives of our Nepali members and American members. In either case, becoming a Christian was ultimately by the work of the Holy Spirit through the call of the Gospel.¹¹ Even still, the ways in which the Gospel message was first shared with our Nepali members, especially in the context of the refugee camp, could potentially help members better appreciate the many and various ways the Holy Spirit brings the Gospel message to individuals.

What was it like to come to the United States as a refugee? Many times members of Ascension have a view of the immigrant and refugee experience that is limited to what is seen on television or online. Hearing about the joys and challenges of coming to the US as a refugee directly from another member of their own congregation I hoped would be powerful. It could lead to a deeper understanding of how congregations like Ascension, and service organizations such as CFNA, can work to aid new Americans in the best possible way to address the challenges that refugees themselves articulate.

How has your baptism shaped your relationship with fellow Christians? This question helps dialogical sermons get to the heart of the purpose of this project. Chapter Three of this project illustrates the essential horizontal dimension of baptism in a systematic way. This particular interview question shows the importance of the horizontal dimension of baptism in a

¹¹ *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 17.

practical way. The answers given to this question provide an opportunity for dialogical sermons to show how baptismal unity can foster “intercultural collaboration” where “people of different cultures work together in shared ministry.”

Can you please describe your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church? As the interviewer, it was most difficult for me to anticipate the answer of this particular question. Yet, the honest answer to this question by Ascension’s Nepali members is key for the rest of the congregation to hear. Their answers would provide a way for the dialogical sermons to note what can be celebrated in the relationships between Nepali members and the church at large. These answers also would highlight what challenges still remain as this project strives for an intercultural level of engagement as described in Chapter Two of this project. It is important for the church to not view Nepali members simply as the congregation’s diversity, but as just as much a part of our congregation, and the Church of Christ, as any other baptized child of God.

Again, the preceding questions are the core questions asked in content during each interview. Other questions were asked as well to help provide full and thick answers from those who were interviewed. A copy of the full oral histories’ written transcripts can be found in Appendix One of this project.

Implementation

It is important for research participants to have informed consent. I used consent documents approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Concordia Seminary. The informed consent process began with the recruitment and screening of my participants and continued through their involvement in research. As noted above, it included providing specific information about the study in a way that is understandable. After choosing to participate, I obtained a written voluntary agreement for the participants to enter the study. Participants were allowed to

withdraw at any time from the study.

I followed the confidentiality protocol outlined by Concordia's Seminary's IRB. As the researcher, I was the only one who had access to the data during the research and following the research. The only exception was a trusted member of the congregation, and Commissioned Minister in the LCMS, who assisted with the video editing process. Recordings of completed interviews were stored on a digital camera memory card, which was in a locked drawer in my home office.

The camera and microphone equipment for the interviews was set up in my office with the help of a volunteer from our congregation. Interviews then took place with only myself and the congregational volunteer running the audio and visual equipment present with the interviewees. Beyond overseeing equipment, the volunteer did not participate in the interviews.

I considered a number of different locations in Ascension's church facility to meet with the interviewees and conduct the oral history interviews. Initially, the conference room was considered. However, a challenge faced with that particular space, and many others at Ascension, is a lack of privacy. With rooms that have doors that do not lock and spaces that are used frequently, it would be difficult to conduct an uninterrupted, private, secure interview. Due to some of those interviewed working second and third shifts at their place of employment, a number of interviews were conducted during daytime hours. During the day, nearly every room in our church building is being used by church staff, congregation members, or Word of Life school students, making it difficult to find an appropriate unused space to conduct interviews.

Additionally, the frequent use of the conference room and other spaces would make it difficult, if not impossible, to leave the necessary recording equipment set up between interviews. Since interviews were not conducted back to back, but over the course of one week,

using a space that allowed for equipment to remain was essential. Having sound and video equipment remain stationary and unmoved ensured that the audio and visual of the interviews would remain consistent. This is important since the congregation would be viewing these oral history interviews before worship.

The space that provided the most privacy and that also best allowed for recording equipment to remain in place was my own personal office at Ascension. Initially I had hesitated to utilize my office for the interviews because I wanted to avoid any perceived dynamic of power from me as interviewer as we met in my office. However, each of the four Nepali individuals interviewed had been in my office before for informal conversation at various times. Nepali members are aware of my general “open door policy” and frequently stop by my office to chat, especially on school days when they drop off or pick up their child at Word of Life School, with which we share a campus. Those interviewed were familiar with the space and comfortable with me as both pastor and interviewer. None of those interviewed objected or voiced concerns about their interview being held in my office. In fact, conducting the interviews in my office ensured less of an implied potential power dynamic than if we had met in the unfamiliar conference room with authoritarian implications that might be perceived by its long imposing table and boardroom chairs.

After scheduling an interview time with each of the four Nepali participants, they came to my office for the interview. The interview was conducted securely behind a locked door to insure privacy and minimal distractions. I served as the interviewer, and the Nepali participants were the interviewees. The interviews were various lengths depending upon how much was contributed by those being interviewed. The interviews ranged in time from approximately forty minutes to ninety minutes. Transcriptions varied in length from 2,168 to 8,441 words.

Following the recording of interviews, transcriptions were made converting the audio of the interviews into written form. I used the transcription service OpenAI Whisper, which values privacy and guarantees a high level of security. In an article entitled, “OpenAI Whisper: The Future of Secure Information,” Torry Mastery of *DotCom Magazine* notes, “OpenAI Whisper ensures that all communication is encrypted end-to-end, meaning that only the intended recipient can access the information. Moreover, OpenAI Whisper does not store any data on its servers, ensuring that there is no risk of data breaches or hacking.”¹² Following the composition of these transcriptions, I looked them over for accuracy. To increase the reliability of the study, I compared the recordings with the transcription. I did not clean up the text of the transcription with the exception of correcting a small number of words that were wrongly transcribed due to the broken English spoken by those being interviewed.

I read over the data recording in the transcriptions three times to gain a sense of the whole. As I read, I wrote notes in the margins of the text. I then worked to classify the data into themes that emerged from the interviews. I determined themes, or meaning units, from each participant and worked to transform their responses into theological language. I then studied the themes for each participant and determined patterns and commonalities across all four participants. These themes and the accompanying theological language can be found in Chapter Five of this project.

After identifying themes across all four interviews, I was able to begin to answer my research question: “How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension’s refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?” Informed by the data collected from my interviews, I was able to pursue the purpose of this project: “Incorporate

¹² Torry Mastery, “OpenAI Whisper: The Future of Secure Communication,” *DotCom Magazine*, last modified April 22, 2024, <https://dotcommagazine.com/2023/04/openai-whisper-the-future-of-secure-communication>.

selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.” The data collected from my interviews informed the content of a series of three dialogical sermons. Chapter Five of this project will explore the discernment of theological themes in the interviews as well as the transformation of this content into the themes of the dialogical sermons that were preached. The sermon series spanned three weekends during the season of Epiphany. The title used for this series was “Savior of the Nations.” The sermons fit well with the universal nature of the Church that the season of Epiphany reflects.

Each week, the sermons were preceded by a presentation of a video clip that reflected the theme of the sermon. Three video clips were created, and each one featured all four participants speaking about a common theme that existed across all four oral history interviews. These videos also included closed captioning so content could be both heard and read. These clips were then shown following the Opening Hymn, but before the Invocation of the Divine Service. Each clip was six to seven minutes in length. The full transcripts of these video clips can be found in Appendix Two of this project. The video clips themselves can be accessed via a private YouTube channel, which can be opened via links in Appendix Seven of this project. A special order of service was also created to feature the oral history shaped theme of each sermon as well. A worship bulletin from this series can be found in Appendix Five of this project.

Methodological Approach

The Practical Theological Framework is the context in which this project’s methodology exists. The Practical Theological Framework consists of four areas: attending to self and world, engaging first article knowledge, discerning theological wisdom, and implementing godly guidance and leadership. These pillars of the theological framework also serve as the content of

the chapters in this project.

This project's research question is "How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?" This question directs this entire project and is also re-searchable using the proper methods. The best methodological approach to answer my research question is action research. Action research is a methodological approach to research that is used to identify problems and find solutions within an organization, such as our congregation at Ascension. This method of action research is a means by which to give voice to a minority ethnic group at Ascension. Action research gave me the opportunity to gather information, not just for the sake of research, but also with the goal of the research measuring what would be included in my dialogical sermon series as I incorporated selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration, as stated in this project's purpose.

Action research was also the best method because, as a parish pastor, I am part of the Ascension Lutheran congregational community that was studied in this project. In relationship to those I interviewed, I am their pastor and an "insider" who has established a deep level of trust with them. As Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson note in their work *The Action Research Dissertation*, "Action research is inquiry that is done by or with insiders of an organization or community, but never to or on them."¹³ As an insider, action research allowed me to study my own setting at Ascension, yet still be credible in my research. There are elements to this research that an outsider simply would not understand. Such insider factors include a relationship with new American members as well as an understanding of the current dynamics between our

¹³ Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015), 4.

refugee members and the rest of the congregation.

As I conducted my action research, my methodological approach included repeating the following steps: reflect, plan, act, observe, and reflect again. These steps enabled me to make continual progress in my project. In the initial step of reflection, I identified the research problem¹⁴ as well as its background. I also assessed the current situation and created a research question¹⁵ that would aid in accomplishing the purpose¹⁶ of this project. In the plan phase, I developed a plan to conduct action research in the form of recorded oral history interviews with Nepali refugee members of Ascension. During the act phase, I implemented my research conducting the oral history interviews with Nepali members of the congregation. In the observe stage, I collected data from the oral history interviews and transformed the video recording into a written transcription. In the reflect step, I analyzed the data identifying themes that existed in each interview and then made connections to themes that existed across all four interviews. I then made conclusions about the data and how it can be used to serve the dialogical preaching task in the congregation through this project's sermon series. Following the sermon series, I began to further reflect on future plans of action, which will be explored in Chapter Six of this project.

¹⁴ Research problem: As Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

¹⁵ Research question: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?

¹⁶ Research purpose: Incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.

Figure 5. The Reflect, Plan, Act, and Observe Process for Continual Progress.¹⁷



Research Methodology

As I carried out action research, I conducted qualitative research. This form of research offered rich in-depth insights from the individuals I interviewed. In their text *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod define qualitative research by two of its main characteristics, “All qualitative approaches have two things in common. First, they typically focus on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings—that is, in the ‘real world.’ And second, they involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena.”¹⁸ Qualitative research allowed me to look at the characteristics of each of the individuals I interviewed and gain insight specifically about their experience as

¹⁷ Danny Burns, “What Is Action Research?” ESRC Research Methods Festival, University of Bath, July 5–7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnnfWuud7J8>.

¹⁸ Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (New York: Pearson, 2018), 228.

Nepali refugees who now live in St. Louis and are members of Ascension Lutheran Church. This method of qualitative research directed the entire research methodology for this project as I focused on recording the oral histories of Nepali members and studied the data collected.

Qualitative research allowed me to gain in-depth insights from those I interviewed. As I analyzed the data from the oral history interviews, I classified data into patterns and themes. These themes were first identified in each individual's interview. Then, overarching themes were recognized that all participants had in common. These common themes were then reflected in the composition of the dialogical sermon series.¹⁹

The method, or type, of qualitative design that I followed is phenomenological. A phenomenological design seeks to understand my participants' perspective of their experience as Nepali refugees who formerly were Hindus, but are now Christians. More specifically, my phenomenological design aimed to understand the way our congregation's Nepali members view their relationship with Ascension. In his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Irving Seidman notes, "The [phenomenologically based interviewing] method combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology. In this approach, interviewers use primarily, but not exclusively, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions."²⁰ This project's oral history interviews sought to use open-ended questions to allow for rich responses from those interviewed to fully understand their viewpoint and history.

¹⁹ See Chapter Five of this project for an analysis of the theological themes found in the oral history interviews.

²⁰ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York: Teachers College, 2013), 14.

Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher

As I conducted my research, I made a methodological assumption that action research in the form of recorded oral histories would be sufficient for this project. Specifically, I assumed that the information gathered from collecting the oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees from Nepal would yield content that could be used to shape a series of dialogical sermons. I assumed that these oral histories would be adequate in content and length to serve as the measure of what would be included in my dialogical sermon series.

I assumed that the sample population for my research would be open to being interviewed by me and having their oral histories recorded on video. I also assumed that those interviewed would be willing to let portions of these interviews be shown to those gathered for worship at Ascension.

A contextual assumption I made was that Ascension's congregation would be open to viewing video clips of oral history following the Opening Hymn and before the Invocation in the Divine Service. I assumed that then connecting the content of the videos to the text of the sermon would serve as an act of intercultural collaboration that would inspire people of different cultures to work together.

I also made the theological assumption that the Word of God would not return empty but would work in the hearts and lives of those congregation members who participated in this study by hearing portions of the oral histories of our Nepali members and the dialogical sermons that were shaped by them.²¹ I assumed that action research, coupled with God's Word, would indeed help to effect change in our community at Ascension toward a more interculturally minded

²¹ Isa. 55:10–11, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

congregation.

In order to have a sharpened, narrow focus that addresses my research problem, there are limitations to my project. For instance, while there are a number of ethnic minorities at Ascension—including Hispanic, African American, and individuals who are biracial—the scope of this project is limited to our Nepali membership. This will help the congregation gain a deeper understanding of this particular ethnic group. One reason to focus specifically on our Nepalese population is because we have a Nepali member who is currently a student in Concordia Seminary’s Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program. It will be beneficial for the congregation to have an intercultural, collaborative engagement with this new church leader, and the ethnic group he will minister to, as he anticipates certification in the fall of 2024.

My research problem is also limited to a sharing of oral histories from Ascension’s Nepali members with Ascension’s American-born members. A more robust two-way sharing could have been possible as well, with Americans also sharing their oral histories with Nepali members. The reason for limiting this project to a one-way sharing from Nepali members to American members is that often Nepali members do not have as much of a “voice” at Ascension. Qualitative research helped in giving this ethnic group a voice to their experience through the telling of oral histories.

Many times, it is the American-born members who speak, sometimes even in a way that may be classified as paternalistic, while Nepali-born members listen. I assumed that the authoritative voice often heard in preaching is my own, and this project, specifically the dialogical preaching that will flow from my research, will give our Nepali members a voice as well in a faithful and appropriate way.

Another limitation of this project is that it highlights the oral histories of a specific ethnic

group as it shares the oral histories of four Nepali members. The content gleaned from this research may not be able to be easily generalized in other ministry contexts. Even those congregations with a minority membership may only find general commonalities, rather than the same specific experiences, when hearing the content of this project’s interviews.

I serve as pastor in relationship to the Nepali members of Ascension who served as research participants. I endeavored, however, to approach the interviews primarily as researcher rather than pastor. As such, I strove to be objective when conducting research without trying to guide or manipulate answers in a way that I may have thought would benefit the outcome of my research.

I am qualified to conduct interviews through my coursework in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Concordia Seminary, specifically through the training that the course PRA6004 “Research Methodology and Design” has provided. I also worked under the approval of the Internal Review Board of Concordia Seminary.

Implementation Timeline

The following is the timeline for the execution of my MAP:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| April 2023 | Submitted MAP Proposal and IRB paperwork |
| July 2023 | Received approval for MAP proposal from advisor, readers, and Director of Doctor of Ministry program |
| August 2023 | Wrote Chapter One of MAP and submitted to advisor |
| December 2023 | Conducted recording of oral histories from Nepali church members and analyzed data |
| January 2024 | Wrote Chapter Two of MAP and submitted to advisor Composed dialogical sermon series using data from oral history interviews as a measure of what to include |
| January–February 2024 | Preached dialogical sermon series |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| February 2024 | Wrote Chapter Three and submitted to advisor |
| April 2024 | Wrote Chapter Four and submitted to advisor |
| May 2024 | Wrote Chapter Five and submitted to advisor |
| June 2024 | Wrote Chapter Six and submitted to advisor |
| January 2025 | Shared initial draft of MAP with advisor |
| January 2025 | Began process of submitting MAP to readers |
| February 2025 | Submitted application for oral exam |

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA

Evaluating the data collected from the field research of this project's oral history interviews had a profound impact on me as a researcher. After investing many hours in analyzing the written transcripts of the video-recorded interviews, I began to view myself as a steward of the deeply heartfelt stories that were shared by the Nepali members I interviewed. Each person interviewed conveyed the ways in which God was at work in their lives through their experience as refugees as well as their leaving former Hindu beliefs to become a follower of Jesus Christ. It became my fervent prayer that I would faithfully utilize this information with which I was entrusted to shape a dialogical sermon series that would be shared with members of Ascension. To this end, throughout the data analysis process, I kept this project's research question before me: "How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?"

Chapter Five of this project endeavors to share a description of the steps taken to analyze the data collected in my oral history interviews. First, data was analyzed from the written transcripts of interviews conducted with four Nepali leaders at Ascension to determine meaning units within each interview.¹ These meaning units were then labeled with themes and statements that helped theologically transform the data.

Second, common meaning units with common themes were identified across all four interviews. Three sets of dichotomies made themselves manifest in the data across each interview, and these shared themes were then used as the measure of what data determined the content of the dialogical sermons.

¹ The full text of the oral history interviews can be found in Appendix One of this project.

Third, videos were produced which highlighted the three sets of dichotomies that the three dialogical sermons would focus on. The videos were composed of excerpts from each of the four interviews. These six- to seven-minute videos were shown to the congregation before the Invocation of the Divine Service.

Fourth, following further theological reflection on the themes identified in the interviews, Scripture readings were chosen and the dialogical sermon series was composed. Each sermon interacted with the oral history interviews and included direct quotes from the portions of the interviews highlighted in the video. These four steps in this project's data analysis will be fleshed out in greater detail under the following headings: Meaning Units from Transcripts, Common Themes and Dichotomy Sets, Content of Pre-Service Videos, and Interaction with Oral History Interview Data in the Dialogical Sermons.

Data Analyses

What follows is an account of this project's four-part data analysis as outlined above. Each step will be described and then data from the oral history interviews which directly shaped the composition of the dialogical sermon series will be shared.

Meaning Units from Transcripts

After completing the oral history interviews, the words of both the interviewer and interviewees were transcribed into written form. These transcriptions were then read multiple times in order to identify meaning units within each interview. These meaning units are important statements made by the individual being interviewed during the course of our conversation. These units were recorded onto a document word for word quoting the interviewee directly. Each meaning unit was labeled with a theme that helped to summarize what was being said.

These units with their accompanying theme were then theologically transformed. This theological transformation looked at the meaning units through the lens of Chapter Three of this project. Specifically, the discerning theological wisdom explored earlier in this project helped give theological language and meaning to the data collected in the oral history interviews. This theological transformation helped to begin shaping the content and structure of the dialogical sermon series. The meaning units, themes, and statements that transform this content into theological language can be found in Appendix Three of this project. They help to illustrate the research from which larger themes for the sermon series arise.

Common Themes and Dichotomy Sets

After identifying meaning units within the oral history interviews, labeling the units' themes, and transforming this content theologically, I then began to search for themes that existed across all four interviews which were conducted with Gagan Gurung, John Gurung, Shiva Gurung, and Meena Rai. Six broad themes were identified that exist across all interviews, and these informed and shaped the content of the sermon series. While there were nuanced narrow themes to these broad themes within each interview, these same six main themes were clearly present and became the basis for the series of dialogical sermons that were informed by the data collected. This overview of these particular themes based on lived experiences helps illustrate the ways in which the data from this project's oral history interviews informed the content of the sermon series. That is, the themes highlighted in this section comprise the larger body of knowledge from which the sermons draw, using specific experiences in an intentional way.

What follows will flesh out each of the six themes by categorizing meaning units from the interview data. Selected quotes from interviewees, reflected in the meaning units, will also be

highlighted to help illustrate the dynamics of the broad themes. Meaning units can be seen in their entirety in the appendix of this project. After examining the meaning units gleaned from the project's oral history interviews, the first broad theme identified was "refugee." Across all four interviews, there were meaning units that spoke of the experience of being a refugee in a number of different ways that would aid in informing the project's sermon series.

For instance, John alluded to the political nature of being a refugee and specifically spoke of living with no citizenship in a geopolitical country as he said, "In Nepal, we have no land, we have no citizenship, and we became a refugee, and we landed in eastern part of Nepal. And it was very broken, tough, and we are suffering. It was very painful." Having no official citizenship in his former home of Bhutan, or in a refugee camp in Nepali, was part of what contributed to John's suffering as a refugee who is unwanted by any government.

Another facet of the lived refugee experience that was reflected in the meaning units of the interviews is the difficulty of life in a refugee camp. Shiva shared concrete examples of the harsh living conditions she experienced in a refugee camp with meager resources. Shiva shared, "Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much." Meena's description of refugee life focused on the emotional struggle that accompanied life in a camp, including facing the reality that simply existing was a challenge. Meena said, "Yeah, basically in our past years when we are in our refugee camp, very, very hard time to settle our life. We struggled many times and very hard to live, you know, difficult to exist."

Other meaning units informed the broad category of refugee by expressing a lack of support and care from others. Gagan shared two statements that emphasized a sense of

abandonment and being alone. He said, “Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.” Gagan went on to say, “Nobody asks, ‘Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you.’ Nobody asks us. That’s the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.”

The second broad theme identified from interview meaning units was “citizenship.” Different aspects of citizenship were revealed in the interviews and helped to inform the dialogical sermon series. One feature of citizenship was the pain that came from a lack of belonging while living as a refugee. John described the void that existed without being the citizen of a nation as he said, “And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it’s very tough and not easy. There’s nothing to eat, and there’s no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too.” The realities of having no land and no citizenship are significant factors that make the refugee experience so difficult.

Other interviewees spoke of a longing to be citizens in a new land, specifically the United States. Some of those interviewed gave insight into the process of applying to come to the US under refugee status. Shiva expressed her happiness when she was informed that she would be relocated to the US, “But the one thing we’re happy because we’re going to America because we know more refugees like that, we’re thinking.” Meena shared similar thoughts about coming to America where she would later become a US citizen, “And here the United States of America gave us opportunity to come here and that’s a great opportunity, and we decide to come here.”

There were times in the oral history interviews where citizenship was also spoken of not only in terms of a political citizenship, but a deeper citizenship of heaven. Gagan shared that he heard the Gospel and was baptized while in a refugee camp in Nepal. He expressed his belief that

perhaps his refugee status was God’s plan for his salvation. Gagan shared the insight, “Maybe it’s God’s plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God’s plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I’m happy now.” Gagan conveyed the joy of his citizenship of heaven through Jesus Christ.

The third main theme derived from the oral history interview meaning units was “persecution.” Interviews brought to light two main sources of persecution endured by Nepali members for being Christian—one general and the other specific. General persecution was endured from the Nepali culture at large. Specific persecution came from family and friends who were close to our Nepali members.

General persecution was endured from the Nepali society at large, where oftentimes the lines between religion and culture are blurred. In a nation that is approximately 81 percent Hindu, 8 percent Buddhist, and less than 2 percent Christian,² many equate being Hindu with being Nepali and vice versa. As he spoke about culture and religion, Gagan shared concerning his own family’s identity before becoming a Christian, “We obey all the Hindu system. Our Gurung tribe it says we are the Buddhist, but we all connected with the Hindus, you know.” In this milieu, for an individual to become a baptized Christian is viewed by many as a betrayal to Nepali culture. Shiva shared in her interview the persecution that came from simply carrying a Christian Bible with her: “I don’t know about Bhutan, but Nepal. If I carry the Bible and some people like this and throw away and, you know, the people hate Jesus. Because they don’t like Jesus. Sometimes like, oh, yes, Jesus, you’re no, good.” Perhaps the primary cultural persecution for Christians comes in the form of how they are viewed in relationship to the caste system. In a

² “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nepal,” U.S. Department of State, www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/.

society where a person is typically born into a caste, becoming a Christian can transcend this ascribed status and be cause for being viewed as a low caste, or lower class, person. Meena shared her firsthand experience in her interview, “Yeah, some people they are Christian but my parents they don’t want to, you know, Christian is the lower caste, do not go and talk, do not eat with them. They say this one. They think that Christian people is a lower caste people.” Some among the Nepali people refuse to associate with Christians because they are considered lower caste people.

Those interviewed for this project also expressed a specific form of persecution that originated from family and friends. Gagan shared the words of a mother whose son he had been longtime friends with as they grew up together. Gagan reflected, “One day she told me that, ‘Gagan do not come anymore to my house. Do not work, do not eat, do not make friends with my son.’ She told me that. I never expect that. And I feel something inside, you know. Something painning inside.” John shared a similar experience with a woman he referred to as “auntie,” but who severed ties with him after he became a Christian. John remembers her insistence that he no longer come to her house:

I remember one moment that happens in my life, I used to call her my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in the kitchen and I ate food. But one day she heard about me that I became a Christian. And then when I was inside her kitchen, she beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me that, now you became a Christian. Now you’re not going to come inside my house because you’re not good for me and now you’re a Christian boy. So I don’t allow you to enter inside my house. And that’s very painful and it’s broken my heart.

Both Gagan and John emphasized the hurt that came with persecution from someone so close to them. Gagan acknowledged the “paining inside,” and John shared how “it’s broken my heart.”

After examining the meaning units that were present across all four interviews, another major theme that was identified was “freedom.” Those interviewed spoke of freedom in two

primary ways. One was freedom in terms of a civil freedom. This freedom of religion is afforded to citizens of the United States by virtue of the First Amendment. The second, and even greater, freedom those interviewed emphasized is spiritual freedom, in other words, the freedom of the Gospel.

Shiva spoke of the civil freedom she experienced in the US in contrast to the persecution she faced in Nepal. She shared that in Nepal she could not carry a Bible in a public place without being criticized. She felt as though she had to worship and engage in Bible study in secret. She contrasts this to her religious freedom in the US saying, “Now openly. Oh my Lord. And I’m thinking, Thank You, Jesus. You sending me my family here because Jesus call me. Come on. You are free here. Oh my God.” Meena shared that compared to Nepal, she felt that it is “easy” to be a Christian in America. She states, “And when I come to America I become free. And I come here in America my uncle and auntie they already Christian they are already member in Ascension Lutheran Church and they told me to go. Yeah, America is easy to be a Christian, it’s not easy in back country they don’t like to be.”

Those interviewed expressed a spiritual freedom that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The freedom from sin made possible by the Gospel is one that transcends nations and civil citizenship. John spoke of the freedom given in baptism, “So when I talk with other people also, like when they baptize, their sin will be washed away. And then they will be free from the bondage and then they will become the children of the God.” Gagan spoke about how the civil freedom and religious freedom can complement each other. He said, “I don’t have any pressure now. I’m free I can go to any country. Being a citizen of United States, I can go heaven citizen of His grace Jesus Christ.” Reflecting on how being a citizen of the US afforded him the opportunity to go anywhere, his freedom in the Gospel is the means by which he can go to

heaven itself.

Main theme number five that was identified from the meaning units in the project's oral history interviews is "stranger." Each of the people interviewed described the dynamics of newly arriving in the US. Through their stories, they described the experience of being a stranger in a new nation.

Gagan described the experience of being a stranger in terms of what was *not* in this new home as he said, "There is no our language, there is no our letter, there is no our food, there is no our system, there is no my size people." John similarly described being at a loss of where to go or even what to eat. He shared, "So when I first came to the United States in St. Louis, Missouri, when I landed in America, I was totally lost. I was totally, I don't know where I have to go. I have no ideas and I have no cars. I have no food in the room. And I was very kind of, I was suffering."

Shiva described the experience of being a stranger in terms of newness. Shiva shares how this newness was so challenging that initially she did not want to stay in the US, "Now, when I come to America, that time, our family so scared because new people, new language, new food, everything new. And I'm thinking, no, I don't want to stay here." Meena identified the language barrier as the most difficult part of being in a stranger in a new place, "I remember the hard part first language problem. Yeah I don't understand English I need to interpret a little bit I understand English. I don't know how to talk."

In each of the interviews, there is a sense of what is missing that caused these Nepali members to feel like strangers. This void includes other people with whom they have things in common and a place that can provide the safety and security of a home.

From a review of the meaning units in common across every interview conducted for this

project, another main theme that was identified is “family.” Those interviewed described different dynamics of family as related to Ascension Lutheran, the congregation of which they are members. Different facets related to their church as family include shared experiences, a love shown to one another, and the way in which baptism transforms both Nepali and Americans into children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Gagan shared that one way in which he knows he has a family at Ascension is that we have shared experiences. He highlighted Pastor Clark’s attendance at the ceremony where he was naturalized as a US citizen. Gagan said, “We have a family Ascension Church. So we can call them in our citizen time and Pastor Clark was there my citizenship time, you know.” Part of what a family does is share in both joys and sorrows of life. Shiva reflected this sentiment as she stated in her interview, “Before when I come here, we feeling so sad. Now I find like a good church, good family, good person, everything now going good.”

Interviewees shared that another aspect of the experience of family at Ascension is the ways in which they have been shown love by others, and have also shared love with others themselves. Meena spoke about how the pastor and congregation show support in times of need, describing this as having a “helping heart.” She shared, “Ascension Lutheran when we become a membership every parts everything help us. They pray, our pastor, you pray for us there’s a good you know every time, every difficult situation also you give hand. You know we help every time. Helping heart you know as very good.” Shiva explained that the love that has been shown to her has resulted in a love for her church. She said, “There’s a Christian like when I, like Ascension Church is my house like that. I feel this is my family. This is my house I’m thinking because I love this family and this church also.”

John Gurung identified baptism as the source of the family dynamics between Nepali and

American members of Ascension. He stated, “I already told you that, especially to close a relationship with Nepali people and Ascension people. So I think number one is we are the child of God. We are the children of the God and we are baptized and then we all became the children of God and we are not any discrimination.” In these words, John describes the horizontal dimension of baptism, which was explored in Chapter Three of this project. John believes that baptism makes people of all nations children of God, and as a result, erases any excuse for discrimination.

After identifying the six broad themes that existed across all four oral history interviews—refugee, citizen, persecution, freedom, stranger, and family—these themes were then used to form the content of this project’s series of three dialogical sermons. For each sermon, two of the broad themes were chosen to form a dichotomy. This served as the title and content for each of the sermons. The three sermons preached were titled, “Refugee and Citizen,” “Persecution and Freedom,” and “Stranger and Family.” Each set of two broad themes was explored in each sermon. In doing so, a recognition was made that while each dichotomy may seem opposed to each other, the individuals interviewed lived in the reality of both. In other words, those interviewed are not only refugees or only citizens, but in their life they have experienced both.

There was also a seventh broad theme that was woven throughout all three dialogical sermons preached in the series. This was the theme of “baptism.” For instance, Gagan spoke about the importance of a person’s connection to Jesus’ death and resurrection in baptism. He also emphasized how this baptismal connection to Christ shapes how a Christian lives with submission to their Savior.

When I became baptized and when the Christian peoples, when the peoples they do the baptism, you know, and they dedicate their life in Christ. They cannot lie after that. They cannot say after that, “I’m a Hindu.” They cannot say after that, “I am a Buddhist.” They cannot say, “I am not a Christian,” when they got the baptism they

totally submitted their life in Christ. Because, Jesus, He died for us. Jesus He born for us. Jesus He resurrected from the dead for us.

Similarly, Meena spoke about the life-changing dynamic of baptism that she experienced firsthand. She shared, “After baptism before life and after baptism is a very very different. And after baptism, after become I Christian my life is changed.”

Shiva expressed the joy that is found in celebrating baptisms. She reflects on the baptism of her own family members who were former Hindus, “Like how many people I can’t count, but five, I think five house Nepali people, mean my family, my three brother-in-law family, and my two sister-in-law family, and me, but big, big family. Then we together, baptism, at the Peace Center, we are so happy that time, because we find them Jesus.”

As stated earlier, John emphasized the horizontal nature of baptism and the way water and the Word transforms not only a person’s relationship with God as His dear child, but also one’s relationship with their fellow baptized. John asserts, “We are the children of the God and we are baptized and then we all became the children of God and we are not any discrimination.”

All four individuals interviewed made reference to their own baptism and the importance of baptism. Within the interviews were highlighted both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of baptism as explored in Chapter Three of this project. This allowed for sermons to not only be informed by the content of the oral histories, but also the discerning theological wisdom connected to the horizontal dimension of baptism that this project examines.

Content of Pre-Service Videos

In order for the congregation to hear and see the video recorded oral histories of four of our Nepali members, a series of three videos was produced. Each video highlighted one of the dichotomy sets derived from the broad themes that were found in the interviews. The sermon titles reflected these themes and the content that was compared and contrasted in the sermons.

The three titles were “Refugee and Citizen,” “Persecution and Freedom,” and “Stranger and Family.”

Each video was also structured with a question being asked at the opening of the video and then the recorded oral histories answering that question.

The video for the first sermon focused on the dichotomy of refugee and citizen, and provided responses that answered the question, “What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?” The video for the second sermon highlighted the dichotomy of persecution and freedom, and shared responses to the question, “Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?” The video for the third sermon emphasized the dichotomy of stranger and family, and highlighted answers to the question, “How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?”

These videos were produced with the help of one of our members at Ascension who is a professional church worker. The videos included visual and audio excerpts from the recorded interviews, and were also accompanied by closed-captioned subtitles. The videos were viewed in our church nave prior to the invocation in worship. This provided the opportunity for the congregation to view and hear the oral history interviews firsthand. The videos allowed our Nepali members to speak for themselves, rather than me simply quoting them. For the actual sermon, I incorporated quotes from our Nepali members that were earlier viewed by the congregation. This aided in the sermon being dialogical in nature as the content of my message was in conversation with Holy Scripture as well as the interviews of our Nepali members. What follows is a transcript of the text of each of the three videos shown prior to the Invocation at Ascension.³ Following the transcript for each sermon will be reasons for why this specific

³ Links to the video recordings of the oral history excerpts that were shown at Ascension can found in

content was chosen to be included in the pre-worship video clips and how these segments from the interviews helped to accomplish specific goals in the sermons.

Video 1: What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?

John: And with my family, in 1992, I came to Nepal, and they kicked us out from our country, Bhutan, and we landed in Nepal, in eastern part of Nepal. And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it's very tough and not easy. There's nothing to eat, and there's no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too. So at the time, I was like a very young guy, like five years old. At the age of five, I came to Nepal, and it was very tough.

So yeah, in this way, we came to Nepal, and in the beginning, I heard from my parents that a lot of people, are dying from sickness. They're suffering from different kinds of disease, and they died, a lot of people. They died from different kinds of sickness, and they're suffering from the sickness and some diseases. Yeah. So in this way, we landed in Nepal, and that's all.

Meena: In our country, we called that thatch and bamboo. Bamboo. And bed also bamboo. Before bamboo bed, we had mud. Mud make a mud bed and sleep over that. And sometimes when we sleep on the mud bed, sometimes the insect bite our ear. It's very hard. The house also sometimes too much rain, sometimes too much rain, it will drop the water and we make cover with plastic and we sleep like that. That's very hard.

Shiva: Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much. Like a new place, new, like everything new. But my life is, yeah, that time I'm younger, this time not bad, not good, but it's too hard.

Now I'm feeling it's too hard because we can go other, like, place, go to work and bring money. We have to stay the inside and what did the government give me, then we have to accept and eat instead.

Gagan: And my dad he I takes us in Nepal because the Bhutan politicians having a lot of issues. And he wants to save us, or he wants to save himself I don't know. So he took us in Nepal because we are Nepali. So then my dad he thought that Nepal is our place we can get that place to hide, you know, to stay. And then we he took us in Nepal and we being a refugee. We didn't know we being a refugee, you know.

And he took us in Nepal and he keep us in there. And I asked him, “Dad when we’re going back?” And he said, “After a few months.”

Slowly my dad he left us alone. He passed away in the refugee camp and we don’t know what we do. And my dad he passed away in Nepal refugee camp in Beldagi. And I don’t remember it might be like 1992, we became a refugee. In 1993 or 1994 he died. Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.

Nobody asks, “Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you.” Nobody asks us. That’s the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.

And then yeah as refugees, I spent like a 23 years a refugee. And I became like 35 something. Yeah my years and I totally grown up and I can decide what is good and what is bad, you know.

And slowly I changed my life and then in the refugee camp in Nepal I got the Jesus Christ. From before that I didn’t know about the Jesus Christ. I never heard from anyone.

Yeah in Nepal refugee camp, I got the Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe be I am still in a Hindus or Buddhist.

Maybe it’s God’s plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God’s plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I’m happy now.

These segments are drawn from interviews with all four of the Nepali leaders at Ascension. These excerpts which were highlighted on the pre-worship video do not include all the material in the interviews that pertained to the broad themes of “refugee” and “citizen.” Instead, this content is a representation of the oral interviews’ content connected to these themes. These video segments include an exemplification of each interviewee’s answer to the question asked by the interviewer, “What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?” The content of the answers given is arranged in an order that works to help worshipers at Ascension gain firsthand insight into different facets of the refugee experience such as a lack of citizenship, physical challenges, and emotional elements.

The video interviews are arranged in such a way that the congregation first hears John describe living as a refugee with “no citizenship.” He talks of being expelled from one country and unwanted by another until he “landed” in a refugee camp in Nepal. What follows are the words of Meena and Shiva, who both focus on the physical challenges of life as a refugee in a camp. They describe meager living conditions that include houses of thatch and bamboo along with beds made with mud and roofs constructed with plastic tarps. The final content comes from the interview with Gagan as he shares a personal experience that emphasizes the physical and emotional elements of being alone in a refugee camp. He describes the death of his father and the lack of physical support that followed with no one offering any kind of tangible help.

After all four interview segments focus on “refugee,” the later part of the final interview shifts to the broad theme of “citizen,” specifically, a spiritual or Christian citizenship. While in the first interview John spoke of a lack of citizenship, or being a non-citizen, Gagan focused on a shift from being an earthly refugee to a heavenly citizen. Gagan viewed his experience as a refugee from God’s perspective and concluded that his refugee experience afforded him the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The video interviews conclude with his faith-filled words, “Maybe it’s God’s plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. ... And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I’m happy now.”

Video 2: Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?

John: So after that, the neighbor, my community, they did not allow me to go inside their house. And I remember one moment that happens in my life, I used to call her my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in the kitchen and I ate food. But one day she heard about me that I became a Christian. And then when I was inside her kitchen, she beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me that, now you became a Christian. Now you’re not going to come inside my house because you’re not good for me and now you’re a Christian boy. So I don’t allow you to enter inside my house. And that’s very painful and it’s broken my heart. And then

I never go from next time.

Meena: Yeah, some people they are Christian but my parents they don't want to, you know, Christian is the lower caste, do not go and talk, do not eat with them. They say this one. They think that Christian people is a lower caste people. They say this one.

Shiva: I don't know about Bhutan, but Nepal. If I carry the Bible and some people like this and throw away and, you know, the people hate Jesus. Because they don't like Jesus. Sometimes like, oh, yes, Jesus, you're no, good. You're like that.

Yes. Jesus no good. Your God no good. You're Christian. If I the Hindu people eat like something, if I Christian people touching, oh, you no good. Why am I touch food? No, you go away. Don't come near and don't touch my food like this. Like go.

But in Nepal, like this. Like a thief. You know thief. Like stolen. Like this going. Oh, somebody look at me. Someone know can see me and he go and Christian family group like one group and they starting Bible and talks about Jesus and the finish time. And he running like this and go home. Like a secret. Yes, secret. Now openly. Oh my Lord. And I'm thinking, "Thank You, Jesus." You sending me my family here because Jesus call me. Come on. You are free here. Oh my God.

Gagan: Yeah this is my one best friend. Kind of I grown with him. And mostly I eat a food with him also. And I sleep with him. I go to school with him. I come back home with him. I go to a plane with him. One day I never expect that word. One day his mother said to me, "I'm sorry. He is not here." Now she already passed, you know. So, yeah I'm going to tell her, you know. And this time, uh, one day she told me that, "Gagan do not come anymore to my house. Do not work, do not eat, do not make friends with my son." She told me that. I never expect that. And I feel something inside, you know. Something paining inside. Why this mom telling this all the things on me? I'm a part of her son. I spent a lot of years with her son and in his home. I feel some things.

But, you know, God brings her in to our church. I didn't say any things to her on that time. I say, "Okay auntie, okay." But after a few months, a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me that, Gagan, "I'm sorry. I tell you the bad word on that time. I tell you don't come at my home. I did wrong. I'm sorry." She said that, and I say, "It's okay every people they do that those who don't understand about the Jesus' love. Every people they do that, it's normal auntie. It's okay." She became a good Christian. She died in America. She came in America and after that she died.

These segments from the oral history interviews were played during the pre-service video in preparation for the sermon titled "Persecution and Freedom." The content for this video came

from the responses in the interviews to the interviewer's question, "Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?" The interviewees' answers to this question are arranged in an intentional way as they moved worshipers from gaining a better understanding of the persecution that faith in Christ can bring, to the freedom the same faith in Jesus can give.

The video began with John and Meena both describing persecution they experienced from friends and family who were close to them. This personal persecution was illustrated by John sharing the account of his close "auntie" no longer wanting to associate with him. Meena shares that her own parents did not want her to become a Christian because followers of Christ are considered "lower caste people."

Shiva and Gagan's interviews were shown last as both of them shift from the theme of persecution to the theme of freedom. Shiva's interview includes a description beyond personal persecution, to a wider cultural persecution she felt in Nepal. She shares how she felt the need to hide her Bible in public and sneak "like a thief" at times to hide the fact that she was a Christian. Her interview then moves to the theme of freedom as she describes the cultural freedom she felt in the United States where she can live out her faith in Christ more publicly without oppression.

Similar to John, Gagan tells of persecution he endured at the hand of a friend's mother. This parent of a lifelong friend no longer permitted Gagan to see her son. Yet, Gagan continues this account and explains that God brought her to faith in Christ and she became a Christian and even worshiped in the same church as Gagan. In this retelling, Gagan describes not a cultural freedom, but a spiritual freedom. This woman was transformed from persecuting Gagan to seeking his forgiveness.

Video 3: How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?

John: So, baptism is not only the plain water, but baptism is that the Word of God is connected with the water. And then it's very important to do the baptism and to baptize in Christ.

Yeah, so when we baptize in Christ, I think Nepali people and the American people, so I already told you that we are the children of God and we became the children of God. So, there is no any discrimination, no any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the children of Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ. We all are in brother and sister in Christ. So, there is no more any denomination, no more any discrimination. So, we all are same in Christ and brother and sister in Christ when we baptize. And we became a child of God.

Yeah. Especially, the Ascension people are very helpful. They are very kind and they are honest. And they are like when someone is in need for physical help or in spiritual or mental help, they are ready to help spiritually or physically or mentally or sometimes economically also.

And also, another thing that Ascension Church is important is they are doing the blessing service. And also, the Nepali people, they are affiliated with them. And also, we are helping to read the Bible verses in Nepali. And these are the things that Ascension Lutheran Church provides us, that opportunity to serve the Lord even in different languages like Nepali, English. So, this could be very helpful for me and also the Nepali community. These are the things that could be very helpful for the Nepali community, the Nepali congregation, the Nepali people from the Ascension Lutheran Church.

Meena: Ascension Lutheran when we become a membership every parts everything help us. They pray, our pastor, you pray for us there's a good you know every time, every difficult situation also you give hand. You know we help every time. Helping heart you know as very good.

Shiva: Yes. Now I'm so happy, we have to best with my family, like a Christian family, like Ascension Church, the Ascension Church, too much helping me, really, really good.

Like Ascension Church is my house like that. I feel this is my family. This is my house I'm thinking because I love this family and this church also. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I like a sad, mad that I'm so many times helping me. Like when my husband like passed that time also helping so much. Everything, everything helping. I'm really sorry. Thank you so much. Ascension like a pastor, member, everyone. I say thank you. Thank you for helping.

Gagan: Yes, even sometimes I'm getting in a struggle, you know. What do I say, you know, how can I ask for help? You know? I didn't know. Nobody knows my

language. I cannot share my language. It happens in our life. You know when I came on we came on here with no friends. No one our skin color friends. No one knows our language friends on here, you know.

Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath. And what next we can think. Before that we didn't know about the Ascension Church. Through CFNA they join us on the Ascension Church.

Yeah, so yeah Ascension Church. They did a lot of help us. Because of this is our home. We got safe on here. They teach us. They give us. They lead us how to be safe in Christ. They lead us Ascension Church lead us to be a good spiritual life in Christ.

The third video featured segments that were representative of the oral history interviewees' responses to the question, "How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?" Their responses deal with the broad themes of "stranger" and "family." The video highlights the experience of not only being a stranger in a new country, but also the feeling of strangeness in the church when worshipping with those who are of a different culture. More importantly, however, these interview segments describe the feeling of family experienced within the church among brothers and sisters in Christ. This family's care for one another is expressed by those interviewed in terms of help, culturally sensitive worship, and a feeling of home.

The four interviews of Nepali leaders at Ascension are arranged with the bookends of both John and Gagan expressing a shift from being strangers in the culture, and even in the church, to finding a family within the people of God. John acknowledges that there are different languages spoken by those at Ascension, yet he emphasizes that there is no discrimination among brothers and sisters in Christ. He attributes this familial relationship to baptism. He shares, "We all are the same in Christ and brother and sister in Christ when we baptize." John expresses his appreciation that his church family gives thought to the Nepali people in worship through reading Bible

verses in the Nepali language and giving the Nepali people an opportunity to serve. All of this helps John see worship at Ascension as a “blessing service.” Likewise, Gagan shares the experience of being a stranger in the United States and feeling as though no one knew his language or shared his skin color. He then identifies Ascension as the place where he no longer felt like a stranger but found a home. Gagan describes the congregation as a “rest place” as well as a place of safety, teaching, and giving.

Between John and Gagan’s interview segments is content from Meena and Shiva’s interviews. Their responses are paired together as they both share the way in which “helping” characterizes Ascension. Meena describes the congregation as having a “healing heart.” Shiva speaks of the church as a Christian family that helps her when she is hurting.

The interview segments highlighted in the pre-worship videos combined the voices of John, Meena, Shiva, and Gagan to create a dialogical experience for the congregation as they heard different voices in dialog with common themes. These voices were then utilized to create a dialogical sermon series which interacted with the data in these videos. This interaction, which will be explored further in the next section, served the purpose of this project as it seeks to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.

Interaction with Oral History Interview Data in the Dialogical Sermons

In this section of the project, I will evaluate my own sermons and preaching.⁴ Specifically, this section seeks to demonstrate the project’s homiletical reasoning in regard to dialogical

⁴ On the importance of preacher’s evaluating one’s own work, see John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 133.

preaching. It will show the breadth of dialogical purposes by not only presenting what dialog was included from the oral history interviews, but also the intended ends, or goals, of the dialog. To do so, the following seeks to provide an overview of the sermon series that gives a broad view of the project's sermonic work. This section will then give a narrow focus as it gives an analysis of the dialogical nature of each of the three individual sermons within the series.

Overview of Project's Dialogical Sermon Series

It is helpful to briefly recap how the research data from the interviews was analyzed. First, the data was analyzed from the written transcriptions of the interviews to determine meaning units. This data was labeled with themes as well as statements that showed how the data was theologically transformed. Second, broad meaning units were identified across all four interviews. Six of these themes were then used as the measure of what data was included in the content of the dialogical sermons. These six themes were refugee, citizen, persecution, freedom, stranger, and family. These themes were well suited for being paired into dichotomies that could be compared and contrasted. These paired themes were then highlighted in both the pre-worship videos and series of sermons. Third, three videos were created to highlight these themes utilizing segments from the oral history interviews. The videos were produced to be viewed by the congregation before the Invocation of the Divine Service. In the final step, the data from the oral history interviews with four Nepali leaders at Ascension directly shaped the content of the sermon series and even informed the use of the compare and contrast approach of the series.

The data collected from the oral history interviews was shared in sermons through a compare and contrast approach. This method sought to do more than simply inform the hearers of similarities or differences between paired broad themes from the interviews. At a deeper level, this approach of comparing and contrasting used the information to make a difference in the lives

of the hearers. For instance, comparing and contrasting data from the interviews aided greatly in emphasizing the transformational nature, both temporal and spiritual, of the six broad themes. Comparing and contrasting was also an advantageous way to highlight the Law and Gospel nature of these themes.

The first sermon worked with the dichotomy of refugee and citizen. In the interviews, individuals expressed a transformation from a literal refugee in Nepali with no homeland to relocating to the United States and having a country in which they were able to become a citizen. This dichotomy contrast between refugee and citizen was also an apt way of describing the theological, or spiritual, transformation that took place in the lives of these Nepali leaders. Portions of the interviews described a refugee-like spiritual homelessness transformed into a citizenship of heaven.

The comparison and contrast of refugee and citizen highlighted a Law and Gospel theme that could be applied to all the hearers of the sermon. As the dialogical sermons were in conversation with Scripture, passages such as Heb. 11⁵ helped to highlight that all Christians are “strangers and exiles” on the earth. The sermon suggested that any Christian could perhaps be called a refugee in a fallen world that is not entirely home. This Law theme was coupled with the Gospel that Christians are not in fact homeless as it may appear in the world, but as Phil. 3 asserts, a Christian’s citizenship is in heaven.⁶ The themes of refugee and citizenship served as a foil to share Law and Gospel.

The second sermon in the series compared and contrasted the broad themes of persecution

⁵ Hebrews 11:13–16: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

⁶ Philippians 3:20: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

and freedom identified in the data collected through oral history interviews. Connections were made between the temporal Christian persecution experienced by Paul and Silas, the Saxon immigrants seeking religious freedom, and the Nepali interviewees. The sermon was then able to focus on the transformation that took place in the lives of Nepali members from religious persecution endured in Nepal to the freedom of religion enjoyed in the US. More importantly, the transformation to a spiritual freedom was emphasized by highlighting the freedom of the Gospel.

The comparison and contrast approach also worked well in order to accentuate the Law and Gospel content of the sermon. The message of the Law included the recognition that persecution is a reality for Christians in the fallen world. The object of our faith, Christ Jesus, was persecuted and finally killed, and followers of Jesus should not expect a dissimilar treatment in this world. Contrasted with this is the Gospel message of freedom. This freedom found in Jesus was highlighted in the sermon utilizing Scripture readings such as Matt. 5⁷ and John 8.⁸ No one is beyond the power of the freedom that the Gospel gives.

In the third sermon of the series, a comparison and contrast approach was taken using the broad themes of stranger and family as identified in the data from the project's oral history interviews. A temporal and spiritual transformation was noted among the Nepali leaders who were interviewed, including the feeling of stranger coming to the US with no friends and few people who spoke the same language as themselves. A transformation was highlighted as the interviewees found a family and home at Ascension. This paralleled the spiritual transformation of those interviewed. From being outside of the Church and strangers to both Christ and His

⁷ Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

⁸ John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

people, to being a part of God’s family and the family of the Church through baptism.

This comparison and contrast of stranger and family was also well suited for Law and Gospel proclamation. The Law recognized that even as the Church we sometimes discriminate based on a person’s ethnicity and culture, including members of Ascension. The Gospel highlighted the beautiful home for all people that God intends His Church to be. This universal nature of the Church was reflected by citing God’s first promise of a Savior for all people in Gen. 3,⁹ the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to the ethnically diverse group gathered on Pentecost,¹⁰ and the picture that Rev. 7¹¹ gives of heaven, which includes saints from all nations.

Each of the three sermons in the dialogical series had a specific focus and function. Analyzing the focus and function statements of each sermon aids in giving a sense of what each sermon, and more broadly, the whole series, hopes to accomplish.

Sermon 1: “Refugee and Citizen”

Focus: Through faith in Christ, God has spiritually transformed Ascension’s Nepali members from homeless refugees to citizens of heaven.

Function: That the hearers would see their own spiritual transformation into citizens of heaven through the lens of Nepali members’ lived experience.

Sermon 2: “Persecution and Freedom”

Focus: Through His Son, God sets free those who are suffering persecution for the sake of the Gospel.

Function: That the hearers, inspired by the accounts of persecution shared by Nepali members, would act upon the freedom they have to share the Gospel.

⁹ Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹⁰ Acts 2:5–6: “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.”

¹¹ Revelation 7:9–10: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Sermon 3: “Stranger and Family”

Focus: God desires that people of all nations would become His sons and daughters through Holy Baptism.

Function: That the hearers would extend love to one another regardless of ethnicity, as baptized brothers and sisters in Christ.

Each focus and function is in service to the overall purpose of this project to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. To this end, the focus and function of the entire sermon series, titled “Savior of the Nations,” could be stated as follows.

Focus: Jesus Christ is the Savior of all nations—including those who are Nepalese and American.

Function: That the hearers view Ascension Lutheran as their church family in which they are connected to one another by baptism and work together in shared ministry.

The opening paragraphs of the first sermon preached sought to give hearers insight into the goal of the sermon series.

In our sermon series over the next three weeks, we’ll be learning more about those, who for many of us, are our ethnic other. At Ascension we are blessed to be a multicultural congregation. On any given weekend you’ll find worshipping at Ascension people who are Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, and Asian.

But sometimes, especially when it comes to our members who are refugees from Nepal, we might be content to simply coexist side by side. Depending on which worship service time we attend, maybe we haven’t even met one of our Nepali worshipers. A goal of this sermon series is to simply listen and learn from our Nepali members. After all, as new Americans, Nepali people do a lot of listening and learning from Americans on a day-to-day basis.

So, it’s good to take time to learn about their experience as a refugee, and their journey of coming out of the darkness of Hinduism and Buddhism into the light of Christ. And through this listening, perhaps we’ll become more intercultural as a

congregation, worshiping together, working together, witnessing together, as the baptized brothers and sisters in Christ that we are.

This stated goal can be seen in each individual sermon as will be demonstrated in the following closer analysis of each individual sermon.

Analysis of the Dialogical Nature of Each Sermon

After providing an overview of the dialogical sermon series “Savior of the Nations” as a whole, it is also beneficial to examine each sermon individually. This section will explore the specific intentional purpose of each inclusion of dialog from the oral history interview data. Highlighting both the content and purpose of each section of dialog from Ascension’s Nepali leaders will aid in connecting how these oral history segments worked toward a greater good, and specifically, accomplishing the purpose of this project. In addition to the actual oral history dialog quoted, the following provides the basic information for each of the three sermons in the series, including the sermon title, biblical text upon which the sermon was based, and the Sunday of the Church Year.

The first sermon was preached January 20 and 21, 2024, which was the Third Sunday after the Epiphany. The sermon was titled “Refugee and Citizen.” The text for the sermon was Matt. 2:13–23.¹²

¹² Matthew 2:13–23:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,

In sermon number one, “Refugee and Citizen,” the first section of dialog from the oral history interviews served to give listeners the opportunity to explore what it is to be a refugee. For many in the congregation, what they know of the refugee experience is limited to what is on the news or social media. This dialog avoids any biases or distortions connected to the identity of refugees by giving a firsthand account of life in a refugee camp in Nepal. The dialog also serves as a way for American members of Ascension to get to know Nepali members and cultivate empathy for their refugee experience. Knowing those who are our ethnic “other” better is key in cultivating a congregation where intercultural collaboration can take place.

The first section of dialog also worked to connect Nepali members’ experience as refugees with Jesus’ experience as someone whose family was also forced to be displaced due to political reasons. The dialog helps to make Jesus’ experience as a “refugee” in Egypt more real for hearers as comparisons are made to Nepali members’ contemporary context. Additionally, it shows that Jesus is not unfamiliar with the plight of those who have lived the refugee experience themselves. Jesus endured displacement and being unwanted on our behalf. Thus, dialogical preaching in this first sermon is not only being shaped by conversations with Ascension’s Nepali members, but also informed by God’s Word in Scripture. The following is the first section of dialog from sermon one.

We heard a little about what life was like in a refugee camp earlier in the video interviews.

weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

We heard John talk about how people suffered from different kinds of sicknesses in the camp and with even some dying as a result.

From Meena we heard about what a house in a refugee camp looks like. Beds made of mud and roofs made of plastic tarps.

Shiva shared that the food they ate came from the government and other agencies, and that they felt completely dependent upon them.

And Gagan talked about a lack of support as he lived as a refugee for 23 years with no mom or dad, no strong house, no good food, no one who asked, “How can I help?”

The second instance of dialog utilizing data from the oral history interviews allowed for parallels to be made between the purposefulness of Jesus’ time in Egypt and Nepali members’ period in a refugee camp. God the Father preserved the life of His Son through His displacement in Egypt so that Jesus’ life would be preserved and He could continue His work for our salvation, including His death and resurrection. Similarly, Gagan’s words illustrate God working good out of his time in a refugee camp where he was able to hear the Gospel message. In the perhaps unexpected setting of a refugee camp, salvation came to Gagan and he became a citizen of heaven. Thus, this instance of dialog allows the voice of the “other” to give voice to the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hearers learned to hear the good news of salvation from the mouths of fellow members who are from a different culture. The following is the second section of dialog from sermon one.

In the Nepal refugee camp, I got Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe I would still be a Hindu or a Buddhist. Maybe it was God’s plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get Jesus Christ. It was God’s plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I’m happy now.

The second sermon in the “Savior of the Nations” sermon series was preached January 27 and 28 of 2024, which was the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. The title of the sermon was

“Persecution and Freedom” with Acts 16:16–34¹³ serving as the sermon’s text.

The first section of dialog in sermon number two recounts persecution that was endured by Meena and John as a result of being Christians in Nepal. While written histories of the persecution of Christians exist, listening to the firsthand accounts of persecution from a fellow church member likely has a more powerful impact on the hearers of the sermon. The hearers find themselves worshiping next to someone who has been subjugated by many in Nepali society, thought of as lower caste by family members, and even beaten by people who were former friends.

As this section of dialog recounts persecution, similarities can be discovered between others who have experienced persecution through the history of the Christian church in general, and the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in particular. Parallels were made in the sermon between the persecution of Ascension’s Nepali member, the imprisonment of Paul

¹³ Acts 16:16–34:

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

and Silas in the book of Acts, and the immigrants from Saxony who came to the US primarily to escape religious persecution and would eventually form the LCMS. Through this comparison, hearers could begin to discern that the experience of persecution among the Nepali people is much the same as what Christians have endured in different times and places.

Additionally, the dialog section also allowed for a comparison to the persecution and rejection that Christ endured for the sake of the world in His life and ultimately in His death. The sermon pointed out that followers of Christ—whether American or Nepali—should not be surprised by persecution today. The following is the first section of dialog in sermon one.

Meena shared this: “Christians are the lower caste, do not go with them, or talk with them. Do not eat with them. They think that Christian people are a lower caste people.”

John shared a personal story about how this persecution of Christians played out in his personal life. He tells this story: “I used to call one woman my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in her kitchen and I ate her food. But one day she heard about me, that I became a Christian. She beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me, now that you became a Christian, you’re not going to come inside my house, because you’re not good for me.” John said, “And that’s very painful and it’s broken my heart.”

The second section of dialog in sermon two pivots from the theme of persecution to that of freedom. It includes Gagan’s account of the mother of a lifelong friend who had initially forbid Gagan to see her son or come into their home after he had become a Christian. Gagan shares that God changed her heart so that she came to be a follower of Jesus Christ and even a member of their Christian church in Nepal. This woman who had once been a persecutor of Christians was now a sister in Christ. This dialog served to connect hearers to the account of the jailer in Acts 16. This jailer who had formerly oversaw Paul and Silas’s imprisonment was baptized along with his family and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This dialog section that expressed the transformation of someone from unbelief to faith also served to encourage hearers that no one is beyond the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

and the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Lord brought to faith the jailer and his family, as well as a woman who had rejected Gagan, so also God can bring to faith those in the lives of the hearers—even those who may be hostile to the Gospel. The following is the second section of dialog from sermon two.

But then Gagan shares this: “But, you know, God brings her in to our church. After a few months, a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me, Gagan, ‘I’m sorry. I told you don’t come at my home. I did wrong. I’m sorry.’ And I said to her, ‘It’s okay people do that who don’t understand about Jesus’ love. It’s okay.’ She became a good Christian.”

The third section of dialog in sermon number two urges hearers to not take their religious freedom, or more importantly their freedom from sin, for granted. In the dialog, Shiva recounted what it was like to be a Christian in Nepal. She felt the need to keep her faith a secret and even hide carrying a Bible in order to avoid persecution. Shiva also expressed the thanks and gratitude she now feels because she and her family can freely live out, and share, their Christian faith. This dialog helped hearers contrast Shiva’s experience with theirs. Likely having not experienced the necessity to hide their faith, hearers can come to appreciate and treasure their freedom to live for Christ and share Christ openly with others. Yet, at a deeper level, Shiva’s words also could be applied to the freedom that the Gospel itself gives, and this spiritual freedom is one that hearers of the sermon are blessed to have as well. What follows is dialog section three in sermon two.

Then, [back in Nepal] faith was like a secret, but now openly. I’m thinking, “Thank You, Jesus.” You sent my family here because Jesus called us. We are free here. Oh my God.

The third and final sermon of the series was called “Strangers and Family” and interacts with key parts from the Day of Pentecost account, especially Acts 2:1–11, 37–47.¹⁴ The sermon

¹⁴ Acts 2:1–11, 37–47:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of

was preached February 3 and 4, 2024, which was the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany. While all the sermons in the series included content about baptism, this sermon most clearly emphasized the horizontal nature of this sacrament in community with one another.

In the first section of dialog in sermon number three, John speaks of “discrimination.” His words help hearers remember and interact with earlier rhetorical units in the sermon where discrimination was mentioned. For instance, John’s words help to make connection to the quote from Martin Franzmann decrying discrimination in the Church. The dialog also links with the example of the atrocities that can be fueled by discrimination as illustrated in the Holocaust and its recent anniversary. John’s quote also points hearers to the example of the Day of Pentecost where God showed no discrimination as He poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit and promised salvation for those who are far off.

In this section of dialog, John not only spoke of discrimination in general, but the blessing

fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ...

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

of no discrimination in particular. John's words remind the hearers that God's work through Holy Baptism is a means by which discrimination is overcome in the Church. His words help to begin to introduce the idea of the horizontal nature of baptism that emphasizes the familial relationship baptism creates among Christians. This unit of dialog also works to help hearers begin to see that when an individual is baptized, it is not necessary, or even beneficial, to give up his or her cultural identity. Instead, whether Americans or Nepali people, Christians can have different cultures and still be brothers and sisters in Christ. The following is the first section of dialog in sermon three.

John Gurung talked about this gift of baptism for all people in his interview. He says: "When we were baptized in Christ ... we became the children of God. There is not any discrimination, not any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ."

The second section of dialog works to emphasize the dual nature of stranger and family in the title of the sermon. Gagan describes what it was like for him when he came to the United States to settle under refugee status. These are circumstances that few other hearers have experienced themselves. He speaks of having "no friends ... no one of our skin color. No one knows our language." Yet, in the midst of this strange new place, Gagan identifies Ascension as his "protect home." He also uses beautiful language to describe Ascension as "our resting place," a place for "breathing a long breath." Gagan's poetic and insightful words can help hearers see their church in a new and more profound way. Rather than simply a place to come for one hour a week, their church can be viewed as a home and resting place. Hearers can begin to consider the church as a place to take a deep breath in the midst of a fallen world where Christians may feel as though they are strangers as they live as God's baptized people.

We heard Gagan describe this place, Ascension, as home, a safe place in the midst of a sometimes difficult world. He says: "We came to the United States, with no friends.

No one of our skin color. No one knows our language. Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath."

The third section of dialog in sermon three enables the hearers to see a picture of what the post-Pentecost community of Christians looks like. In Acts 2, following baptism, the church is described as having all things in common and giving to those who had need. Meena's description of Ascension as having a "helping heart" could work to encourage hearers as they discover God has worked through them to be a reflection of the early Christian church described in Acts.

In the dialog from the oral history interviews, Shiva describes Ascension as her "house" and "home." She gives an example that makes the concept of family not merely theoretical, but concrete. Shiva shares that when her husband died leaving her a widow with two children in an unfamiliar place, Ascension acted like family to her. The inclusion of her example of help from Ascension sought to aid the hearers in seeing an instance of living out the horizontal dimension of baptism in a tangible way. What follows is the third section of dialog from sermon three.

In her interview, Meena described a type of giving as a "helping heart." She said this: "Ascension Lutheran, when we become members everyone helps us.... In every difficult situation you give a hand. A helping heart."

In Shiva's interview, she recalled the death of her husband Chatra, leaving her a single mother with two children. The most emotional part of these interviews was when Shiva shared how much Ascension's love and care during that devastating time meant to her. She said:

"Ascension Church is my house. My home. I feel this is my family. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I am sad. Like when my husband passed away. At that time also helping so much. Thank you so much. I say thank you. Thank you for helping."

Findings

Much was learned from both the bibliographic research and field research conducted for this project. The bibliographic research specifically includes the task of engaging in first article

knowledge in Chapter Two and discerning theological wisdom in Chapter Three. The field research was carried out in the form of oral history interviews among Ascension's Nepali members. Both the bibliographic and field research served the same purpose: to "incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together."¹⁵

Considering this purpose statement, the findings from my research can be best demonstrated by examining the text of this project's series of dialogical sermons, which is what this section of Chapter Five will aim to do. The four main areas of this project's bibliographic research will be highlighted with footnotes in the full text of the three dialogical sermons. The footnotes will indicate how the findings from the research informed the sermons. The four main areas of bibliographical research are the discipline of oral history, the discipline of cultural studies (specifically Sánchez's three levels of cultural engagement), the horizontal dimensions of Holy Baptism, and the practice of dialogical preaching.

These four areas of research can be viewed through the Practical Theological Framework. In this structure, the disciplines of oral history and cultural studies can both be classified as first article wisdom/knowledge. In Chapter Two, this project examined these disciplines in light of recent research and engaged in a literature review that informed research. Following the Practical Theological Framework, the horizontal dimension of baptism and the practice of dialogical preaching are discerning theological wisdom. Exploring the biblical and theological foundation of these areas in Chapter Three helped to provide faithful direction for this project.

Attending to these areas of first article knowledge as well as theological wisdom provided

¹⁵ Purpose statement of this Major Applied Project

godly guidance and leadership in my ministry setting. This godly guidance was utilized to help inspire people to pursue the purpose of this project. This godly guidance was communicated to the congregation through a series of dialogical sermons. These sermons, informed by the bibliographical research, sought to encourage people of different cultures to work together in shared ministry. This working together is in the context of Ascension’s ministry setting as illustrated in the sermons preached.

The content of the sermon series was not only informed by bibliographic research, but also by this project’s field research. The gathering of oral histories among Ascension’s refugee population served the dialogical preaching task in many essential ways.

An effective way to show how the findings of my research shaped godly guidance, and fulfilled the purpose of this project, is to examine the text of the sermons preached. What follows is the full text of the three sermons in the dialogical sermon series. In the text are footnotes that seek to illustrate how the findings of my *bibliographical* research influenced the content of the sermons. Portions of the sermons will be identified in the footnotes as being informed by one of the four areas explored in my bibliographical research: oral history, cultural studies, horizontal dimension of Holy Baptism, or the practice of dialogical preaching.

In addition to the footnotes, some of the text is printed in bold. The bold text seeks to show how my *field* research shared the content of the sermons. The bold text is primarily composed of the content from the oral history interviews with Ascension’s Nepali members.

Sermon 1: Refugee and Citizen

The day was March 13, 1999—all the way back in the last century—when my wife, Lisa, and I went on our very first date. What did we do on our first date? Dinner and a movie. Dinner went well, and then it was time for the movie. Now, this was back in the days before online ticket sales, so when we got to the theater to buy tickets, there was really only one movie that wasn’t sold out. It’s a film entitled, “The Other Sister.” The movie ended up being more emotional than

we had anticipated.¹⁶

The movie is about the Tate family: parents Radley and Elizabeth and their oldest daughter Heather. But the movie's main character is the *other* sister—Carla Tate. Carla is a young adult, who has mild mental disability. The story is about the struggle Carla and the family has in finding the right level of independence for Carla. It wasn't the most romantic movie for our first date, but it did provide some thought-provoking conversation for the ride home.

The title of this movie is telling—"The *Other* Sister." The other sister is the one who had a different level of cognitive ability from the rest of the family. That term "other" is sometimes used in our world today. Sometime negatively. But if I were defining what the term "other" means, it would simply be "someone who is different from me." Not better or worse, not superior or inferior. Just different.¹⁷

We each have those in our life we might consider the other.

Maybe it's someone who is our vocational other: working class or professional; white collar or blue collar or clerical collar. Not better or worse, just different.

Maybe it's our geographical other: someone from the inner-city, the rural country, other side of the world, or even from California.

Maybe it's our life circumstance other: someone who is unborn and still in the womb, an individual with a disability, or a person in hospice care.

Or maybe it's our ethnic other: someone who has a different skin color, different language, different culture than us.

God, the maker of heaven and earth, has not created everyone identical. Not everyone is like me—and that's a good thing! God's Word is clear, all people are included in God the Father's love for the whole world, the world that He sent His only Son to save.¹⁸ All are people included in Jesus' instruction to make disciples of all nations.¹⁹ All are people loved by Christ.²⁰

In our sermon series over the next three weeks, we'll be learning more about those, who for many of us, are our ethnic other. At Ascension, we are blessed to be a multicultural congregation. On any given weekend, you'll find worshipping at Ascension people who are Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, and Asian.

But sometimes, especially when it comes to our members who are refugees from Nepal, we

¹⁶ *The Other Sister*, 1999.

¹⁷ Cultural studies: The bibliographical research of Chapter Two of this project defines the term "other" using content from James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers in their work, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*. Their work has influenced the placement of the discussion of "other" at the beginning of this sermon.

¹⁸ See John 3:16.

¹⁹ See Matt. 28:18–20.

²⁰ Reference to part of Ascension Lutheran's Mission Statement, "Loved by Christ; sharing Christ's love."

might be content to simply coexist side by side.²¹ Depending on which worship service time we attend, maybe we haven't even met one of our Nepali worshipers. A goal of this sermon series is to simply listen and learn from our Nepali members. After all, as new Americans, Nepali people do a lot of listening and learning from Americans on a day-to-day basis.²²

So, it's good to take time to learn about their experience as a refugee, and their journey of coming out of the darkness of Hinduism and Buddhism into the light of Christ. And through this listening, perhaps we'll become more intercultural as a congregation, worshiping together, working together, witnessing together, as the baptized brothers and sisters in Christ that we are.²³

In each week of our three-week series, we'll highlight one question that was asked of four of our Nepali members as I recorded their oral histories. This week's question is, "What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?" There's much to be learned from their answers. But we also want to look at this topic through the lens of the Word of the Lord—Holy Scripture—the foundation of any sermon. And so we first focus on today's Gospel reading from Matthew 2.^{24,25}

We're probably familiar with the account of the wise men, the magi, visiting Jesus as a child, worshipping Him, and bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But we might not be as familiar with what happens next. That's what today's Gospel reading is about. After the wise men leave, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and has this message: "Rise, take the child and his mother [—take Jesus and Mary—], and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Matt. 2:13). And Joseph does. It seems that very night, under the cover of darkness, they leave for Egypt.

For political reasons, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph have to go to a foreign land. The ruler in Judea at the time, King Herod the Great, was a megalomaniac, a ruthless ruler. So, to protect himself from a new potential king, Herod cruelly orders that all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger be killed.

It's because of King Herod that Jesus and His family are displaced from their home. They leave

²¹ Cultural studies: The bibliographical research in Chapter Two explores the three levels of cultural engagement as defined by Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. He defines a multicultural congregation as one where different cultures are present, but simply coexist side by side. Here, the sermon identifies Ascension as primarily a "multicultural" congregation in its level of cultural engagement.

²² Dialogical preaching: The bibliographical research in Chapter Three of this project focuses on dialogical preaching. This part of the sermon was shaped by the work of Lisa Washington Lamb in her text, *Blessed and Beautiful*, as she discusses the importance of preacher and congregation as "listener."

²³ Horizontal dimension of baptism: The bibliographical research in Chapter Three looks at the ways in which baptism shapes the relationship between fellow baptized Christians. This part of the sermon begins to articulate the purpose of this project, to work toward becoming an intercultural congregation. The sermon depicts this intercultural nature as being rooted in congregation members' baptismal identity as brothers and sisters in Christ.

²⁴ The Holy Gospel for this sermon was from Matt 2:13–23.

²⁵ Dialogical preaching: The section of the sermon is informed by Chapter Three of this project where dialogical preaching is shown to be not only shaped by conversations with individuals in the congregation, but is also informed by God's Word in the Scriptures. This particular sermon connects the oral histories of refugees with the account of Matt. 2.

in the middle of the night with not much more than the clothes on their back, and travel 200 miles to Egypt. And how long are they supposed to stay in Egypt? The angel simply instructs Joseph, “remain there until I tell you.” Forced to flee their home for safety, it’s fair to say that Jesus and His family become refugees in Egypt.

There’s a painting by the British artist Edwin Long that I think helps depict the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt.²⁶ It shows Jesus, Mary, and Joseph arriving in Egypt. Around them are different sights and sounds and smells. People dressed different than them, speaking a different language than them, worshipping different gods than them. They are outsiders. For the people of Egypt, this family of three is their ethnic other.

Yet, even this displacement of Jesus and His family has a purpose. God had a purpose. Through Jesus’ going to Egypt, the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea would be fulfilled. That promise, “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1).

Another purpose of this flight to Egypt is that Jesus’ life be preserved. Preserved so He might give you life and salvation. You see, there would come a time when God the Father would allow His Son to die at the hands of a political leader, but it won’t be Herod the Great who will give the death sentence, it will be Pontius Pilate. And Jesus’ death some thirty years later, on that Good Friday, will be for the life of the world. Jesus will lay down His life for people of all nations, from Israel to Egypt, from the United States to Nepal. It may have been hard for Joseph to see at the time, but in fleeing to Egypt God had a purpose. A greater purpose than Joseph could have imagined.

We can hear echoes of Jesus’ experience as a refugee in the accounts of our Nepali members who were refugees. In their recorded oral histories, we heard that they too became refugees for political reasons. They were no longer welcome in their home. Another king, the King of Bhutan, established a policy called “One Country, One People,” and forced Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan to move into refugee camps, becoming people without a home.

We heard a little about what life was like in a refugee camp earlier in the video interviews.

We heard John talk about how people suffered from different kinds of sicknesses in the camp and with even some dying as a result.

From Meena we heard about what a house in a refugee camp looks like. Beds made of mud and roofs made of plastic tarps.

Shiva shared that the food they ate came from the government and other agencies, and that they felt completely dependent upon them.

And Gagan talked about a lack of support as he lived as a refugee for 23 years with no mom or dad, no strong house, no good food, no one who asked, “How can I help?”

²⁶ “The Flight into Egypt” by Edwin Long, Oil on Canvas, 1883.

And in each of these stories you can hear a longing for home. A place to be a citizen. A searching for purpose. Perhaps God has built that into our hearts—a longing for home.²⁷

After years of living as a refugee, eventually, our Nepali members came to the United States and settled here in St. Louis. Many have become naturalized citizens of the US and have finally found a home. One of the greatest joys I've had as a pastor is attending naturalization ceremonies with our Nepali members and celebrating with them. I remember attending John Gurung's ceremony. It included 51 new Americans from over 20 different countries. And these new Americans come from every walk of life—doctors, software engineers, teachers, factory workers, moms, and dads. The joy in the room at the Federal Courthouse downtown was palpable as “America the Beautiful” was sung, and the pledge of allegiance recited. The ceremony was the culmination of a long path to US citizenship that took years of waiting, months of studying for the civics test, and saving money to pay for all the fees associated with the process.

Perhaps the highpoint of the ceremony is when all the new Americans stand and repeat after the presiding judge the words of the Oath of Allegiance. The oath begins with these words:

I hereby declare that I absolutely and entirely renounce all allegiance to any foreign prince, state, or sovereignty of whom I have been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, that I will bear true allegiance to the same.²⁸

New citizens reciting a pledge of allegiance to their new home. Thanks be to God!

Yet, there's still a greater home that our Nepali members have, a citizenship in an even greater land. And ironically it's a home, a citizenship, that for some was first found in the refugee camp of all places. We heard about this in Gagan's interview. He says:

“In the Nepal refugee camp, I got Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe I would still be a Hindu or a Buddhist. Maybe it was God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get Jesus Christ. It was God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.”

God had a purpose for Jesus to go to Egypt. God had a purpose for Gagan to go to a refugee camp. It was there in that place with no home, no mom or dad, no strong house, no good food, that Gagan first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And through faith, this refugee received all the

²⁷ Oral history: This part of the sermon includes direct quotes from the oral history interviews among refugee members. The bibliographic research in Chapter Two of this project discusses the different “voices” of oral history. The inclusion of this content in the sermon illustrates the purposeful voice of oral history as stories from the interviews are purposefully used in the sermons and connected to God's Word.

²⁸ Paraphrase of the “Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America,” US Citizen and Immigration Services, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-j-chapter-2#:~:text=I%20hereby%20declare%2C%20on%20oath,the%20United%20States%20of%20America>.

riches of heaven—an eternal home, an eternal citizenship.²⁹

All our Nepali members have taken a pledge even greater than the one recited at their naturalization ceremony. A pledge connected to baptism where they renounced, not a foreign government or prince, but the prince of this fallen world, the devil, all his works and all his ways. When they were asked, “Do you desire to be baptized?” They answered, “Yes, I do” (*LSB*, 270). And with that, God worked through water and His Word to connect them to Jesus’ death and resurrection. To give forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. The very same gifts God has given you in your baptism.³⁰

The experience of being a refugee, an outsider, a stranger. It’s not unique to just Jesus or our members from Nepal. God’s people have always been refugees of sorts. Take Hebrews chapter 11 for instance. There’s a whole list of people who lived ... by faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the list goes on. Yet the list ends saying this: “All these acknowledged that they are strangers and exiles on the earth ... they desired a better country, a heavenly one.”³¹ The same is true for us strangers, exiles, pilgrims, refugees, pick your word—this fallen world is not quite home. We long for heaven. As Phil. 3 puts it, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”³² But until then, God has a purpose for you—even in this fallen world. To love your neighbor. To make disciples. To share Christ’s love.

As we talk about immigrants and refugees, for the United States, perhaps one of the most powerful symbols of welcome is the Statue of Liberty, located right next to Ellis Island where countless immigrants and refugees came to our shores—some of them our own ancestors. Inside the base of the Statue of Liberty, mounted to the wall on a bronze plaque, is a famous poem by Emma Lazarus. It concludes with these words:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”³³

It’s as if the Statue of Liberty herself is crying out with these words of welcome to a new home.

²⁹ Horizontal dimension of baptism: This analysis in the sermon of Gagan’s quotes from his oral history interview is informed by Chapter Three of this project where baptism is described as giving us citizenship into God’s kingdom. Implied in the sermon’s content are the words of Eph. 2:19, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens.”

³⁰ Horizontal dimension of baptism: Here, the sermon quotes the baptismal liturgy found in *Lutheran Service Book* (*LSB*). *LSB* also informed the bibliographical research of Chapter Three of this project. At this point, the sermon seeks to show how every Christian’s baptism bestows the same gifts in connection to God and the fellow baptized.

³¹ See Heb. 11:13–16.

³² See Phil. 3:20.

³³ Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” first appearing in *The New York Times*, 1903, public domain.

But in a much greater way, Jesus cries out to us:

Come to Me, all you who are weary and I will give you rest.
Come to Me, you huddled masses.
Come those who are considered the wretched refuse of the world.
Come those by nature sinful and unclean.
Come Nepali and American alike.
Come for I have died for you and I live for you.
Come you homeless, longing for an eternal home.
Come for I am the one who transforms from refugee to citizen—citizen of heaven.

AMEN.

Sermon 2: Persecution and Freedom

We begin today's sermon by talking about new Americans, but not Nepalese new Americans. No, we begin with the new Americans who established the church body that our congregation is a part of, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They came to the United States in the early 1800s not as refugees, but as immigrants—immigrants who chose to come to the US for a variety of reasons, but for one main reason in particular. There's an article that recently appeared in the periodical *Interest Time* that does a great job of articulating why these Lutherans made the move. It says:

Having traveled the distance from Saxony, Germany, to the pioneer country of the United States of America, Lutheran immigrants from the old country left behind everything they knew and stepped foot into the unknown. If Lutherans don't like change, certainly no one told these brave Europeans.

But they came from Germany and other areas of central and northern Europe for good reasons, and that can motivate even the most change-averse people. They came to escape poverty and high taxes for the hope of starting a new life in a new land.... The main reason, though, was much bigger: They were largely seeking religious freedom....

They wanted to keep safe the Christian Gospel and its truth among them; they wanted to be free to teach it to their children without fear of persecution. This was the chief reason that they gave at the time for the emigration; it was the official reason.³⁴

These new Americans may not be our forefathers and foremothers by blood for all of us—myself included. But they are our forefathers and mothers in the faith.³⁵ Immigrants who came to the US

³⁴ "We Stand on Broad Shoulders: Celebrating 175 Years of the LCMS," *Interest Time*, Issue 123, <https://interesttime.org/issues/>.

³⁵ Horizontal dimension of baptism: This part of the sermon draws upon the work of Robert Kolb in *Making*

to have the freedom to live out their faith, as they handed down the Gospel to their children, and handed off the Gospel to others.³⁶

We are blessed to live in a land with something like the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the US Constitution. And the very first line, of the very first amendment, states this: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”³⁷ The freedom of religion. The freedom of worship. The freedom to attend Bible study and carry our Bible out in public. The freedom to operate a Lutheran, Christian school. The freedom to live our faith in word and deed in our day-to-day life. The freedom to hand down the Gospel and hand off the Gospel. A freedom worth immigrating from Germany for. A freedom we too often take for granted.

In today’s reading from Acts 16,³⁸ we see that Paul and Silas did not enjoy this same level of religious freedom. In the years following Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, Christians were a minority in the Roman Empire. In fact, many wrongly confused Christians as just another sect of the Jewish religion.

In our reading, we find Paul and Silas in one of the leading Roman cities—the city of Philippi in what is now modern-day Greece. Earlier the city had been given special status by Emperor Octavius so its citizens were near equal to that of Rome. In this place, Roman culture and Roman pagan religions went hand in hand. To be Roman is to blur the lines between culture and religion.

What leads up to today’s reading is that Paul and Silas heal a servant girl who was demon possessed. You would think the girl’s owners would be happy for the girl, but they weren’t. She had been making money for them as a fortune teller of sorts, as the demon somehow spoke through her.

Upset that their money-making scheme is gone now that the girl is healed, they drag Paul and Silas in front of the magistrates accusing these foreign Jews of advocating customs that Romans can’t follow. A mob forms, their clothes are stripped off them, they’re beaten with rods, and chained up in prison. And keep in mind, Paul and Silas have done nothing wrong. All they did was give freedom to a girl.

There in the inner prison, their feet fastened in stocks, bruised and bloody, what do Paul and Silas do? They pray and sing hymns to God. And the other prisoners, and perhaps even the prison guards, they listen. Even when persecuted, Paul and Silas still praise God. They still trust

Disciples Baptizing: God’s Gift of New Life and Christian Witness, which was cited in the bibliographical research in Chapter Three. Here, the sermon emphasizes that the horizontal connection that baptism creates between Christians spans not only ethnic differences, but also time itself. Baptism connects us to the fellow baptized of all times and places.

³⁶ See Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 2–3.

³⁷ “The Bill of Rights: A Transcription,” National Archives, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript.

³⁸ Acts 16:16–34.

in the Lord. What a powerful witness!

I would guess that in refugee camps in Nepal, the level of religious freedom looks more like Roman Philippi, than American St. Louis. In Nepal, there's no Bill of Rights. No First Amendment guaranteeing the freedom of religion. Nepal is a country that is 81 percent Hindu, 8 percent Buddhist, and less than 2 percent Christian.³⁹ With such an overwhelming majority of Hindus, you can imagine that Nepali culture and Hinduism go hand in hand. To be Nepali is to blur the lines between culture and religion.⁴⁰

One area where this is seen is in the caste system. In countries like India and Nepal, society strictly follows the Hindu idea that there are dozens of different castes or levels in society. What caste a person is part of determines what they can and can't do and where they can or can't go.

For our Nepali members who became followers of Jesus in Nepal, becoming a Christian meant not only adopting new beliefs, but it also meant being viewed by Nepali Hindus as if they were betraying their culture. To become a Christian is to be treated as a lower caste or lower class—to become a Christian is to become an outcast. We heard this in Meena and John's video interviews earlier:

Meena shared this: “Christians are the lower caste, do not go with them, or talk with them. Do not eat with them. They think that Christian people are a lower caste people.”

John shared a personal story about how this persecution of Christians played out in his personal life. He tells this story: “I used to call one woman my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in her kitchen and I ate her food. But one day she heard about me, that I became a Christian. She beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me, now that you became a Christian, you're not going to come inside my house, because you're not good for me.” John said, “And that's very painful and it's broken my heart.”⁴¹

We hear these accounts and maybe we're surprised by them. Or maybe we're not so surprised. Maybe we should be more surprised by times when a Christian is *not* looked down upon because of his or her faith. After all, the one who is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, was looked down upon, unwelcome, an outcast, falsely accused of crimes, beaten, and finally crucified. If this is what happened to Jesus, why should His followers expect anything different? Yet, our Savior

³⁹ “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nepal,” US Department of State, www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/.

⁴⁰ Cultural studies: The bibliographic research of Chapter Two of this project shaped the sermon's point that both culture and religion go hand in hand. This was true in first-century Rome and remains true today, especially in nations like Nepal which have an overwhelming majority of citizens who follow a non-Christian religion. At this point, the sermon seeks to illustrate the tremendous pressure faced by Ascension's Nepali members as they became baptized Christians.

⁴¹ Oral history: Chapter Two of this project contains bibliographical research that utilizes oral history scholars such as Paul Thompson and his text, *The Voice of the Past*. Thompson recognizes the importance of the oral, rather than written, nature of oral histories. The personal and emotional recounting of John's rejection by a close community member is an example of a story that will likely not have parallels in written histories. This story of persecution from the lips of someone known at Ascension is powerful.

promises: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10).

Back to Paul and Silas in that prison in Philippi. As they’re singing hymns, there’s a great earthquake, the doors of prison are opened, and everyone’s chains fall off. In despair, the jailer is about to take his own life, but Paul lets him know that no one has left. The jailer falls down before Paul and Silas and pleads, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul simply answers him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” The Holy Spirit had called this jailer by the Gospel—it seems the Gospel in the form of hymns sung by two inmates. That very hour, Paul and Silas are taken by the jailer to his house, where he and his whole household are baptized—it seems servants and children included.

When you think about it, spiritually speaking, who were the ones who were really free in this account? I would suggest that even chained to a wall, Paul and Silas were free. The jailer was the one imprisoned by unbelief and fear. As Jesus says, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). The power of the Gospel.

This account reminds me of the story that Gagan told in his interview. The mother of a very close friend no longer welcomed him into their home, or allowed him to be friends with her son after Gagan became a Christian. It was heartbreaking for him.

But then Gagan shares this: “But, you know, God brings her into our church. After a few months, a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me, [Gagan,] ‘I’m sorry. I told you don’t come at my home. I did wrong. I’m sorry.’ And I said to her, ‘It’s okay people do that who don’t understand about Jesus’ love. It’s okay.’ She became a good Christian.”

Those who don’t understand Jesus’ love, they can mistreat those who do. Yet, no one is beyond the work of the Holy Spirit. No one is beyond the power of the Gospel. Not a Gentile jailer in Philippi, not a Hindu mother in a refugee camp, not a Muslim neighbor in St. Louis, not a social media influencer who is hostile to Christianity online, not someone who has strayed away from the church, not even people like you and me who are by nature sinful and unclean—no one is beyond the power of the Gospel. Understanding Jesus’ love shown in His teaching and healing, His dying and rising, His Word and Sacraments—it changes lives. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

We are truly blessed to live in a land with the freedom to live out our faith. A blessing cherished by those nineteenth-century Lutheran immigrants from Germany and also realized by our Nepali members today. **In her interview, Shiva talks about the fear that came from being a Christian in Nepal. She describes feeling like a thief; like she had to sneak around going to Bible study or worship while carrying a Bible. But she also said this is what she thinks now that she lives in the United States. She says:**

“Then, [back in Nepal] faith was like a secret, but now openly. I’m thinking, ‘Thank You,

Jesus.’ You sent my family here because Jesus called us. We are free here. Oh my God.’⁴²

Thanks be to God for this freedom! But yet, even here in America, even with the freedom of religion, there’s freedom and then there’s *freedom*.⁴³ There’s freedom of religion, but then there’s freedom in the Gospel. Not all in America are spiritually free. Some are still imprisoned in unbelief and no belief at all. Some don’t understand Jesus’ love. It’s all the more reason for us who do, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is worth sharing anywhere—anywhere people are not yet free, whether the jail cell, the refugee camp, or wherever God has placed you.

The Gospel is worth sharing no matter what the consequence. After all, ours is the kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel is worth sharing so others may believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. So that along with us, they may be set free by the Son. Free indeed.

AMEN.

Sermon 3: Strangers and Family

The hymn we just sang together is one of our favorites here at Ascension. The text of “Thy Strong Word” was written by Martin Franzmann, who taught at Concordia Seminary here in St. Louis. But I’d also like to share something else Franzmann wrote—a quote from him concerning the all-nations, universal nature of the Church, followers of Jesus Christ. He once wrote this:

We place no bars—racial, political, or social. The Lutheran Church is not a German church, an English church, or a Chinese church; it is neither a white man’s church nor a black man’s church; neither a rich man’s church nor a poor man’s church. The Gospel that we preach is a universal Gospel and the grace it offers is a universal grace.⁴⁴

⁴² Dialogical preaching: This section of the sermon engages in a “dialog” of sorts between the nineteenth-century German Lutherans who immigrated to the United States and Shiva, a Nepali refugee who came to the United States in the twenty-first century. The common link that is highlighted between them is an appreciation of religious freedom. This is brought to light through Shiva’s recorded oral history.

⁴³ For a similar comment, see William Willimon, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Acts* (Louisville: Westminster, 2010).

⁴⁴ Brinkley, *Thy Strong Word*, 15–16.

What I find striking is that Franzmann wrote these words back in 1947—even before an organized civil rights movement. That’s because Franzmann’s words reflect a timeless, biblical truth. The Gospel and the grace it offers is a universal grace meant for all people.⁴⁵

There’s no room for discrimination when it comes to the Church. Merriam-Webster defines discrimination as a “prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment.” There can be discrimination based upon all sorts of things. Skin color, wealth or poverty, whether someone is a cat person or a dog person, or who a person is rooting for in the Super Bowl. (Go Chiefs!)

But sometimes discrimination can lead to evil acts. This past week the world just marked the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The world remembered the 1.1 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis at Auschwitz alone. But the Church is called to be different—different from the rest of the world. The Church is called not to discriminate, but to welcome. Not to treat fellow Christians as strangers, but as family.⁴⁶

There was no discrimination on the Day of Pentecost. God makes no discrimination based on ethnicity or where people are from as He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

On that day, we learn that in Jerusalem there were worshipers of the God of Israel who were Jews and who were proselytes, in other words, ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles. They were from every nation under heaven. Cretans and Arabians—people from east to west, people from islands and the mainland. In fact, there are twelve diverse regions mentioned in our reading from Acts, representing all people.

And it’s to these people, from the four corners of the earth, that God chooses to reveal Himself. As tongues of fire rest upon the disciples, they speak in different languages so that all might understand. No one was left out; the Lord wants all to hear and understand the mighty works of God—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But God’s desire for the salvation of all people doesn’t begin at the Day of Pentecost. No, we see God’s love for all people from the beginning. In Gen. 3, God promises a Savior for Adam and Eve and their descendants—that includes all people. In Gen. 12, the Lord promises Abraham that all the families of the earth will be blessed through him—through the Savior that will come from his line.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, Jesus commissions His disciples to make disciples of all nations. And in Acts 1, Jesus instructs His followers to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Again and

⁴⁵ Cultural studies: This quote from Martin Franzmann echoes the bibliographic research in Chapter Two of this project concerning the catholic, or universal, nature of the church. The work of Larry Vogel and Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. deals with the catholicity of the church, emphasizing that the Christian church is not mono-cultural or mono-ethnic. The sermon uses the words of Franzmann to help illustrate this point.

⁴⁶ Horizontal dimension of baptism: Using the stark negative example of the Holocaust, the sermon calls upon Christians to be distinctly different. Utilizing findings in Chapter Three of the project’s bibliographical research, the horizontal relationship created in baptism is described as family-forming and overcoming discrimination over cultural differences.

again, we see the Lord’s desire that all people, from all places, be saved—no discrimination.

As we return our attention to the Day of Pentecost, Peter preaches a sermon. He concludes his sermon saying:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” And with that the people were “cut to the heart” and ask, “What shall we do?” And Peter answers, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:36–39).

Peter shares that repentance, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, baptism, is for them and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls. Even people living 2,000 years later in the year 2024. Even people living in St. Louis, Missouri. Even people from Nepal.

John Gurung talked about this gift of baptism for all people in his interview. He says: “When we were baptized in Christ ... we became the children of God. There is not any discrimination, not any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ.”

We are made brothers and sisters in Christ in baptism. Amen! Now that doesn’t mean we stop being Americans. That doesn’t mean we stop being Nepali. That doesn’t mean we need to check our culture at the double red doors when we come into Ascension’s building. No. But it does mean that baptism transcends culture. Whether American or Nepali. Whether baptized in this font or in a river in central Asia, we are still part of the same baptized family.⁴⁷

This is what we might call the horizontal dimension of baptism. So often we emphasize the vertical dimension of baptism. In other words, we stress that baptism changes our relationship with God. We are connected to Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are made a child of God. But we dare not forget the horizontal dimension of baptism. It changes our relationship with each other. We are connected to one another. We are made brothers and sisters in Christ.⁴⁸

We see this horizontal dimension of baptism in the baptismal service. I remember when I was first installed as pastor here at Ascension, there were already Nepali people who were waiting to be baptized. After instruction, we scheduled the baptism of twenty-one Nepali people of all ages,

⁴⁷ Cultural studies: The sermon here recognizes a truth that was shared by Lisa Washington Lamb in Chapter Three of this project. She advocates for thinking of the church as a “third space.” Rather than being separate ethnic groups within one congregation, or equally harmful, ignoring the identity of different ethnic groups, Lamb advocates for a third space where ethnic identities are recognized by a new community forged by a common faith. The sermon identified baptism as the means by which that community is formed.

⁴⁸ Horizontal dimension of baptism: Here the sermon begins to speak of the new family of faith formed in baptism. It will later quote the order of Holy Baptism from *Lutheran Service Book*. This resource was also cited in Chapter Three of this project as it illustrates the way in which we welcome the newly baptized as they are received in Jesus’ name as a brother or sister in Christ.

from toddlers to older adults. All of them baptized in this font. After these new Americans who were different from most in the congregation with a different skin color, different clothing, different language were baptized, I said these words from the hymnal:

In Holy Baptism God the Father has made you members of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs with us of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We receive you in Jesus' name as our brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

To which the mostly Caucasian congregation resounded in unison, "Amen. We welcome you in the name of the Lord" (*LSB*, 271).

One Church. Fellow heirs of heaven. Brothers and sisters in Christ. If in baptism we are made family, then this is our home. In our family's South City home in the Lindenwood Park Neighborhood, we have this simple sign hanging. Home sweet home. It's in a place where we can see it when we come through the front door. After a long day, no matter what challenges have come, no matter what frustrations, I can come home and take a nice deep breath. Home is a place of refuge and relief; safety and sanctuary. A place of love. Home sweet home.

We heard Gagan describe this place, Ascension, as home, a safe place in the midst of a sometimes difficult world. He says: "We came to the United States, with no friends. No one of our skin color. No one knows our language. Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath." In a new place full of challenges, frustrations, and so much that is unfamiliar, Ascension is a place to take a long breath. A place of refuge and relief; safety and sanctuary. A place of love. And our Father's house is a home not only for our Nepali members, but for each of us. Home sweet home.⁴⁹

Recognizing each other as family, how do we treat each other? We love one another. We care for one another. That's what family does, for better or for worse; in sickness and in health. We see this kind of love and care following the Day of Pentecost. Listen to the beautiful description of a faith family's love for one another that we heard in Acts 2:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44–47)

⁴⁹ Oral history: The powerful words of Gagan's interview cited in the sermon are an example of the transformative voice of oral histories that was highlighted in Chapter Two of this project. Gagan's words help to transform the way the hearers of the sermon view their church as they are invited to see it as a resting place. His words also help people see their church anew as a place for new Americans to find rest in the midst of a chaotic transition to a new country.

A love for others so great that you'd sell your personal items, do without, so that others' needs might be met? Sharing your resources for your neighbor's benefit? Showing hospitality and breaking bread with others in your home? That's typically not what the world does. Yet, the Church is called to be different from the rest of the world.

In her interview, Meena described a type of giving as a “helping heart.” She said this: “Ascension Lutheran, when we become members everyone helps us.... In every difficult situation you give a hand. A helping heart.”

In Shiva's interview, she recalled the death of her husband, Chatra, leaving her a single mother with two children. The most emotional part of these interviews was when Shiva shared how much Ascension's love and care during that devastating time meant to her. She said:

“Ascension Church is my house. My home. I feel this is my family. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I am sad. Like when my husband passed away. At that time also helping so much. Thank you so much. I say thank you. Thank you for helping.” As pastor, I too want to thank you. Thank you for helping. Thank you for loving. Thank you for caring.

Again, today's interview question was, “How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?” And the answers given by our Nepali members are moving. Ascension is a place where baptized brothers and sisters in Christ don't discriminate. A safe home to take a long breath. A place with helping hearts. A place of love and care—especially in times of need. Thanks be to God!

And yet, our congregation is not perfect. Your pastors are not perfect. Sometimes we still discriminate. But one day the Lord's Church will be perfect. Perfect at Christ's return. We get a glimpse of what that perfect Church will look like in heaven. From Rev. 7: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Until this perfection, may God grant that Ascension is a small reflection of heaven—at home with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Home sweet home.⁵⁰

AMEN.

⁵⁰ Cultural studies: The sermon concludes with an encouragement for Ascension to be a home for all people and a foretaste of heaven. This vision for Ascension is one that reflects what Sánchez would call “intercultural” and is articulated in the purpose of this project: “incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together.”

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY

Chapter Six of this project provides a summary of the research problem, research question, and the purpose of the research. The chapter will also describe how this research will be of value to my ministry setting. The ministry setting considered includes the narrow context of Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis, but this summary will also extend to the broader ministry setting in which Ascension exists. This project has wider potential value beyond our congregation, including the Missouri District of the LCMS, other LCMS congregations, and Christian Friends of New Americans. This summary will address ways in which this project has value in each of these areas of ministry that are significantly connected to Ascension. While this summary will not be an exhaustive description of how this project may be of value, it seeks to provide a starting point for exploring its possible use in different ministry settings.

Research Problem

This project's problem is one that is related specifically to the ministry setting at Ascension. This project's research problem arose in Ascension's setting which includes a minority group of members who are refugees from Nepal. In this context, this project's research problem is as follows: As Ascension Lutheran Church grows in ethnic diversity, much of the congregation has a shallow multicultural level of engagement, where different cultural groups are only aware of each other as they exist parallel to one another with limited interaction.

This research problem is also practical, rather than only conceptual. The practical nature of this problem shapes the way in which the problem is solved. "We solve a practical problem by doing something (or encouraging others to do something) to eliminate or at least mitigate the

condition creating these tangible costs.”¹ Addressing this practical problem is reflected in the research question and purpose of this project.

Research Question

This project’s research question relates directly to the research problem, and seeks to find a way to respond to the research problem. The research question was also posed in such a way that, if answered, will begin to solve the research problem. This project’s research question is as follows: How will the gathering of oral histories among Ascension’s refugee population serve the dialogical preaching task in our congregation?

Among the qualities of the research question, it is important that it articulates what this project seeks to measure. Accordingly, for its field research, the project analyzed the recorded oral histories of four key Nepali leaders in the congregation and then used that content as a measure that shaped the content and focus of the sermon series which was dialogical in nature. Thus the dialogical sermons in this project were a direct result of the field research.

The research question uses keywords that capture the essence of the project and guided many of the main areas of research explored in the earlier chapters of this project. Such key areas include “oral histories” and “dialogical preaching.” Not only were these topics key in the bibliographic research of this project, but also in its field research.

Research Purpose

Simply put, the purpose of this study is to answer the research question. The purpose of this project’s research is as follows: incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of members of

¹ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 50–51.

Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. Thus, the recorded oral histories, and their incorporation in a series of dialogical sermons, sought to enact intercultural collaboration in the act of preaching. As demonstrated in the bibliographical research of this project, dialogical preaching is by nature collaborative,² and incorporating voices from another culture makes this project's sermons distinctly interculturally collaborative. As highlighted in the introduction of this project, a healthy relationship between different cultures in a congregation is one that is "intercultural." The reason for this is that "intercultural thinking moves us more clearly to mutual interdependent engagement.... [In interculturality,] we have a model that, while taking into account particularity, works toward common values and community."³ It is this type of cultural collaboration that the purpose of this study has sought to reflect in the dialogical series of sermons preached at Ascension for this project.

Project's Value to Ministry Setting

Value at Ascension

This project was carried out first and foremost to benefit the congregation in which I serve as pastor. Again the purpose of this project's research is to incorporate a selection of recorded

² As noted in Chapter Three of this project, John S. McClure attests to the collaborative nature of dialogical preaching as he describes the preacher and hearers working together to inform the content of preaching. McClure even uses the term "collaborative" as another name for dialogical preaching, writing, "Collaborative preaching is a method that involves members of a congregation in sermon brainstorming. Preaching becomes a 'rhetoric of listening' through which the biblical interpretations and theological insights of the congregation find a voice in the pulpit."

See McClure, *Round-Table Pulpit*, 7.

Chapter Three of this project also notes that Shauna K. Hannan affirms the collaborative nature of dialogical preaching as she writes, "Directly to the point of this book, if ministry is understood to be collaborative, and preaching is ministry, then sermon preparation should be the work of the community together rather than the work of one person."

See Hannan, *Peoples' Sermon*, xv.

³ Sánchez, "Hispanic Is Not What You Think, 233.

oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons as an act of intercultural collaboration that might inspire people of different cultures to work together. What follows seeks to demonstrate ways in which the act of intercultural collaboration took place in the sermon series. The summary will then move toward the larger effect of the sermon's intercultural collaboration on the congregation following the series of sermons.

This summary will examine five ways that intercultural collaboration happened in the sermon series, and how this inspired Ascension members of different cultures to work together. The evidence shared will move from examples of intercultural collaboration in the sermons that are focused internally within the congregation, to examples of collaboration in the sermons that are focused more externally outside of the congregation. The following are the dialogical sermons' examples of intercultural collaboration that will be highlighted: inspiring baptism as a common value that forms community, inspiring empathy toward the hearers' ethnic "other," inspiring intercultural leadership within the congregation, inspiring evangelism and witness among those who are non-Christians from Nepal, inspiring welcome to other cultural groups at Ascension.

Inspiring Baptism as a Common Value That Forms Community

The first way intercultural collaboration took place within the sermons is in relationship to baptism. The dialog in the sermons from the oral history interviews attested to Holy Baptism as a common value that forms community. This community formation through baptism transcends hearers' ethnicity. For example, the sermon "Refugee and Citizen" compared the experience of taking the Oath of Allegiance to the United States as a new American, along with its renouncing allegiance to any foreign power, to renouncing the devil and affirming the desire to be baptized in the baptismal liturgy. The blessing of baptism is something that all baptized members of

Ascension hold in common as their stories of God's work in their lives intertwine.

A direct quote from the oral history interviews was cited in the sermon "Strangers and Family" as John Gurung reflected on the gift of baptism for all people. He says,

When we were baptized in Christ ... we became the children of God. There is not any discrimination, not any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever.

John's words help demonstrate that people of all cultures are made part of the same family in baptism. This does not mean that one who is baptized gives up his or her ethnic identity, but rather, baptism transcends culture.

This intercultural collaboration between the words of the Nepali leaders interviewed, the insights of the pastor, and the experience of the hearers, helped to deepen the congregation's understanding of the catholic, or universal, nature of baptism. The dialogical collaboration in the sermon series also encouraged hearers to consider not only the vertical relationship between the baptized and God in this sacrament, but also the relationship between the baptized and their fellow baptized. This view of all people at Ascension will aid in inspiring people of different cultures at Ascension to work together.

Inspiring Empathy toward the Hearers' Ethnic Other

A second way intercultural collaboration was achieved in this project's series of sermons is through inspiring empathy toward the hearers' ethnic other. Empathy builds on the foundational element of baptismal identity as described above. It is difficult to have empathy for another without knowing his or her story. This project's series of dialogical sermons was a means by which the accounts of Ascension's Nepali members could be shared in an intercultural, collaborative way. This was done as I interacted with their stories as pastor and hearers made

connections from the oral history interviews to Scripture and their own lives. For instance, in the sermon “Refugee and Citizen,” all four Nepali leaders who were interviewed recounted what life was like in a refugee camp before coming to the United States. The sermon pointed out that John talked about how people suffered from different kinds of sickness in the camp, with some even dying as a result. Meena gave a description of what a house in a refugee camp was like with a roof made of a plastic tarp and beds made of bug-infested mud. Shiva described the government-provided food that was eaten in the camp. Gagan talked about a lack of support or concern for him during his twenty-three years of living in a refugee camp. These experiences are ones that most hearers were unfamiliar with. However, sharing them helped to create empathy as well as connections to the biblical account of Jesus’ flight to Egypt. The collaborative nature of these accounts in the sermons also made connections that are common among all the hearers, including the longing for a home and a citizenship that can only be fulfilled in God’s promise of eternal life in His presence made possible through Jesus Christ.

Intercultural collaboration also took place in the sermon “Persecution and Freedom” as Nepali members spoke about the persecution they endured for the sake of being Christians. For example, Meena shared the experience of being considered a lower caste person and looked down on for becoming a follower of Jesus. John and Gagan both shared stories of no longer being welcomed in the homes of close friends after converting to Christianity from Hinduism. Additionally, Shiva, and others interviewed, shared the joy and relief that came from having the freedom to openly live as a Christian and share the Gospel. Shiva stated, “Then, [back in Nepal] faith was like a secret, but now openly. I’m thinking, ‘Thank You, Jesus! You sent my family here because Jesus called us. We are free here. Oh my God.’” This firsthand account of persecution and freedom aided hearers of the sermon series to grow in empathy for their ethnic

others.

As this project seeks to inspire people of different cultures to work together, the collaboration demonstrated in this project can work toward a future greater capacity for empathy toward the “other.” Like many congregations in the LCMS, a majority of Ascension’s members are Caucasian and have European backgrounds. Most families are at least third-generation US citizens. For them, a new American who came from Nepal as a refugee is different and their “other.” As such, our congregation has been content to be multicultural where different cultures simply exist side by side with little interaction.

This project’s intercultural collaboration, however, has helped to encourage a greater interaction between ethnic groups. This has been achieved through creating a means by which members can have a greater capacity for empathy with those who are different from themselves.

Bruce Hartung highlights the importance that empathy plays in creating community.

The capacity to empathically relate to the other is essential for inviting genuine community. This kind of relationship requires the laying aside of one’s agenda in order to learn about the other and understand the other in a deeper way. This requires being taught rather than teaching, seeking to understand rather than being understood, and being responsive to the other rather than expecting the other to respond to us.⁴

This project is valuable because its series of sermons created a way in which to learn about the other and understand them in a deeper way.

The format of a sermon series helped to reach many in the congregation in a highly impactful way over the course of three weekends. There are few, if any, other means of communication in the context of a congregation that would have helped foster understanding of our Nepali members so quickly and among so many. As Hartung points out, understanding is one

⁴ Bruce M. Hartung, *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 62.

of the first steps in creating community. Without an understanding of who one's other is, separation remains. With understanding, however, comes the opportunity to grow in intercultural community for the sake of one another and for the purpose of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ together and with one another.

Inspiring Intercultural Leadership within the Congregation

A third area of impact that the intercultural collaborative nature of the sermon series had on the congregation moves past empathy for the ethnic other to inspiring intercultural leadership within the congregation. It is one thing to see someone as a baptized brothers or sister in Christ, or to have empathy for them, but a deeper level of collaboration occurs when a church member is open to, or even seeks, intercultural leadership. For a congregation to be truly intercultural and work together in shared ministry, it is essential that the different cultures in our congregation are represented in Ascension's leadership. Featuring content from the oral histories of our Nepali members in a dialogical sermon series helped the congregation see and hear firsthand the value of having new Americans actively involved in leading the mission and ministry of Ascension.

For example, when worshipers heard the spiritual maturity of interviewees such as Gagan and John, they began to wonder if they may be well suited for leadership in the congregation. Examples include Gagan's reflection on his life in the sermon "Refugee and Citizen." He considers how God was at work even through the difficult experience of being a refugee to bring him to faith in Jesus Christ by hearing the Gospel in a camp. The sermon "Strangers and Family" highlights John's Lutheran theology of being connected to Christ in baptism, saying, "We are all in Christ."

Hearers also came to see the love that Ascension's Nepali members have for the congregation through the intercultural collaboration shared in the sermons. In the sermon

“Strangers and Family,” Shiva describes Ascension, sharing, “Ascension Church is my house. My home. I feel this is my family.” The collaborate nature of the sermon series helped to show that Ascension’s Nepali members are not merely a separate ethnic group at Ascension, they *are* Ascension.

The insights shared about Ascension, and their relationship with the congregation, by all four of those interviewed may cause others in the congregation to see the value of their perspective being shared as members of our Ministry Council. The view of the value of Word of Life Lutheran School from our Nepali members could help the congregation see that perhaps some of these Nepali refugees would bring a fresh perspective in the school board as our school ministry seeks to impact a greater number of ethnic groups with Christian education.

Perhaps the most impactful way that this project has helped encourage intercultural leadership at Ascension is that it has aided members in knowing John Gurung better. John is one of the key Nepali leaders who were interviewed for this project. He is also a student in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) Program at Concordia Seminary. This is a specialized program that equips men for service as an ordained pastor in the LCMS as they minister primarily to those in their own ethnic community. As John continues his studies and nears certification as a pastor, it will be important for Ascension to support him in various ways, and perhaps even extend him a call to serve as a pastor at Ascension. This project provided a valuable opportunity for the congregation to hear directly from John concerning his coming to faith in Jesus Christ, persecution for the sake of Christ, theological education, love of our congregation and school, and sincere desire to serve the Lord and His Church. John’s words from his oral history interview that were shared in this project will help the congregation better know John and grow in their support of his future ministry.

Inspiring Evangelism and Witness among Those Who Are Non-Christians from Nepal

The fourth way the intercultural collaboration in this project's sermon series had an impact moves beyond the congregation. This project has great value in raising awareness in the congregation concerning the need for evangelism and witness in the non-Christian Nepali community in St. Louis. One of the sermons in this project's sermon series was titled "Persecution and Freedom." The homily highlighted the oral history interviews of our Nepali members as they spoke of various forms of persecution for the sake of Christ. This persecution was at the hand of other Nepalese individuals who were non-Christians, and primarily Hindu or Buddhist. John shared a moving account of how a woman whom he once called his "auntie" beat him with a bamboo stick and ordered him to no longer come into her home simply because he had become a Christian. The mission opportunity to witness to Nepali individuals like this woman is not limited to Nepal, but also exists in the City of St. Louis where Ascension is located.

The sermons had value in illustrating that those non-Christian Nepali people are not beyond the call of the Gospel or the work of the Holy Spirit. A number of illustrations were incorporated into the sermon where Nepali people who once persecuted Christians were later baptized and came to faith in Jesus Christ. For instance, in the sermon "Persecution and Freedom," Gagan shares the following about a woman who had barred him from her home because he became a Christian:

But, you know, God brings her into our church. After a few months, a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me, "Gagan, I'm sorry. I told you don't come eat at my home. I did wrong. I'm sorry." And I said to her, "It's okay. People do that who don't understand about Jesus' love. It's okay." She became a good Christian.

Heartened by these accounts, Ascension is more eager to equip and encourage John Gurung to continue his education to serve as a Nepali Lutheran pastor. Not only will he have opportunity to

make stronger disciples among existing Nepali Christians, but he will also have opportunity to make more disciples of Jesus Christ among those in the local Nepali community.

Ascension members also see that it's not only John Gurung who can share Christ among the Nepali people, but they can too, regardless of their ethnic background. For instance, this project has raised an awareness among all members of Ascension concerning the mission and ministry of Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA). Through a wide variety of service opportunities, member can play a key role in sharing the Gospel with non-Christians in the Nepali community and other ethnic groups in St. Louis as well.

Inspiring Welcome to Other Cultural Groups at Ascension

Fifth, the intercultural collaboration of this project helped to illuminate an external witness opportunity in our community, inspiring the congregation to welcome other cultural groups at Ascension. The stories of our Nepali members, especially connected to the horizontal baptismal unity that exists between them and the rest of the congregation, helped to show that ministry with those of a different ethnic group is possible. The sermon "Strangers and Family" highlights the answers of Nepali members to the following question as part of the oral history research, "How do you view your relationship with Ascension?" The sermon includes paraphrases of the Nepali leaders' answers, including the following: Ascension is a place where baptized brothers and sisters in Christ don't discriminate. A safe home to take a long breath. A place with helping hearts. A place of love and care—especially in times of need.

Not only is outreach and welcome to different ethnic groups possible, but it is also what we are called to do as Christ's Church. In his text, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, Mark DeYmaz writes, "Pursuit of the multi-ethnic local church is in my view, not optional. It is

biblically mandated for all who would aspire to lead local congregations of faith.”⁵ The sermon series helped to highlight this mandate in Scripture in such places like Matt. 28:18–20.⁶ Having seen God’s work in baptizing and making disciples among the Nepali people at Ascension, there is an openness to seeking to reach other ethnic groups. For example, our congregation has two Spanish-speaking elders, and a retired pastor who was a missionary in Venezuela. We have started to discuss the possibility of beginning a ministry to, and with, people who are Hispanic in St. Louis.

Value in the Missouri District

Ascension’s ministry is located within the context of the Missouri District of the LCMS. This project has value for the district in which our congregation exists. One way in which this project has value is through it potentially being shared at the district’s annual conference. As a district with nearly 300 congregations, the Missouri District’s church workers conference is a large event and provides opportunity for large-group and small-group presentations.

A presentation on this project would provide occasion to highlight the value of recording oral histories in the congregation, the practice of dialogical preaching, and working toward multicultural and even intercultural congregations. A presentation on this project would ideally not be led by only myself, but also by at least one of the Nepali members highlighted in the project’s videos. Perhaps the greatest value of a presentation of this nature would be to highlight that Nepali Lutheran Christians are a valuable part of the Missouri District. To again quote the

⁵ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), xxix.

⁶ Matthew 28:18–20: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Latina theologian Carmen Nanko-Fernández, “We are not your diversity, we are the church!”⁷ In other words, these baptized and catechized Nepali brothers and sisters in Christ are the Missouri District.

A presentation at a District conference would give the opportunity to highlight what the Lord is doing in Ascension’s context among the Nepali population of St. Louis. Ideally, this would serve as a springboard for participants from other congregations to consider what ethnic groups exist in their local context. This project would hopefully encourage churches by showing that not only can the Lord work through an LCMS congregation to reach different ethnic groups, but it’s also what He has called us to do as Christian people.

Value in Other LCMS Congregations

The potential value of this project could also extend to other LCMS congregations. While this project focused specifically on refugees from Nepal, the same, or similar, practices could be employed in connection to any minority group in a congregation. This project recognized the multicultural separation that exists between American and Nepali members of Ascension. However, division among members of a congregation can extend beyond ethnic disunion to any people groups that simply exist side by side with little interaction.

For instance, separation could exist in a congregation that has a minority of service men and women who are active duty in the Armed Forces. Division could exist between a handful of college students who come to worship from a local campus and the rest of the congregation. There may be a disconnection between those who are new members of the congregation and others who have been long-standing members of the same church.

⁷ Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish*, 1–20.

In all of these examples exists the possibility of recording the oral histories of each “minority” group within the congregation. Whether the oral history of those in the military, local college, or new members, their shared stories could help to promote understanding and empathy in the congregation. If those oral histories would also be coupled with a dialogical sermon, or sermon series, they could have an even greater impact on the congregation as their stories are connected to the larger story contained in Scripture. Oral history informed conversational sermons could help LCMS congregations move toward an intercultural level of connectedness where different groups collaborate in shared ministry.

An additional way this project could be of value to LCMS congregations is through sharing the recorded oral histories of our Nepali members with other congregations who are seeing an influx of Nepali people settling in their geographic area. The Nepali refugee population continues to shift. Locally, here in St. Louis, the Nepali population has decreased in recent years. Specifically at Ascension, a number of Nepali individuals and families have relocated to Akron and other parts of Ohio.⁸ I have been in contact with a LCMS pastor and principal as we work together to make connection between them and our relocating Nepal members in an effort to keep these refugees connected to a LCMS church and school.

For pastors and congregations in communities like Akron, sharing the recorded oral histories of our Nepali members could help them better understand who the Nepali people are. A knowledge of the history of this ethnic group could help church workers, and possibly congregations, become more familiar with this ethnic group and create a greater desire to

⁸ According to Pew Research, Akron was among the top ten cities in the US with the highest Nepali population. The number of Nepali individuals in Akron continues to grow.

“Nepalese in the U.S. Fact Sheet,” Pew Research, accessed July 22, 2024, <http://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-nepalese-in-the-u-s/>.

welcome Nepali families into their church and school.

Value at Christian Friends of New Americans

Ascension’s ministry has a four-part focus, and one of the four areas is the congregation’s partnership with Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA).⁹ This project could have value for the mission of CFNA as it carries out its work as a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS. CFNA’s partnerships extend beyond Ascension, and include dozens of LCMS congregations in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Congregations may benefit CFNA through service teams, regular volunteers, donation of needed items, or financial support. Perhaps the recorded oral histories of new Americans served by CFNA could help strengthen the ministry’s relationship with area LCMS congregations. When congregation members hear the stories of new Americans, including the impact that CFNA has had on their lives, the mission of this RSO may become more “real.” Church members at partner congregations would be able to see not only the differences, but also the commonalities, that exist between them and new Americans. This sharing of oral histories could potentially be linked to a presentation or dialogical sermons led by CFNA’s Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Stanish Stanley. There could be potential value in the sharing of the oral histories of new Americans to encourage generosity in stewardship of all kinds—time, talent, treasure—among members in CFNA’s partner congregations.

Conclusion

In his text, *Harvest Waiting*, Donald Moorman uses the picture of harvest fields to express the urgency of mission among new Americans in the US.

The coming decades are crucial for the church as it addresses the ethnic diversity of urban America. “Playing it safe” will be the sure road to disaster. “Business as usual”

⁹ “Focus,” Ascension Lutheran Church, accessed July 22, 2024, <http://www.ascensionstl.com/focus>.

will mean we will soon be out of business in many of our nations' great urban areas. We must take some risks and dare to fail.... The greatest tragedy is failing to speak the Good News of salvation through Christ, powerfully and effectively, to all the peoples who make up this great nation. God has given this generation of American Christians a unique mission opportunity. Never before has such an opportunity confronted us. If we fail to respond, it will soon pass us by. In John 4:35, Jesus says to his disciples, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."¹⁰

Moorman's work was published in 1993, over thirty years ago. Today, the ethnic diversity of the US only continues to grow, and the opportunities that Moorman observed are only greater and more urgent. This project shares one way in which congregations can answer Moorman's call to respond to the opportunities that come in ministry to, and with, new Americans.

This project's introduction began with words related to harvest as well. Its opening paragraphs quote the Holy Spirit-inspired words of the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 3:6-7, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." This project is an example of how the seeds of the Gospel have been watered at Ascension. This watering has been done through incorporating selections of recorded oral histories of members of Ascension who are refugees in a series of dialogical sermons. The aim of this watering is to inspire growth in the entire congregation toward a mature intercultural collaboration where people of different cultures work together in shared ministry. May the Lord of nations work through His preached Word to give this growth.

¹⁰ Moorman, *Harvest Waiting*, 151-52.

APPENDIX ONE

Full Transcript of Nepalese Oral History Interviews

Tika “John” Gurung

Interviewer: So today we're recording the oral history of John Gurung. His name is Tika Gurung, but goes by John. John is one of our Nepali members here at Ascension. John is also a student in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, the EIIT program, at Concordia Seminary. And so today John is going to share with us his story, his account as a refugee, and also his account of becoming a Christian. So thank you, John. I'll just ask some questions, and then you can respond to those and take as long as you like. We'd love to hear your life story. So tell me about what life was like for you in Nepal.

John: Thank you, Pastor Clark, for giving me this great opportunity to share my childhood testimony. So yeah, life is not easy, and it is very difficult and painful. But so when I was back in Nepal, it was really tough, and it was really broken. And I spent my life not easy, and it was really tough, and it was broken. So yeah, life is really tough and painful, and it's very hard to move forward.

So actually, my name is John Poju Grung, and I'm originally from Bhutan. And I came to Nepal in late 1992, so I want to share a little bit about how I came to Nepal from Bhutan.

So Bhutan is a small country between China and India. I was living in a small village called Chirang. And around late 1980s and 1990s in Bhutan, the government, they started implementing the verification. They started the mandatory verification of the citizenship of Bhutan, and they started processing the verification. And when they started the process for the verification of citizenship in Bhutan, they denied Bhutanese citizenship.

And another reason is the Bhutan government, they had aimed to make Bhutan unique in cultural identity. And so another reason is that there's a cultural and political circumstances, cultural and political issue. Because of those reasons, the people, those who are living in the southern part of the Bhutan, that we call the Tsumpas, and they are called the Nepali people, and they raise the voice against that violence.

And then the Bhutan government, they started sending the police and army in different parts of the village and torturing the people in Bhutan. And some are put into the jail, and some are killed, and they started doing some sexual harassment. And because of that, the people, those who are living in southern part of the Bhutan, the Nepalese, Bhutanese people, they raised the voice against that violence. And the Bhutan government, they did not like, and then they started

torturing the people.

And with my family, in 1992, I came to Nepal, and they kicked us out from our country, Bhutan, and we landed in Nepal, in eastern part of Nepal. And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it's very tough and not easy. There's nothing to eat, and there's no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too. So at the time, I was like a very young guy, like five years old. At the age of five, I came to Nepal, and it was very tough.

So yeah, in this way, we came to Nepal, and in the beginning, I heard from my parents that a lot of people, are dying from sickness. They're suffering from different kinds of disease, and they died, a lot of people. They died from different kinds of sickness, and they're suffering from the sickness and some diseases. Yeah. So in this way, we landed in Nepal, and that's all.

Interviewer: Thank you, John. So in Nepal, you were in a refugee camp?

John: Yeah. In Nepal, we have no land, we have no citizenship, and we became a refugee, and we landed in eastern part of Nepal. And it was very broken, tough, and we are suffering. It was very painful. So it was very painful, but slowly, like UNHCR, LWF, like different organizations, they started helping us. Like they are providing like individually five pounds of food, the rice, they provided five pounds of rice to the family. Within every month, they gave us like food, and rice to survive. So in the beginning, the people, they died because of the starvation, no food, different kind of sickness.

So, after that, I grew, and when I was like grade five, I was like around 12 years old, and at the time, I heard about Jesus. One of my friends, he was my classmate, and he brought me a booklet to me about Jesus. And then in the beginning, I don't know, and I didn't care about who is Jesus, but when I read that booklet, it touched my heart. And then that's a miracle for me to know about Christ.

Interviewer: Good. Yeah, can you tell me more about becoming a Christian there in the refugee camp?

John: Yeah, so it was very tough to become a Christian in the refugee camp because when I was like around 16 years old or 15 years old, I accepted Christ as my Savior, life Savior. And at the time, I had no idea about Jesus, and I had no more idea about who is Jesus and from where it came. But when I grew up with the family, the Christian family, and I started going to the church service and the Sunday service, and then I knew a little bit more about Christianity.

But in 2002, I accepted Christ as my life Savior, and I have a little history about how I accepted Christ. Like when I was sitting outside my house in the bench and when I was to lay down or sleeping, I heard a sound. Someone is singing near from my neighbor. And then I woke up and then I went there and I looked from

the wall. And then I saw someone is playing guitar and someone is singing. So that moment touched my heart because I never knew before someone is singing and that's kind of miracles for me. And then they called me and then I went inside the church and then maybe I remember singing the song, "This is the Day", maybe. And then they talked to me about Christ, they talked to me about Jesus Christ, like they evangelized me and then they started telling me about Jesus is our life Savior. And if you believe in Jesus Christ, your sin will be washed away, but you must have a trust and then you have to believe in Christ.

But in the beginning I had no idea about who is Jesus Christ. And then slowly and slowly I started going to church and then I believed in Christ. I accepted Christ as my savior. But in 2002, I did my baptism program in 2002.

But slowly my parents, they knew that I go to the church. So because my family, they were from the Buddhist background and they don't like Christianity and they think that Christianity is a foreign religion and they never trust and they never believe in Christianity.

And one day when I came from my school and then when I was sitting inside my room, I saw 10, 12 people are gathering. The old people are gathering around my house and then they're sitting inside my house. And they told me that, now you became a Christian and then now you have to leave Christ right away and you became a Buddhist priest. And I said to them, no, I don't want to become a Buddhist priest because what I accepted, what I know, what I believe is true God. And He was going to provide me eternity and eternal life.

And then when I talked to them in that way and they tortured me, they took me to the jail, they put me into the jail and they beat me. The whole night I was like torturer, and then it was very painful. And I cried, I cried to the God and then he listened to me and he listened to my prayer and he answered me.

So after that, the neighbor, my community, they did not allow me to go inside their house. And I remember one moment that happens in my life, I used to call her my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in the kitchen and I ate food. But one day she heard about me that I became a Christian. And then when I was inside her kitchen, she beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me that, now you became a Christian. Now you're not going to come inside my house because you're not good for me and now you're a Christian boy. So I don't allow you to enter inside my house. And that's very painful and it's broken my heart. And then I never go from next time.

And then, yeah, it was very painful and they tortured me. They put me into the jail and the life is not easy in refugee camp and it was very painful.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing. Not easy as a refugee and not easy because you're a Christian too, John. So you mentioned your baptism. Can you tell me more about

when you were baptized and how that happened?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: So John, you talked about your baptism. Can you tell me a little more about that, how that happened and what took place?

John: Yes. So it was, my baptism took place in 2002. And I was like 14 to 15 years old when I was baptized. And so the pastor, they explained to me about the baptism means to get rid of the sin. Baptism means to, when I baptize, then my sin will cleanse my sin. And they told me that baptism is like to connect with God. And when I was baptized, I knew that now I have no more sin. And I trust myself and I believe that now I'm free from the sin.

And it took place in 2002 and we went to a river nearby our, from our house. And it takes like 20 minutes to walk. And then I took their baptism and yeah, in this way I took the baptism in 2002. And when I was like very young, 14 to 15 years at the time of that age, I took baptism.

Interviewer: Okay. So you talked a little bit about what baptism means to you between you and God. So what about baptism, what does that mean for you and your relationship with other Christians, with other baptized people?

John: Yeah, the baptism means to, the very important thing is that to connect with, make a relationship, a good relationship with God. A true relationship with God. Actually I understand in that way. So when we baptize, our sin will be washed. But the very important thing is that we must have a trust in God. We must trust in God. We must believe in God from our heart. And then God will change our life. So when I talk with other people also, like when they baptize, their sin will be washed away. And then they will be free from the bondage and then they will become the children of the God. So they'll become a family of God. So yeah, I understand in that way.

So baptism is not only the plain water, but baptism is that the word of God is connected with the water. And then it's very important to do the baptism and to baptize in Christ.

Interviewer: So we're baptized and we become children of God. And that also means that we're brothers and sisters in Christ too.

John: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah, so how do you see that with other Nepali Christians or even American Christians, that relationship that we have together in baptism?

John: Yeah, so when we baptize in Christ, I think Nepali people and the American

people, so I already told you that we are the children of God and we became the children of God. So there is no any discrimination, no any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the children of Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ. We all are in brother and sister in Christ. So there is no more any denomination, no more any discrimination. So we all are same in Christ and brother and sister in Christ when we baptize. And we became a child of God.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's beautiful work in our life that God does for us. Thank you, John.

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like coming to the United States?

John: Oh yeah, so yeah, in 2007, like Bhutan, India and Nepal and the other organizations, they started meeting together to resolve the problems, the refugees, the crisis that happens in Nepal. To resolve that problem. Finally, they came to know that the result comes that they will take the refugees in different parts of the countries like Canada, China, USA, UK. And they plan to do that.

And then in 2013, God also told me to go to the United States. And then I prayed. I don't know in which state I have as my destination, but God spoke to me for the United States of America. And after that, I chose the United States in 2013. And then I landed in 2013, August 27, in St. Louis, Missouri.

So when I first came to the United States in St. Louis, Missouri, when I landed in America, I was totally lost. I was totally, I don't know where I have to go. I have no ideas and I have no cars. I have no food in the room. And I was very kind of, I was suffering.

And so in the beginning, like when I landed in the United States, and after three months, I was feeling very, very sick. Like I was suffering from, I was, one month I stayed in hospital because I was suffering from the migraine headache. And then it takes a long time to cure.

But one day when I was taken into the ICU, and then I have no idea. But when I was in the ICU, I remember and I see it's like a dream. And something came in front of me and then said that, wake up, wake up, I heard that kind of noise. And then when I suddenly wake up, I saw my wife is weeping near me. And then I just told her, why you are weeping? And then she explained everything because you are already, you are, like you are dead. And then you are put in the ICU. You never breathed for like maybe, I don't know, it's like five minutes and he was in ICU. And then she was crying and she was calling to their family. And then everyone was knowing that I was dead.

So, but God suddenly woke up me and I wake up and I saw the sound. And then what I believe is there is a God and who protects me and to plant his church. Still I have to plant his church in this universe.

So before, when I came, let me talk about, in 2015, I started smoking and drinking lots. And then, you know, because of this, I was gone through depression also. And I was going through the migraine headache also. And I started smoking and I started drinking. And I think because of that also I was suffering for long. And I stayed one month in hospital, in Barnes Jewish hospital. And also I came, I stayed in St. Louis University Hospital for 15 days. But Jesus healed me from that circumstances, from that crisis, from that pain, from that suffering. Jesus healed me from that suffering.

And from 2015, I started serving the God. One day, one of the Nepali evangelists, one Nepali pastor, and his name is Pastor Gagan. And he came to my house and then he told me that, Brother John, if you want to come to my church. And I denied, I denied him that, I said to him that, no, I'm not going to come. And the next day he again come to my house. And then he told me, he brought me some chickens and he brought me some milk. And then he gave to my family. And then again he told me, Brother John, would you come to my church to serve God? And then I said, yes.

And then I went to the church called the New Life Church. I went to the church, New Life Church. And then I started serving the God over there. And in the beginning they gave me the opportunity to play guitar. Because they knew me that I used to play guitar. And they gave me that opportunity to play guitar. And slowly, slowly they made me a worship leader. They made me a worship leader. And then after that I started worshipping the Lord in, within the congregation, in the crowd.

And then after that in 2020 it was very blessing for me. And God gave me a great opportunity to attend the seminary school in St. Louis, in Concordia Seminary. And that's my great opportunity to serve my Lord, to serve my community, serve my people, serve my congregation after learning a lot of things from my seminary. And in 2020 I got that opportunity to study. And then now three years have been passed. So still one more year left. So I'm still a seminary student. So in this way God works in my life. So it was like kind of miracles and it was very blessing for me to serve the God.

Interviewer: Thank you, John. It's wonderful to hear God's work in your life. What was the hardest part about coming here to the United States and to St. Louis?

John: Yeah, I told you that the hardest part that I come to the United States in St. Louis is like, in the beginning I have no idea. So where to go, where is shopping center, and where is Schnuck's, or where is Walgreens, pharmacy, where is social security office, I have no idea. And I don't have any car, vehicles at the time.

And also I don't know the way where to go for shopping.

And the very difficult part that happens in my life is in 2014 there's a lot of snow. And at the time I don't have anybody to help me to go for the shopping. And I walked and then when I came back home I was like, I feel very sick. Because it's very cold and there's too much snow. And I have to walk like maybe half an hour for shopping. So nobody helped me at the beginning. My family is there, but they have their own job, they're working, and they're busy. So they didn't get time to help me. But they helped me somehow in other things like going shopping some other days, like in the weekend. But every time they couldn't help me. So I struggled myself.

And another thing is that I became very sick. Like three months I stayed in the hospital. And within the three months, doctors, they could not recognize me. What kind of disease is going in my life? What kind of disease is, from which disease I have been suffering, and they could not recognize me, but only God healed me. Because I just lay down to the God, I bow down to the God, and God healed me from that pain. And that's two things in the beginning that I struggled. And I was gone through the sickness is my difficult part when I came to the United States.

Interviewer: Okay, thanks John. I know now you have a connection to Christian Friends of New Americans. Was Christian Friends of New Americans, CFNA, was that helpful to you? When you first came to the United States, did you have a relationship with CFNA?

John: When I came to the United States in the beginning, I had no idea about CFNA. But slowly after one year, I heard about CFNA. And then my Nepali evangelist, Pastor Gagan, he talked about CFNA. And then slowly I started connecting with Pastor Stanish, and he talked about CFNA. And then they bring me some support. They bring me some help in the beginning when I was in Alberta, when I was there in Alberta Street. And then CFNA is a very good organization. And it's very helpful for the people who are in need, and the people who are in need. So, and then from, especially I heard that the CFNA, about CFNA is from Pastor Gagan. And it's very helpful for me, and they help me a lot.

Interviewer: How has CFNA been helpful? Are there some ways where CFNA has been helpful to you? Yes.

John: Right now, my son, Deepsysh, he used to go there every Monday and some other days. And they provide help for the homework, and they help Deepsysh to do homework. And also, when there's some other programs. Like last time, Deepsysh, he joined for bicycling, and they provide a new bicycle to my son. In that way, they are helping us. And sometimes, if I needed some basic needs for the home, they can provide us. And in this way, the CFNA is helping me.

Interviewer: Great. Thank you. So, thinking about Ascension Lutheran Church, where I'm pastor, where you're a member, just describe your relationship with Ascension Lutheran.

John: Yeah. So, after I was affiliated with Ascension Lutheran Church, it was very, very blessing for me, because God gave that opportunity to affiliate with Ascension Lutheran Church and with Pastor Clark. So, we attend first week of the month for the church service. And also, we used to attend for the Bible study. And these are very important and beneficial for me, because we learn a lot of things from Ascension Lutheran Church.

And also, they help me a lot for other different activities, like in seminary. They provide me some time when I was in need of the laptop. And also for the thing, for the bill, and for a lot of things from Ascension Lutheran Church is helpful for me and helping me. And that was the great blessing for me.

Interviewer: Great. Well, thanks, John. So, thinking more about Ascension, what is one thing that you like the most about Ascension?

John: Yeah. Especially the Ascension people are very helpful. They are very kind and they are honest. And they are like when someone is in need for physical help or in spiritual or mental help, they are ready to help spiritually or physically or mentally or sometimes economically also.

And also, another thing that Ascension Church is important is they are doing the blessing service. And also, the Nepali people, they are affiliated with them. And also, we are helping to read the Bible verses in Nepali. And these are the things that Ascension Lutheran Church provides us, that opportunity to serve the Lord even in different languages like Nepali, English. So, this could be very helpful for me and also the Nepali community. These are the things that could be very helpful for the Nepali community, the Nepali congregation, the Nepali people from the Ascension Lutheran Church.

Interviewer: Okay. Thanks, John. A little harder question, maybe. So, thinking about Ascension, what is one thing, or is there a thing, that you would change about Ascension?

John: That's kind of a hard question. But one thing to change about what Ascension is like, if you, like at the time, everything is good, everything is okay. But I didn't see anything to change, but like about the sermon time, about the sermon time, like sometimes you spoke like 13 minutes or 12 minutes. If you little bit increase to like 16, 17 minutes.

Interviewer: Longer sermon?

John: Longer sermon, like 16, 17, around 20 minutes. I think that would be very

blessing and that would be very helpful to understand. Even though it still is good, but that's my kind of suggestion.

Interviewer: Thank you. I appreciate that. Just a couple more questions, John, and then we can finish. What might help you or help the Nepali people have a closer connection to Ascension or a closer connection to the people, the American people at Ascension? Is there anything that can help you or the Nepali people have a closer relationship, a closer connection, to Ascension or to the American people at Ascension?

John: I already told you that, especially to close a relationship with Nepali people and Ascension people. So I think number one is we are the child of God. We are the children of the God and we are baptized and then we all became the children of God and we are not any discrimination. We are all same in brother and sister in Christ. So that's the one reason.

And also the other thing is that I already told you that when we are in needy, when we are in need of help, I think at the time Ascension is providing the big help to our community. And also even from our community also, if the Ascension, they need help, then we are ready to provide that big help from our community. So we are sharing our help with each other.

And then also the main important thing is that we are brother and sister in Christ. So we are same. So we must do, if I have gone through the suffering, if something happened in my family, or if I am in a painful situation, someone dies, I think we must help each other.

In the same way, if something happened in Ascension Lutheran Church, we can help them for praying for them, for encouraging from the sermon, from the verse. So in that way we can make a good relationship with each other, with the Ascension Lutheran Church and Nepali community.

Interviewer: Thank you, John. I appreciate that, how we are a blessing to each other. Ascension can be a blessing to our Nepali members, and our Nepali members at Ascension can be a blessing to American members. That is very important.

So your son goes to school at Word of Life, and Word of Life is a school that is associated with our church. Our church helps to support. So what are some ways that Word of Life has been good, or been a blessing to your son or to your family?

John: Yes, that is true. My son goes to Ascension Word of Life in the school, and especially he is getting the scholarship from the Word of Life. Another thing is that he is learning not only the activities that are given in the school, or they are taught in the schools from the books only, but he is learning from the Bible also. He is learning about who is Jesus, the story of Jesus, and why Jesus came into

this world, the reason. Everything he is learning from the school. That is a very important point for me to send my son to the Word of Life school in Ascension.

Also another thing is that he became very honest, polite, and he is a good guy after he is learning from, when he registered in Word of Life.

Interviewer: He is a good guy. You can be proud as a dad. Last question, is there anything else you wanted to share about the story of your life, or anything you would like to share about your life as a Christian?

John: Lastly, I want to share a little bit about my life testimony. First of all, I want to say that I have not good English, and it is kind of broken English, but I believe that you are going to understand a little bit what I am saying.

Interviewer: Yes.

John: In the beginning, my life was very painful, suffering, and I was gone through sickness, tough, and broken, but slowly God healed me and changed my life, and then I started serving my God from 2015. Before my life was very broken, I was engaged in different fields like smoking, smoking weed, and some alcoholics, and I became an alcoholic also, but Jesus changed my life and then I became a true worship leader, a true servant to serve my congregation, to serve my community.

So this is my blessing, this is the blessing from God. And finally, at the end, I am very proud and honored, and thank you so much for giving this great opportunity to share my thoughts and my little testimony about how I became a Christian, and how my life back in Nepal when I was in a refugee camp, all the things that I got this opportunity to share with you today. And thank you so much to everyone for this opportunity, and I honor you, and I respect you, and God will bless you, and everyone, God will bless.

Interviewer: Well, thank you, John. We thank you for telling your story, sharing your story. It's an important one for people to know, and I am blessed by hearing it, so thank you for your time today.

John: Thank you so much, Pastor, for your great opportunity, giving me this great opportunity to share my little bit about my life testimony. Thank you so much.

Meena Rai Gurung

Interviewer: So, I'm here with Meena today. She's a member of Ascension Lutheran Church, one of our leaders in the Nepali community. And we are here to learn more about

her life as a someone from Nepal coming to the United States as a refugee, but also her life as a Christian. So Meena, could you tell me a little about what life was like for you in Nepal and Bhutan?

Meena: Yeah, basically in our past years when we are in our refugee camp, very, very hard time to settle our life. We struggled many times and very hard to live, you know, difficult to exist. And here the United States of America gave us opportunity to come here and that's a great opportunity, and we decide to come here.

Before my parents, they don't like to come to America because they're scared, they don't know the language and they're scared and they don't let me go to America. And I talk to them to tell them it's good. Everyone is going, it's a good opportunity. I don't want to miss, so I talk to them and they let me go, and I come to America.

And when I come to America, and before when I was in my refugee camp, I'm not a Christian. When I come to America, I become a Christian because my family members all are Christian and I know about the Jesus. I heard about Jesus is our Savior Lord and I accept Jesus is my Savior. In 2014, March, I forgot the date, with Pastor Clark and I'm so happy to be here.

Interviewer: We're very happy that you're here. So, thinking about the refugee camp, how old were you when you first went to a refugee camp?

Meena: When I was in the refugee camp, I was three years old. I don't know about my country, my home country, Bhutan. I don't know about it, I didn't remember. Half of my life is spent in refugee camp, about 20, 25 years. Very struggle time.

Interviewer: What are some of the things that made living in the refugee camp hard, made it a struggle? What were some of the things that were hard?

Meena: In our country, we Nepali, but also they told us we were refugees. We live in Nepal and also we speak the same language. What they speak with the same language, also they call us a refugee tag. They give us a refugee tag. They are not our country. They think like that.

In Nepal people, not all, but some people, kind of dominate or something. They are the lower people. They think like that and whenever we work also, when we go outside to work, they are the refugees. They are refugees. They say like that, you know, when they say refugees, nothing. They think like the refugees, not nothing. I don't know how to say this. And everywhere they give us some work also. Other people, they get higher money for the same job and we got a lower money. They separate.

Interviewer: You're doing the same work?

Meena: Yeah, same work like that. We don't have enough food also. The government, they give food. UNHCR, they give food also and that's not enough. We need money and we need to buy dress also. We like to buy beautiful dress and winter time. When I was a student, very very cold in winter time. I don't have a warm jacket also and the shoes only \$20 or \$25 is also very expensive for us that time. In winter time, we don't have any shoes. The sleeper also \$25, \$30 is very expensive for us. It's very hard to buy things. We don't have any money. It's very difficult, you know. Very hard.

Interviewer: What kind of house did you live in at the camp?

Meena: In our country, we called that thatch and bamboo. Bamboo. And bed also bamboo. Before bamboo bed, we had mud. Mud make a mud bed and sleep over that. And sometimes when we sleep on the mud bed, sometimes the insect bite our ear. It's very hard. The house also sometimes too much rain, sometimes too much rain, it will drop the water and we make cover with plastic and we sleep like that. That's very hard.

In my back country also like that we live and then also the too many houses because of too many houses there is a fire, you know. Fire burn and get all the houses on fire.

Interviewer: Okay, there would be fires in the camp?

Meena: Yeah. And we burn fire also burn our house. And in like summer time is very hard, you know, to live outside. It's very hard to live. I don't imagine how I survived that time. Very different now, and when I think about the past, a very hard life. They still live there, and it's very hard and in my country.

Interviewer: So in the refugee camp, was it hard? Were there any people there who were Christians?

Meena: Yeah, some people they are Christian but my parents they don't want to, you know, Christian is the lower caste, do not go and talk, do not eat with them. They say this one. They think that Christian people is a lower caste people. They say this one and maybe they don't know about the Jesus and you know that that time they discriminate the lower caste and upper caste they say.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. So, what can you tell me about how you became a Christian?

Meena: Yeah, when I come to America, you know, I know about a little bit I heard about the Jesus in my back country but my parent didn't like to go to the church so I didn't go. And when I come to America I become free. And I come here in America my uncle and auntie they already Christian they are already member in Ascension Lutheran Church and they told me to go.

Yeah, my decision is when I go to America I will be a Christian I will be a Christian. I think like that in my country you know when I go to America I want to be a Christian. Yeah, and then when I come to America also and my parents they told me to go, and I'm a Christian.

Interviewer: Is it easier to become a Christian if you're in America than it was in Nepal?

Meena: Yeah, America is easy to be a Christian it's not easy in back country they don't like to be. Still they my parents are not in Christian instead they live in Australia. Then they are not in Christian but now they understand when they come on Australia also they know they are not a lower caste. They accept, they accept a Christian is also a kind of a religion they think. They now understand about the Jesus.

But I hope later they also accept Jesus when I talk to them and they say, "oh yeah." They want to listen you know and maybe later they accept Jesus. I think, I hope, you know. Everybody now Christian in my family also. And here in America everybody is Christian. But my mother and my brother they didn't accept Jesus so maybe later they accept Jesus. Yeah we pray for them.

Interviewer: Yeah we will pray for them. So thinking about your baptism what does your baptism mean to you? Why is your baptism important?

Meena: I think baptism is everything. I sacrifice my life or life whatever I do I sacrifice all. I will not come back in the worldly. And when I accepted Jesus I have to follow the Jesus I am becoming the follower of Jesus. Yeah, I think that one and I accept Jesus.

Interviewer: Yeah, thank you. So, what does what does God do for you in baptism when you were baptized what did God do for you?

Meena: God is very good. After baptism before life and after baptism is a very very different. And after baptism, after become I Christian my life is changed. Most of the things, when I become a Christian my friend are separate they don't want to talk and then you now Christian, I make a Christian friends only. And the worldly and non-Christian friend they go they say the this Christian people they, they don't want to talk with me sometime and but I tell them still we friend. Our life change when we become Christian our life will be changed.

By God of grace I have a family. When I come to America I'm only single. I only one and I got a one husband and a handsome husband I have and two beautiful kids. Yeah, it's amazing it's a grace of God I got many different as a wonderful life. Become Christian also in sometime is a very difficult situation time but it's still we not forget stop to praying to God still we praying to God you know.

Interviewer: Thank you. So thinking about coming to America what was the hardest part? What was hardest about coming to America—most difficult?

Meena: Remember the hard part first language problem. Yeah I don't understand English I need to interpret a little bit I understand English. I don't know how to talk. Also now I understand and a little bit try to speak English. My English not good. But also I try to speak English. English is a learning you know practice. Practice makes perfect. You know maybe yeah I'm trying to speak English.

Interviewer: You're doing a great job.

Meena: Yeah I try to learn more English.

Interviewer: So, can you describe your relationship with, your connection to, Ascension Lutheran Church? What is that like for you?

Meena: Oh it is a very helpful. Ascension Lutheran when we become a membership every parts everything help us. They pray, our pastor, you pray for us there's a good you know every time, every difficult situation also you give hand. You know we help every time. Helping heart you know as very good. Ascension when we become a member we got a good opportunity everywhere you know every situation also they pray for us. And especially pastor thank you so much for everything helping us Nepali member is you know. Pastor help mainly and other members also thank you everybody you know when I say thank.

Interviewer: You're welcome. Yeah, good to help each other. Is there anything you would change about Ascension Church? Anything that you think should be done differently?

Meena: I don't have any idea. I don't have any idea.

Interviewer: Okay, so thinking about CFNA. So, Christian Friends of New Americans, CFNA. How has CFNA helped you or helped your family after coming to America?

Meena: Yeah, yeah I have to remember CFNA. So is important you know parts of our life CFNA also helped many things when I was new. When I was new the health and screening time that's good.

Interviewer: Yeah, health screenings.

Meena: You know in my country every single time they we have to pay the money but they do free. CFNA do the free health and screening they do free and it's good. And they have English language also and they have the different skills the sewing. I'm training for the sewing machine. They have a different opportunity. They teach us you know they help us CFNA also.

Interviewer: Is there anything that might help you have a closer connection to Ascension?
Anything that would help with that?

Meena: Close connection? I don't have idea and just pray for Nepali members every time you know. Nowadays so many members are moving to another state. And you know little bit sad they leave. You know Nepali members are less population. And also still it's okay when I come to Ascension Church. I have more opportunity to speak English. You know when I get in Nepali members I don't know you know long time when I speak Nepali I forgot English. When I come to Ascension Church as you know as I learn more English and I practice good.

Interviewer: So almost done. Just one more question. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your life or your life as a Christian? Anything else you'd like for me to know about your life or about your faith.

Meena: I don't have any idea. Yeah everything is good and still keep praying for us. And yeah everything is good and pray for us. You know everything is good. So yeah upcoming life upcoming plan we're trying to buy house and something you know. Pray for us still okay?

Interviewer: I will. Well, thank you for your time. Thank you for your answers. You did a great job.

Shiva Gurung

- Interviewer: So, Shiva, if you just want to introduce yourself, just say your name and where you live so that people know.
- Shiva: Okay. My name is Shiva Gurung, and I live in Winnebago, St. Louis, Missouri.
- Interviewer: Very good. Thank you. So as we talk about your life, Shiva, just thinking back and remembering what was life like for you in Nepal. When you think of Nepal, Bhutan, what was life like for you there? And you can talk about before going to a refugee camp, but just tell us what your life was like.
- Shiva: Yeah, I want to talk about refugee camp.
- Interviewer: Okay, good. Thank you.
- Shiva: Because Bhutan, I don't remember real, because at that time I was a little girl, that's why I don't remember.
- Interviewer: Good, so you lived in Bhutan as a young girl, and then moved to a refugee camp. So how old were you when you moved to the refugee camp?
- Shiva: At that time I was 14.
- Interviewer: Okay. But can you tell us, just describe what life was like in the refugee camp? So things like, where did you live in the refugee camp? What kind of food did you eat? Who did you live with? Okay?
- Shiva: Like a refugee life.
- Interviewer: Yes, yes.
- Shiva: It's not bad and not good. So, so, but we have to stay like around. When come the refugee life, that time, we don't know what I do that time. But we doing like what the government give me, like fruit, clothes, everything, and stay around. Like, you know, when I buy a house, that I around like cover it, the property, you know, like.
- Interviewer: Yes.
- Shiva: Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much. Like a new place, new, like everything new. But my life is, yeah, that time I'm younger, this time not bad, not good, but it's too hard.

Now I'm feeling it's too hard because we can go other, like, place, go to work and bring money. We have to stay the inside and what did the government give me, then we have to accept and eat instead.

Interviewer: So did you go to school while at the refugee came?

Shiva: Yeah, that time refugee life is, school is free. But me no, I'm not at school. That time I got married when I 14 age.

Interviewer: You were married when you're 14?

Shiva: Yes. That time I don't remember, I don't have in mind what I do because, you know, the Bhutan government, do not like Nepali people, and when I was running in Nepal and you have to stay like one life refugee, then I don't know. But one thing is, the refugee can, you know, like stay, like government give it. If the government not give it, we die.

Interviewer: You depend on the government for food and for everything you need.

Shiva: Yeah. Like one government, UNHCR, that's the government, we all Nepali refugees take this. I don't know what I'm saying.

Interviewer: No, no, that's good. That's good to know because it's good for me to learn from you what life was like as a refugee.

Shiva: Stay home, cooking, eating, like sometimes give me the government give me like banana, cabbage, potato, that's it, and rice. But refugee life no good, it's too hard. But school is free. Like a 10th grade, it's free.

Interviewer: Got it. Up to 10th grade.

Shiva: Yes. Okay. Free. Like a secondary school, you know, like a children's school, starting 10th grade free. But I really tell you I don't like refugee life, no, never, it's too hard because I already finished that time. I never ever thinking my kids going again refugee life.

Interviewer: Yes.

Shiva: Now, when I come to America, that time, our family so scared because new people, new language, new food, everything new. And I'm thinking, no, I don't want to stay here. I want to go my country, but when I walk outside, those people say "hi." But we Nepali people thinking all day people call me like this, that's not. Then I, one day my daughter like little baby, that one person guy like this, and my daughter and me running away because they call me. "Come on, come on, let's go, let's go." But we don't understand that's why now everything understand now that are good.

Interviewer: Yes.

Shiva: Before when I come here, we feeling so sad. Now I find like a good church, good family, good person, everything now going good. But when, like when I, we citizen, all my family citizen now, my daughter, my son, my husband, me. But my husband not with us, this is sad.

Interviewer: He's with Jesus, he's in heaven.

Shiva: Yes. Now I'm so happy, we have to best with my family, like a Christian family, like Ascension Church, the Ascension Church, too much helping me, really, really good.

Interviewer: Good.

Shiva: I don't want to lost like this church and this family, this member, everything, I love.

Interviewer: Thanks Shiva, we love you too.

Shiva: Thank you, and my son, my daughter also love this church and family.

Interviewer: We're so happy you're here. Yeah. Can you tell me what it was like coming from Nepal to the United States? How did that happen and what was that like? Did you come on a plane and did the government tell you what city to come live in? Can you just share with me what that was like coming to the United States?

Shiva: Like everybody, like refugee people, everybody say we have to go to our country, our own country. But the government didn't send our country because the government Bhutan is so strong, they don't need Nepali people like this. And I don't know what's going on, like 2007 or 2006 start the process. The United States, like Canada, Australia, everywhere, but when the process start, sometimes I'm happy, sometimes sad, because I don't know where we're going,

But the one thing we're happy because we're going to America because we know more refugees like that, we're thinking. Yeah, then when the process is starting, then everything is step-by-step processing, like sometimes medical, sometimes physical, everything, everything.

Now when the successful everything finished, then they send me the one letter, you have to go to Missouri, then I don't know where is the Missouri? But my family, my brother-in-law, my husband's brother, he already coming here, like 2008, he coming 2008, then that's why the government send me and my family, where our family, then I come here.

Interviewer: So what was the hardest part about coming to the United States? Was there something that was very difficult or hard for your family when you arrived in St. Louis? Something that's been hard for you?

Shiva: When I was on the plane, that time I eat nothing. They give me everything food, but you know change, like food change. That means we didn't eat before, that's why two days we don't eat. But my kids, my mother-in-law, they are eating, but me, no, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep. Then when I come here, then I make on my hand, that time I love to eat.

Interviewer: Yes, your own food, yes.

Shiva: Not a bad thing going, no, everything good.

Interviewer: I know you and your family have been connected to CFNA, Christian Friends of New Americans. How has CFNA helped when you first came to the United States?

Shiva: Yeah, when I come to the United States, that time, Makasa, you know Eddie, Makasa?

Interviewer: Yes.

Shiva: Yeah, my family already connected with Makasa.

Interviewer: Okay.

Shiva: Then my family bring there the peace center church, like, what's the name, the doctor?

Interviewer: Dr. Buckman?

Shiva: Dr. Buckman and his wife.

Interviewer: Carol?

Shiva: Yeah, Carol. The people helped me that time, like a blanket, like food, you know, furniture, like bed, everything the Peace Center helping me. And I learn like English, how can I write, how can I speak, and how can I stay, everything they teach me.

And I learned then when, like, say, six months ago, then we baptism start like a Christian family. The pastor, Makasa, every week coming visit my home, and little learn like starting Bible, and they teach me like a Christian, how is, what is the Christian, like Christian, what I, like a Christian. How is the baptism, who is the father, like something, something they teach me, and we learn little, little, then

starting all my family together, baptism.

Like how many people I can't count, but five, I think five house Nepali people, mean my family, my three brother-in-law family, and my two sister-in-law family, and me, but big, big family. Then we together, baptism, at the Peace Center, we are so happy that time, because we find them Jesus.

And then when little, then started every month coming here, and start the Bible. I remember the name Brad Aldrich, pastor Brad, he also helping Nepali people, he's a really, really good man. He helping so much time, like Bible is starting, like he reading English, and he translate the Nepali. Okay you read Nepali, I read English, they teach me, he's a really, really good man, yeah.

Then he pick the kids, and he doing like playground, where is the playground, and he taking kids, and going anywhere, and bring kids back home, and his wife also Bible is study every week, every house, all Nepali house, every week, the Bible, he teach me all Nepali people Bible. Like six o'clock p.m. start the Bible, like Saturday six p.m. start the house fellowship, right? That's English, right? But Nepali, like Nepali, house fellowship. Pastor Brad and his wife coming, and he starting every week, like today my house, tomorrow Dil's house, tomorrow Gagan's house, tomorrow, other people house. He is doing this like maybe two years, he continue, continue, continue, maybe two years or one year, I don't know, but he really, really good people.

Then when the Peace Center, I found the Pastor Brad and his wife Miss Kelly, they bring here Ascension Church.

Interviewer: Yes.

Shiva: Yeah, your church here, now you coming here, then I remember, I think over there that room, the Pastor Brad teaching the Nepali family, like Bible. Yeah, then slowly, slowly, we see people, and we know everything, like learn little, little, little, little, then we are one family. But Pastor Brad, I miss Pastor Brad and Miss Kelly.

Interviewer: Yes, I think a lot of people do, I know. So, when you came to the United States, you weren't a Christian yet, is that right? So, you talked a little bit about this, but how did you become a Christian? How did you come to believe in Jesus and know who he is?

Shiva: Okay, my brother already Christian in Nepal, he teach me that time too. But when I come to America, that time, Christian family, American Christian family, they help me. And they showing me everywhere, like where to go, hospital, where to go, this way, which people, everything they teach me, how can eat, how can stay, how can talk. Everything the Ascension Christian family teach me and learn English and everything like a training, you know, everything, everything they

teach me. And then when they learn, like starting, like Christian family, like Bible, the Pastor Makasa, they learn little, little. He teach me and my brother already they teach me in Nepal, but not a baptism.

But when I come, that time we love the Jesus and we understand who is the Jesus and why coming, why die, everything we understand. That's why we love Jesus.

Interviewer: Good. Thank you. So, when, you know, when you're baptized, a great day of celebration and joy, happiness. So what does your baptism mean to you? Why is your baptism important to you? When you think about, you know, your relationship with God, but also other people who are baptized. So what does, what does your baptism mean to you? Why is your baptism important to you?

Shiva: I have to think like a baptism, but I don't know. I don't really, but I'm thinking baptism. Me or my God, we relation.

Interviewer: That's OK. It's a, it's a hard question, especially to answer in English.

Shiva: But I know that Jesus loves me.

Interviewer: Yes.

Shiva: Why he coming and why die? I everything understand. Then I love Jesus. That's why I accept my God and I baptism. And when I, when I, when I baptism that time, I my everything for Jesus. Yeah, my family, me, everything. And that time I'm thinking, oh, my God, I do. Before I think I do maybe wrong, you know, like something bad. Everything gone because I, I, I got my Jesus. I'm thinking that and say, sorry, Jesus, if I did wrong, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: To know that he forgives us. Wonderful. Was there any Nepali people or people in your family, who were maybe angry that you became a Christian?

Shiva: No, no. We are all family Christian.

Interviewer: OK. OK. Good. But no. If there was a Nepali Hindu or Buddhist?

Shiva: Yeah. Most of people Hindu, Buddhist. Yeah.

Interviewer: And they weren't upset with you becoming a Christian?

Shiva: No, no. Because they understand also what's the Jesus and what's mean the Christian. They understand they like it, but they also Hindu.

Interviewer: If you, if you became a Christian in Nepal in the refugee camp, do you think people there would be upset?

Shiva: Yeah. If you became a Christian, too much people sad

Interviewer: OK, why, why would they be upset in Nepal but not the United States when you become a Christian?

Shiva: I don't know. But maybe they did that time, they didn't understand what it means like Christian and what does it mean God? And what did they doing that time? Maybe no understand because because like a no no one explain, you know, no explain. But when I come here, everybody explain what is what is the Jesus? What do you mean? Why Jesus coming in world and why he died? Every like we also reading the Bible.

Then Nepal too much family like a no like Christian. The before long, long years ago, too many Christian died because no like Jesus. Jesus hate, you know, like Hindu family. They hate Jesus before. Now everybody like Jesus. We have we so many Nepali Christian Buddhists like a Hindu, Buddha. So many, but no hate the other each other God no, no, we understand. Yes. Nepal too much that time.

Interviewer: OK. Thank you.

Shiva: Yeah. John told you not like a John. John also that time is like that. He like Christian. He go to church. But when he come back, his family closed door. Don't come. Go away like that.

Interviewer: Yes. I know very Gagan and John both. There were some people in Nepal that maybe wouldn't let them come to their house or wouldn't feed them because they became a Christian.

Shiva: I don't know about Bhutan, but Nepal. If I carry the Bible and some people like this and throw away and, you know, the people hate Jesus. Because they don't like Jesus. Sometimes like, oh, yes, Jesus, you're no, good. You're like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Lower class maybe?

Shiva: Yes. Jesus no good. Your God no good. You're Christian. If I the Hindu people eat like something, if I Christian people touching, oh, you no good. Why am I touch food? No, you go away. Don't come near and don't touch my food like this. Like go.

Interviewer: No. Thank you for helping me understand that better. Yes. Thank you.

Shiva: But now we so many Nepali people and also like Hindu, but they can hate the Jesus and also Christian family. Not Nepal. This is the America. They also understand what do you mean the Jesus. They understand also. Sometimes my job, we talk about like Jesus. That time, oh, I know, I know Jesus. I read also Bible like that. Okay. Tell me one verse. What do you say my Jesus? But they

can't.

But no hate like Christian people. When I celebrate at home the Christian people, they also invite the Hindu people. They coming and enjoy with us. No more hate Jesus. They can't.

Interviewer: That's good to have that openness. We can talk about Jesus in the United States. Yes, openly.

Shiva: But in Nepal, like this. Like a thief. You know thief. Like stolen. Like this going. Oh, somebody look at me. Someone know can see me and he go and Christian family group like one group and they starting Bible and talks about Jesus and the finish time. And he running like this and go home. Like a secret. Yes, secret. Now openly. Oh my Lord. And I'm thinking, "Thank you, Jesus." You sending me my family here because Jesus call me. Come on. You are free here. Oh my God.

Interviewer: I was able to celebrate with you when you became a United States citizen.

Shiva: Yes.

Interviewer: So what is that? What does that mean to you to be a citizen of the United States now?

Shiva: I'm free about refugee. No more refugee. No more stay refugee life. No good. It's too hard. Everything follow, follow, follow, follow, you know. Like fruit. At least fruit to following what they give me. I go and take this and bring home and cooking. No eat meat. No eat fruit. You know fresh fruit. Only eating, eating rice, curry. Too hard refugee life.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay, just a few more, just a few more questions almost done. So describe your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church. Our church. Now, what is that like? What does that mean to you? Your relationship with Ascension.

Shiva: I don't know. There's a Christian like when I, like Ascension Church is my house like that. I feel this is my family. This is my house I'm thinking because I love this family and this church also. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I like a sad, mad that I'm so many times helping me. Like when my husband like passed that time also helping so much. Everything, everything helping. I'm really sorry. Thank you so much. Ascension like a pastor, member, everyone. I say thank you. Thank you for helping.

Interviewer: Well, thank you, Shiva. Happy to help. We help each other. That's what Christian family does.

Shiva: Yeah, I love Christian family.

Interviewer: So thinking about Ascension, is there one thing, is there one thing that you would change about Ascension? Do you think you would do differently or do you think you would change about Ascension Church?

Shiva: Like, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: It's okay.

Shiva: Like, I don't understand.

Interviewer: Okay, let me get some Kleenex for you.

Shiva: I'm sorry.

Interviewer: No, that's okay.

Shiva: Yes, pastor. What did you say?

Interviewer: I was thinking, when you think of Ascension Church, Ascension Lutheran, something, is there anything you would change about the church or something? some way that the church would be a better place for you?

Shiva: I don't know. I don't say anything.

Interviewer: So your child, Samuel, goes to Word of Life School. Can you talk a little bit about why you send Samuel to Word of Life School?

Shiva: Yeah, I say, "Let's go, Samuel. I don't have more money to learn like Ascension School." "No, mommy. I can go other schools because I like this church. Like my family, like a friend." And he like also learn here, study. He no want to go other schools. He loves this school. I say, one time I asked him, "Why you like this Ascension Church?" Because studying good and this all people good. No talk like bad thing, no fighting, no like something bad habit. It's very good, "Mommy, I don't want to go other school." He like, he loves.

And one time, let's go, Samuel. We have to go other state, like a city, you know. He said, no, mommy. Don't go. We stay here. And my daughter also. I don't like. I don't want to go. I want to stay here.

Interviewer: Yeah. Samuel has some very good friends.

Shiva: Yes. He loves.

Interviewer: And hearing about Jesus every day. I'm so happy.

Shiva: Yes. Yes. I asked so many times, Samuel, let's go other school. He said, no,

mommy. I no want to go. I want to finish this school. He loves.

Interviewer: Good. Glad he is here. Glad he is here.

Shiva: Yeah. And also I proud my son because we Christian. And he also learned Christian school. I'm really, really good. And he, he, when he is starting this, the Ascension school. It's too hard for me. Now I'm very happy because he going very good. Good. Yeah. Everything he learn, like speak, writing, everything.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Thank you. So one more question. Is there, is there anything else you would like to share? Anything that you would like to share about your life that you haven't said or anything else you would like to share about you being a Christian? Just anything else you want to tell me? Anything else you want to tell me today?

Shiva: Okay. Sorry. I don't know what I'm saying.

Interviewer: Is there, is there anything else you're thinking that you want to tell me about that maybe you haven't said today? That's okay if not.

Shiva: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thank you, Shiva. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for sharing your life story with me and how God has been at work in your life. That's a very important story for me to hear and for others to hear too. So thank you.

Gagan Gurung

Interviewer: Thank you Gagan for being willing to talk with me today and just share your story about God's work in your life.

Gagan: You're welcome pastor. There's a good opportunity to say something from the heart. You know, when this is the one; physical life, you know. After that in the hand of Jesus, you know. So that's why we need to do better if we got a chance.

Interviewer: Yes With the time we have here on earth. Yes. So today I want to just ask some questions about life in Nepal and Bhutan and then also coming to the United States—and also your faith life, too. So, to begin with can you tell me a little about what was life like for you in Nepal?

Gagan: In Nepal my life, I was a teenager and I spent my teenage and my youths there. I know what is the refugee and lot of desire, you know a lot of things to need, you know. But also we are the human beings and need to struggle with all those things. Yeah, it's not the life of people who live in a regular life. The refugee life is the little different life in Nepal. And we actually the Nepali people are refugees in Nepal because we are the citizens of Bhutan.

Yeah, it's a very difficult—the house, food, and clothing, water—everything is very difficult. We struggle those all the things and have a lot of memories is still in our life. So yeah, we have a lot of struggles.

Still there is Nepali in Nepal refugee in Nepal and Japa, Morong. When we are in Nepal, there are seven refugee camps in Nepal. Now they all bring in a few camps, they keep in a few camps like a Patri and then Baldangi. Baldangi one, two, and three. And Patri yeah no there is no more refugees in a Kusina Aari and Goldap and a Temi. I think they closed all those camps and they bring in one. Still there is a refugee having a lot of struggles.

I spend my life, youth life, teenage life in Nepal refugee camp. I didn't know, I never heard before the Nepal is a country. Even I didn't know I am a Nepali when I was in a Bhutan. So when I came on Nepal being a refugee slowly we grown up on there. So I know I'm a Nepali but as a refugee in Nepal.

Interviewer: So You became a refugee because you were Nepali living in Bhutan. Yeah, can you share a little more about how you and your family became refugees?

Gagan: And actually that is the long story about my dad. He is a citizen of Bhutan and my mom is a citizen of India.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gagan: And I don't know how they meet each other, and then I was born in India. And my

dad was a citizen of Bhutan and he took me in Bhutan and I became a Bhutanese I was born in India, but I'm not a citizen of India and my dad he took me when I grew up a little bit like a kid and he took me in Bhutan and he give the education in Bhutan. And I became a Bhutan citizen.

And Yeah, and because of the Bhutan government there is a lot of issues with the Nepalese traditions like dress, language, the letter, you know, the alphabet and all the religion systems. And then the other activities curriculum that the activities the curriculum those all the things the Bhutan, they don't like the Nepalese programs in Bhutan. And then the Bhutan they close all the system and they close all the Nepali books and they close all the Nepali traditional dress and language. They're not allowed to speak in a public place in our own language. And we cannot wear the regular dress in a public place in a market or office.

So, because of those all the things, I am in the middle. Bhutan governments and the Nepalese people having a lot of the political issues. And then, yeah, and my dad he decides, "Let's go for the few months. We leave the Bhutan for a few months. Not forever, only for a few months." And yeah, and we didn't know about what is political. I was in grade three at that time and even we don't know what are politicians and what is the real religions? What is the culture of dress even we don't know that.

And my dad he I takes us in Nepal because the Bhutan politicians having a lot of issues. And he wants to save us, or he wants to save himself I don't know. So he took us in Nepal because we are Nepali. So then my dad he thought that Nepal is our place we can get that place to hide, you know, to stay. And then we he took us in Nepal and we being a refugee. We didn't know we being a refugee, you know. And he took us in Nepal and he keep us in there. And I asked him, "Dad when we're going back?" And he said, "After a few months".

Slowly my dad he left us alone. He passed away in the refugee camp and we don't know what we do. And my dad he passed away in Nepal refugee camp in Beldagi. And I don't remember it might be like 1992, we became a refugee. In 1993 or 1994 he died. Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.

Nobody asks, "Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you." Nobody asks us. That's the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.

And then yeah as refugees, I spent like a 23 years a refugee. And I became like 35 something. Yeah my years and I totally grown up and I can decide what is good and what is bad, you know.

And slowly I changed my life and then in the refugee camp in Nepal I got the Jesus Christ. From before that I didn't know about the Jesus Christ. I never heard

from anyone. I was born in a Buddhist family. Actually, we say the Gurung tribe is a Buddhist but really we obey all the Hindu system.

Interviewer: Okay

Gagan: We obey all the Hindu system. Our Gurung tribe it says we are the Buddhist, but we all connected with the Hindus, you know.

Interviewer: So kind of a combination between Hinduism and Buddhism?

Gagan: Yeah, and then yeah, and every times if we have any programs, we need to use the llama, you know, and the priest of the Buddhist we use a llama and those who wear orange dress.

Interviewer: Yes.

Gagan: Yeah, and then yeah and I didn't know when I became a refugee and when I grown up and then I know we are the Hindus and Buddhist. Before that we didn't know we are Hindus or Buddhist.

So yeah, and then slowly I grow up and we grow up my sisters my brother and myself when we grown up on the refugee camp. And then after that the struggles on many things. And then one person God sent me at my home and He shared about the Jesus Christ. And we deny that day. No, we are the Buddhist We are the Hindus. We have a lot of friends, families. They all are Buddhist and Hindus Thank you for sharing your Good news, but I don't want it.

First, we reject and he gone back home and then the other time he never tired to share the Gospel. And another time he came again and he called me from his home. And he started sharing the Jesus Christ. That is the kind of sunset time, you know.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gagan: And there is no light electricity, you know, every house has a Kerosene lamp, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Gagan: Yeah, and then he put the one kerosene lamp on the on a table and he demonstrate through that lamp about the Jesus Christ sharing the gospel. Gagan, what do you think? Just now I burn this lamp. Are you ready to worship him? Because I turn on the light the Hindu people Buddhist people, they put down the light when they first blink the light, you know. And he asked me not to do that. This is only the lamp is man-made. Who made the man? We need to worship him, and not a man-made things. We need to worship who made the man who made the human and

through that he shared the Gospel. And then I say, "Thank you pastor for sharing the Gospel. I'm okay. It's good. Give me a time. I'm not saying I didn't say okay. I agree. Let's Pray for me."

And then he gone and I gone home to and slowly my all the families they already accepted the Jesus Christ. I didn't know that. And they started to go to church. My elder brother and my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, they all started to go to church and I don't know.

And then, yeah, so the time comes they decide to baptize my family and I don't want to be baptized. So, I told to my family also do not baptize right now. And they denied to baptize. And slowly they start to take me to a church also and I went with family because I saw the little changes in my family, my brother, my sister-in-law my brother's wife. I saw that something changing, you know. And I start to follow them. And when we start to follow, I start to go to church and I made new friends, you know But also I just for enjoy and for fun I went to church every week Sunday, you know.

So slowly one day my pastor he decide we are ready to go to up next time we all are ready to go to a be baptized. And I didn't say to my family do not go this time. I didn't say them and they told me, "Let's do it Gagan. Let's do together baptize." And I say, "Okay, let's go ahead. Let's get baptized. This is a good time to go to Jesus Christ. Let's baptize."

And then the when the times comes for the baptism, you know, I told to my family brother, "I'll go little before you before you." Okay hour before and my brother say, "Okay I go because I gonna see the place where we're going to baptize." And I told to pastor, "This is the good place for baptize."

But when I went on the baptism place before pastors came before my family came before the other church members came from the baptism place, I don't know who took me from there to the high mountains in the temple. I didn't know that. How I got that spirit to go to the temple from that baptism. Fled from the river. This is very far like a five to six hour by walk.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Gagan: And I don't know who took me on there. And then I worshiped in the temples and I didn't know. And then when I came back home at midnight immediately when I worship in the temple and I came back home. And then when I back home all my families was asleep. You know at midnight.

And earlier in the morning my brother he asking me question, "Where you been? I didn't see you the baptism place we got baptized. We got baptized, my wife myself. How about you, what your next?" My brother asking a lot of questions and I say, "Forgive me. I don't know. I went in the baptism place, but who took

me from there to the high mountain? Temple in the Hindu temple. Yeah, the top temple. Who took me on there I don't know.”

And I asked forgive my brother He said it's okay. Do not miss next time, you know. But after a long time I start to follow my father and I listened to my pastor. But also I didn't understand about the Bible. I just follow. I go to church and come back enjoy church. There is a youth, you know. There is my years level friends and just enjoy there When I go to church, I being like kind of the Christian. When I leave the church, I being like a Hindu I say Buddhist. I didn't know what is the difference between you know. I'm a blind I didn't know what is the different between.

And I start to go to church I start to visit pastors and I give a good relationship with pastor and his son, you know. But I'm not a real spiritually, but just pretending. Just being like I'm a good Christian.

Interviewer: Yes.

Gagan: My pastor he decides to send me the Bible college. Kind of seminary, you know?

Interviewer: Yes.

Gagan: And my brother also he's agreed to send me to college. And yeah I went to send me to Bible college Punebher. There's a different language peoples on there. Yeah, and I stay on there like six months. They give us a little English and little Hindi, you know. They mix, and yeah on there. I got the baptize in a Bible college at the Bible college.

The times because of when I was there every test I became a fail. Zero mark every test I became a fail. So if the teacher they give me the any memory verse I forget it. If the teacher give me any homework, I forget it. I got zero every test.

One day our class of that the principal he decide for the long whole night chain prayer. I never did that. I don't have experience with that. Listen I want to learn I need to have a new experience with this all the guys. This is my new experience. I don't know what we get when we do this chain prayer when we do the prayer. When we do the fast? What we get? I don't know but let's do it.

My chain prayer time was a 11:30 for half an hour. And I don't know who make us wake up to prayer I didn't know that anything. Just I went in my bed and I sleep, I don't know. And then the guys who were before me, they wake up me. “Gagan be ready. Okay now I'm going a prayer after that your turn after half an hour.” That is an in a November. Very frozen, very cool year There's a there's a foggy night, very foggy. And there is no heater. There is no AC. You know, in Asia most of country there is no AC and heater, even the hot; even then cool. It doesn't matter. Just depend a blanket.

And then yeah, he wake up me before he go. And I try to wake up and I wake up and then he went and then I almost went to sleep, you know. And my one friend she make me wake up again this time A two minute left go we need to walk a little bit like a like a five minute. We need to walk to go to the room to pray in the midnight, 11:30. And I went on there and there is a guy, he's praying on there. And he got my sound and he wake up and my turn.

And he gone and I carried the blanket, you know, there is a little foggy night and cool, you know, and I cover my body with all the blanket. And then I said kind of prayer, you know, but I don't know what I need to say to pray. What word we need to use, what I need to ask, what I need to say. I don't know just I say, just I say, "Thank you. Thank you." Thank you I don't have any things to say, other words to say. No, I don't have my mouth kind of like, you know, I cannot say any the good things. I cannot say about the Bible word from my mouth. Just I said, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." Thank you whom I give thanks to. I don't know. Just I give a thanks. Thanks and suddenly I see just like, did you know the Acts chapter two.

Interviewer: Yes. Yeah, I think the Day of Pentecost.

Gagan: Yes, I never read that book I never heard that book I never think it's on there in a Bible. On that night when I was pretending kind of the prayer, you know. Suddenly I feel warm. I feel a warm, totally warm my body. And something is moving on my head. I feel that the room where I was praying, you know, the room was totally light. But there is no light. There is no real light, but I feel there is a light around on me. I became a warm and when I done the prayer my turn off, you know, I don't know when I did throw my blanket in the ground. And I asked my friend, "Did you see on the light on here? Did anybody did turn on the light on here?" "No."

And when back to my bed I turn on the Bible I can read it. I can understand totally from there. And then I feel that God's angel came on there and blessed me to understand the Bible. When I read on there when I read the Bible, wow, everything clear—Old Testament, New Testament. All for me. I can understand. I can read. I can explain. And from there I got the good score also in the Bible college. From there I got a little pass on there.

And yeah, after a few months the school founder they organized the big gospel program. And the founder they asked us, you know, middle of the public, "Anyone who are here from our Bible college not baptized?" I don't know who tell him I didn't tell him. I don't know how I raised my hand. I don't know who did it. I don't know I raised my hand. Tears come from my eyes I didn't know who raised my hand? I am very a shy guy. I didn't want to come forward for anything. I don't know who raised up my hand and tears come from my eyes. And I proclaim the words, "I'm ready for baptize. Still I'm not baptized." Now I want to

be baptized. I raise my hand all together four people on there in a Bible college. There is a non-baptized including me.

Interviewer: And that's where you were baptized at the Bible college.

Gagan: My pastor, he didn't baptize me. But I got baptized in a Bible college. From there I tried to share His love. I tried to save His people from the worldly place. And then I when I came back home when I done my Bible class six months. When I came on my back home, refugee camp totally different. I saw the difference before I am okay. No, I saw the different very totally different. People are doing bad things, eating bad things, you know thinking the bad things, talking the bad things. I saw that totally different.

Then I feel that this is the not real life. The real life is in Jesus Christ. And I start to go to church continually and I involved regularly with youth fellowships and every church program. You know, I started to involve on there and slowly God grace me up and up and up. Still I am worshipping the God Jesus Christ.

Yeah in Nepal refugee camp, I got the Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe be I am still in a Hindus or Buddhist.

Interviewer: That's right.

Gagan: Maybe it's God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.

Interviewer: Amen. Thank you, Gagan, for sharing God's work in your life. That's a beautiful story of how God has worked in your life.

Gagan. Yes pastor. Yes. Yeah, I never tired to share the gospels about that about how I became a Jesus Christ, you know. I never tired really pastor. I never tried every time I share to people every time I tell to my children also how I became a Jesus, how I accepted Jesus Christ, how I was I am before. Accepting the Jesus Christ, you know, this is my forever testimony. For the people those who are not in a Jesus Christ still.

Interviewer: So, when you when you think about your baptism, how does your baptism change your relationship with God? But how and then also how does your baptism change your relationship with other people too? With other people maybe who are baptized?

Gagan: Baptism, I never know all the Christians they have a system. For accepting of Jesus Christ in the middle of the people, you know. And they're doing the baptisms in the water. I didn't know those all the system in the Christianity, you know. And when I saw, I heard, all the things and when I became baptized and

when the Christian peoples, when the peoples they do the baptism, you know, and they dedicate their life in Christ. They cannot lie after that. They cannot say after that, "I'm a Hindu." They cannot say after that, "I am a Buddhist." They cannot say, "I am not a Christian," when they got the baptism they totally submitted their life in Christ. Because, Jesus, he died for us. Jesus he born for us. Jesus he resurrected from the dead for us.

That is the symbol of the baptism. That means we need to submit our life in the Christ. From there we cannot be together with the world of worldly people. That's the reason we cannot do what the worldly people they do. With a little different than them from baptism, I learned those all the things I'm the baptism guy. Baptized people Jesus his blood from my head He cleaned up all my sin. Now I cannot go through that again. The clay place, the sinner place, the dirty things. I cannot do that again. This keep us separate and we can see the worldly peoples and we can see the peoples are doing what they're doing, you know. We can see that clearly because we need to see from the Bible. What the peoples are doing? And it's give us a clearly we are the different from them, those who are not accepting the Jesus Christ still. Yeah, that's the difference.

They make us the different, very different, for talking, for relationship. for all the system, the family system. We have to be totally different than the other. Yeah, that's not, it's not saying just like a Christian it's easy to say the Christian. But it's not easy to us. The given the life in the Christ, every day we need to be a sacrifice for his grace. Yeah. Very nice. Yeah, it's a very different when I became a baptism, totally different

Interviewer: Thank you, Gagan. Yeah, exactly God's work again in our life and baptism sets apart God's people.

When you became a Christian, was there any in the refugee camp or your family or community—was there any persecution? Or was anyone mean to you, give you a hard time, because you became a Christian?

Gagan: Yeah pastor. Yeah, that's a good question. Yeah. Yeah This is my one best friend. Kind of I grown with him. And mostly I eat a food with him also. And I sleep with him. I go to school with him. I come back home with him. I go to a plane with him. One day I never expect that word. One day his mother said to me, "I'm sorry. He is not here." Now she already passed, you know. So, yeah I'm going to tell her, you know. And this time, uh, one day she told me that, "Gagan do not come anymore to my house. Do not work, do not eat, do not make friends with my son." She told me that. I never expect that. And I feel something inside, you know. Something paining inside. Why this mom telling this all the things on me? I'm a part of her son. I spent a lot of years with her son and in his home. I feel some things.

But, you know, God brings her in to our church. I didn't say any things to her on

that time. I say, "Okay auntie, okay." But after a few months, a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me that, Gagan, "I'm sorry. I tell you the bad word on that time. I tell you don't come at my home. I did wrong. I'm sorry." She said that, and I say, "It's okay every people they do that those who don't understand about the Jesus' love. Every people they do that, it's normal auntie. It's okay." She became a good Christian. She died in America. She came in America and after that she died.

Interviewer: Yeah One day we'll see her in heaven.

Gagan: Yeah, we will. We will, yeah, sure. We had hoped that, I quit my girlfriend also. I quit my girlfriend is not a Christian, not a Christian. And I quit my best friend. I quit seeing bad movies. I quit to worship the gods. I quit the where is the bad people. Together I quit to being there like, you know, the Psalm chapter one. I separated from those all because they're talking, they're thinking, they're everything, is different. How can I be on there? No, it's not good. My heart says go away go away.

And one by one I try to make them a Jesus Christ. I try to preach the Jesus Christ, slowly slowly. Yeah, some of they became Christians. Some they call me still. Yeah, some they became a Christian, some are still not. Yeah, my all the friends.

Interviewer: Yeah. Thank you. No one is beyond the work of the Holy Spirit. That's beautiful.

Yes, the other thing I want to talk about is coming to the United States. What do you think the hardest part of coming to the United States was? As a refugee coming to the United States, coming to St. Louis, what was difficult about that?

Gagan: Do you know when I buy a good laptop, when I buy a good laptop, it's a very expensive good one. They have a good memory on there. If I give those laptops to my daughter, Elena, she is two years old, how she to use that? Same thing in us our life. We spend our life in a refugee camp. We know a lot of things about the America. Wow, that's the dream country, you know. That is the great country. There's the higher educated peoples are there. That's very different than our place where we are feeling something nervous in heart. When we processing for the United States, you know, when we plan to come a United States. Everything is making a talking by ourselves in heart, you know. Heart and minds talking to each other. There is no our language, there is no our letter, there is no our food, there is no our system, there is no my size people.

There is a very difference in the United States, but We don't have any choice. God wants to send us. When God decides, we don't have choice. You know the Jonah chapter one.

Interviewer: Yes, God he wants to send him to Nineveh, right?

Gagan: Yes, but he went to Tarshis, what we say?

Interviewer: Tarshish. Yeah, the other direction.

Gagan: Yeah but finally he came he go to the Nineveh, because the giant fish help him to go on there and he realizes all the things in the fish belly. The same things the God want to send on here, we cannot run anywhere. Then when I got that opportunity when I passed every my test, now I need to be ready anytime. They're gonna send the ticket for the plane.

So many things happen on heart. What I need to do there? I don't know nothing. What I need to do there? I don't know nothing. I don't know English. I cannot understand English. I know only my language. I can speak a little bit Hindi, you know—a little bit the Bhutan language. Bhutan language one or two words. Some Hindi language, and some Nepali language. I don't know the English. How can I understand? How can I share my problems? How do they understand me? Those all the things happening in my mind.

But the hardest problem, the real problem, is on here is food for us. In the journey time when the tickets come when the plane flight comes, you know. The boarding pass comes and the one the air hostess, or someone, they give me the burger. I never seen those all the things. Green sauce on it. That is the two bread, and the top and the bottom there is some kind of biscuit. But there's the ham. I never eat that one before. I scared to eat in a plane. She gave me for to eat. They thought I'm hungry. I'm really hungry. But I don't know how to eat this one and I'm bringing it on here. I give to Shiva. She is happy because she is here four or three years before me. And she knows what is the burger. She is happy to receive those all the things.

Yeah, most important is that food is the important for us on here. But slowly we find out the Asian market on here we can get everything. What we have in Nepal. What we have in the refugee camp, what we have in Bhutan we have everything's on here. But we think, we think different, you know. But God thinks different way. He provide us everything's on here. Slowly we find out everything's new. We are okay. I can eat a pizza. I can eat a hot dog.

One day that's real in my life I went in a McDonald's. Many people they asked me many things to eat, you know, from the McDonald's. And I went on there I don't know. I don't have a car on that time. I don't have a cycle on that time. I stand with the car in the drive-through. And the car goes, and I went on there and then the supposed to there is a blinking sounds they need to be there inside, you know, the cars drive sounds. In they hear the cars drive sound, you know, and then they say "How may I help you?" You know, but there is nobody asking me anything. I was standing on there. The car is honking. You know, honking at me I don't know why he's doing that one. That is a normal in my back country honking the wrong horn. You know. that is normal in my country. They're honking at me. I

don't know.

That's I stay on there and He came and told me no, you cannot stay here. This is the driveway. I don't know what is driveway. What is the sitting way? Then he told me go to a front end window, and he told me to go to the front window and I went on the window in there. "How may I help you sir?" I'm not sir. I'm not a sir, but they're asking me, "How may I help you." Sure they respect me. Now I know he's respecting me, and I say, "I'm not a sir. I'm a Gagan."

And I asked him give me a four hamburger. He understand different. He bring me a four hamburgers. I thought I tried to ask a number four number four. Yes, hamburger one, but I said give me a four hamburger. That is not his mistake that's my mistake. That's my mistake, and what I do this all of these hamburgers? I give to a friend. I eat a one and I give to a friend. Those are the things happen in my life still when I go to McDonald's I ask for French fries. They give me a sometime a Sprite the drink I actually give me a one Sprite. They give me a Sprite It's right. It's right. Oh, okay. They still don't understand. Yeah, so but those all the things are normal things nowadays. Yeah, I understand them and I repeat. Did you understand what I asked and say, "One Sprite?" No one regular fries, and then Okay. Those are the things happen in our life.

Yes, even sometimes I'm getting in a struggle, you know. What do I say, you know, how can I ask for help? You know? I didn't know. Nobody knows my language. I cannot share my language. Is happen in our life. You know when I came on we came on here with no friends. No one our skin color friends. No one knows our language friends on here, you know.

But Christians, the CFNA, the Christian Friends of America. Oh, wow they do help me a lot. They do help me a lot. They those are The Christian Friends of New Americans. Dr. Buckman is my first friend in America. He's my first friend. He made me a good friend and first friend and yeah. And he helped me to how to survive, you know, he teach me how to make a coffee. I've never seen a coffee in my country. I never drink. He teach me how to make a coffee And still I am making a coffee and I give a thanks to Dr. Buckman and Jesus also. Yeah he teach me how to make a coffee you can ask the Dr. Buckman. One or two times I make a mistake is too dark, you know. So hard to drink, you know. So yeah, and then slowly I now make a normal one. Yeah, I can do it by myself now.

Yeah, yeah and the Christian Friends of New Americans, CFNA, they did help us a lot. You know when we came on here I came on here 2013. Alone I came alone. No friends, no family, I was alone on there. But a lot of family on there same language, same system, we can share, we can talk everything, you know. But here I came alone. Stay alone. There is no friend. But the CFNA I got the good friends. And they keep me. They save me. They make me busy on there and I work still. I work with the CFNA as the Nepali facilitator.

Yeah, yeah, there's a lot of things are struggling here. Yeah, I got a chance for the grammar ESL class in the International Institute Yeah, I got a couple of months I got a chance to read English on there good, but still I'm struggling with the English.

Interviewer: You're doing great. Thank you. So I was going to ask you about Ascension too. So what is one thing that you like about Ascension Lutheran Church?

Gagan: Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath. And what next we can think. Before that we didn't know about the Ascension Church. Through CFNA they Join us on the Ascension Church.

Even we didn't know the Lutheran Christian. Lutheran also when we are in Nepal maybe there is some Lutheran churches are in Nepal, but we never heard. I accept the Jesus Christ through the Pentecostal church and I got a church plant class from the Baptist class school. And I got a college in a Pentecostal school. And when I came on here, I heard of the Lutherans and I read about the Lutherans in my Bible college time. About the Lutheran, you know Martin Luther, I read about him. Only about how Martin Luther he fights with the with the catholic, you know. I know only those stories.

But when I came out here, there is a Lutheran churches. I didn't know that they believe. How they are believed. Do they believe in Trinity God or not? Do they believe in prayer or not? Those all the things having a lot of questions in my mind. And when I join on the Ascension Lutheran church all the things are here what I thought in my mind. Same beliefs, same way to follow the Jesus Christ. And when we became members of Ascension Church still we are very safe. They help us a lot. Even the Ascension Church they help us our citizen class time. The participant members, you know. We need to bring our families, you know. We don't have big family on there. We have a family Ascension Church. So we can call them in our citizen time and Pastor Clark was there my citizenship time, you know. Yes, yeah a lot of our friends was there from the Lutheran churches. In my citizens time those all are my family. And still I have a picture of those all the things.

Yeah, so yeah Ascension church. They did a lot of help us Because of this is our home. We got safe on here. They teach us. They give us. They lead us how to be safe in Christ. They lead us Ascension Church lead us to be a good spiritual life in Christ. Yeah, and I don't have I don't have that much of word to explain those all the things. Might be I messed up somewhere. So yeah.

Interviewer: No, thank you.

Gagan: Every time I give a thanks to the Ascension Church and members and pastors. Every time we give a thanks because one day my wife, she got a ticket speeding

ticket. Actually, she was not speeding she says that but also police stopped her when she was coming from the job in the midnight like at 12 o'clock. She got a ticket. She didn't know why. She got a ticket. She don't have a good English, too. So she says speeding and we don't know where we go. To whom we need to talk, you know, how we paid the ticket? We don't know. And I share all the things with my Pastor Clark from the Ascension Church. I share everything to him and he provide us how to work for that ticket. Even I didn't pay it. I don't want to ask who paid those all the things, but I give a thanks to Jesus. The Ascension Church help us a lot.

Interviewer: Happy to help, and Ascension is better because of you and the Nepali people.

Gagan. Thank you. Yeah, so my wife she is very happy because she got those ticket and she's very nervous, you know. What is next? What I need to do? So we feel guilty, you know, and what is next we need help. We don't have the higher level friends on here, but only we have a hope for the church people. And we share everything to the church and pastors and all is clear.

Interviewer: Yeah good. Yeah the next question is, what is one thing that you would change about Ascension Lutheran? Is there something that you would change about our church, or do differently?

Gagan: Can you make it a little clearer?

Interviewer: So thinking about Ascension Lutheran, is there something that you would change about Ascension or do differently here at Ascension?

Gagan: No, what I expect everything is okay. What I needed everything is okay. They take care of us. They take care of the immigration. They try to help the immigrations. And then the students. Everything most of things they cover it. I even I didn't see that space about to say I'll to do at these things. Everything's okay. Okay, I don't have any things They are ready to do. What is the next? Okay, but I'm okay. That is good. There is nothing to change keep it on, okay. To help the needed people. That's it.

Interviewer: Good. I guess another way to put that question is there anything that might help you, or the Nepali, people have a closer connection to Ascension? Is there anything that would help that?

Gagan: Yeah, a lot of a lot of things the Ascension Church they do help a lot of things, you know. Do you know the Baal and Dil?

Interviewer: Yes, yeah Baal and Dil.

Gagan. Yes, they got a lot of troubles.

Interviewer: Yes, they did.

Gagan: They got a gunshot in the chest.

Interviewer: I remember, I remember Baal.

Gagan: Yeah that time also the Ascension Church, they have a lot of things to paying a house rent. Oh my God, they are still all the things. Are there the those the family are thinking are not still I'm thinking those all the things, you know. And that time the same time they have a totally they lost their property, you know. And they don't have the most of money they don't have the income, you know. And that time same time they have a problem for the AC and heater. The Ascension Church they help. It's not easy it's not easy to pay those all the things. It's not easy to get the help those all the things. Yeah.

Interviewer: Well good. Happy to help.

Gagan: Oh my God.

Interviewer: So we're almost done, Gagan. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your life? About your life your life as a Christian? Anything else that maybe you thought of while we've been talking that you wanted to share?

Gagan: No, everything is fine. Because I know I'm in a safe church. I'm knowing I'm in a safe community, you know. I got a good church members, Ascension Church. I got a good pastor, you know. And give me the opportunity to be a Nepali evangelist, you know. And they keep us still I saw in a paper. I'm an evangelist of God, you know. Evangelist of gospel and yeah. And then yeah, everything is okay and good and well, so yeah. Yeah, I don't have nothing. Yeah, everything is okay and just give a thanks from my heart. Yeah, every time, yeah. So yeah, all the families are safe on here. My families are good on here.

My son he got a good school on here. Yes Ascension Lutheran Church, Word of Life my son he liked those school. And his son here helping a lot of from Ascension Church. Most of people they're paying us so high. Ascension Church they give us a good amount to pay for the school. It's not easy to get those school from the good amount, you know. So, yeah, we have a thanks for those all the things.

Interviewer: Good. So, what has been good about sending your son, Ethan, to Word of Life School?

Gagan: Mostly we decide to send our kids on here. One is shaped good education, good living, and good for the Bible study. For the Bible, he knows all the stories from the Bible. When we asked about the Noah, he tell me about it. He start to telling them about the Noah's history. He knows most of the Bible story. There's those

all the things I needed, not only the worldly things. Who made the plane? Who made who began first the world war? Not only those things, we need to teach from beginning our kids, Who is Jesus Christ?

That's why the Ascension Church helps our kids to learn about the Jesus also as well as us in a worldly education, as well as in a Bible education. That's why I decide to my send my son on here. And mostly my people I request to them all to send their kids in a good Christian school. Yes, still our peoples are here, Nabin, you know, so they start.

Interviewer: Yes, good to see his children here, too. It's good to see. That's wonderful. Yeah, and this is where we send our children too. Very blessed to have Word of Life.

Gagan: One, two, three, four, five, or six Nepali kids are here, right?

Interviewer: Yes, you're right and they're doing great. They're very good students.

Gagan: They all like it. Yeah, they all enjoy. They all are happy. No fight. Not any corruption and no danger. Everything is safe and good. Yeah, that's the I like that's why the dead like from the son protection. That's why the Jesus love us to protect us from the danger of worldly things.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah a safe place to hear about Jesus and have a good education. Yeah well, that's all my questions Gagan. And thank you so much for sharing your story of God's work in your life—from Nepal to the United States and to Ascension, and CFNA. Thank you very much.

Gagan: Yeah pastor. I love to share about the Jesus Christ. I love to share about my testimony, you know. There's a good opportunity to share from what I have in my heart, you know. Nobody asks how you became a Jesus Christ. They cannot spend their time with me like this, you know. And I can share from my heart things, you know from the bottom. No, I feel like a, you know, little light because I got a chance to share my heart, you know. About how I got the Jesus Christ. How I being a Christian. How I struggles my life and yeah forever from my generations. How long it goes? I don't know. It's depending on God. And the people I tell them all follow Jesus Christ. My dad he died in a Hindus or Buddhists, you know. He passed away when we are Hindus and Buddhists. From me all the generations need to be a Christian.

Interviewer: Yes

Gagan: Now I'm a Christian. My son Christian now. My son in law need to be a Christian the great great great great 100 great son need to be a Christian. Need to be a follower of Jesus Christ at the end of this world. Yes, until Jesus returns. Yeah, and then I'll be together with them in heaven. That's the only my thought is that, "How we can share the gospel?" My mind says, "How can I get the time to share

the gospel?" You know, "How can I help my kids to grow up in a Christ?"

I don't have that much of mine. In my question in my mind how I earned the money from the company. I don't want too much money to earn it. You know, I don't want to be my bank account. I need to how to share the gospel to the Jesus Christ. I need those time How can I spend with the with the people to sharing the Jesus Christ?

Interviewer: Yes.

Gagan: You know, how can I get a good time and opportunity to share from my heart? The spiritual time. Just like here now I'm here for the spiritual time to sharing from my mind and my heart. How I feel in Jesus, you know, Jesus Christ, that's all the things I like to be. I don't have a big politician and big things to earn the money. I have only things that how can I share the gospel to the peoples and bring in the church?

Interviewer: And that's what's most important. That's what lasts forever and ever.

Gagan: Yeah, this is a good time to good time to share from the heart. Yeah, I spend on my life. I'm born in India. Because my mom is Indian she has a right to birth me in India, you know. You know and when I became a little grown up they start to eating by myself. And my dad he took me from the India to Bhutan and I became a citizen of Bhutan. And the corruption scams the politician corruption scam in Bhutan 1992. We became a refugee in 1992 in Nepal. But the God has a different grace. Because he gave an opportunity to come in a different developed country: America, Canada, Australia, Denmark. There is a lot of Bhutanese Nepalis are spreading on this world.

Interviewer: Yes, there is.

Gagan: Now I am the lucky one who got the good opportunity to come in the United States. That's why I find the good God's people on here and I happy.

Interviewer: Good.

Interviewer: Yeah, and a U.S. Citizen now, too.

Gagan: Yeah. Yeah, I became a unit United States of citizen um 2000, uh I forget it. Um, 2004. No, maybe 2017 or 18? Maybe something like that hold on I have 23 2001 time 2021.

Interviewer: Yeah, could be was it during Covid? I think it was during Covid.

Gagan: My daughter, she's gonna be at three next October. And that same month I became a citizen in October. Yes 2021, I became a citizen.

Interviewer: I'm happy to celebrate. That's wonderful.

Gagan: I don't have any pressure now. I'm free I can go to any country. Being a citizen of United States, I can go heaven citizen of his grace Jesus Christ. Thank you. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah to be a citizen of heaven and of the U.S. Well, thank you Gagan again. Thanks for your time.

Gagan: Thank you pastor for that good opportunity.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's right. So your story encourages me too, and many others. So, thank you.

APPENDIX TWO

PORTIONS OF THE ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE SERMON SERIES VIDEOS

Sermon #1 What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?

John: And with my family, in 1992, I came to Nepal, and they kicked us out from our country, Bhutan, and we landed in Nepal, in eastern part of Nepal. And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it's very tough and not easy. There's nothing to eat, and there's no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too. So at the time, I was like a very young guy, like five years old. At the age of five, I came to Nepal, and it was very tough.

So yeah, in this way, we came to Nepal, and in the beginning, I heard from my parents that a lot of people, are dying from sickness. They're suffering from different kinds of disease, and they died, a lot of people. They died from different kinds of sickness, and they're suffering from the sickness and some diseases. Yeah. So in this way, we landed in Nepal, and that's all.

Meena: In our country, we called that thatch and bamboo. Bamboo. And bed also bamboo. Before bamboo bed, we had mud. Mud make a mud bed and sleep over that. And sometimes when we sleep on the mud bed, sometimes the insect bite our ear. It's very hard. The house also sometimes too much rain, sometimes too much rain, it will drop the water and we make cover with plastic and we sleep like that. That's very hard.

Shiva: Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much. Like a new place, new, like everything new. But my life is, yeah, that time I'm younger, this time not bad, not good, but it's too hard.

Now I'm feeling it's too hard because we can go other, like, place, go to work and bring money. We have to stay the inside and what did the government give me, then we have to accept and eat instead.

Gagan: And my dad he I takes us in Nepal because the Bhutan politicians having a lot of issues. And he wants to save us, or he wants to save himself I don't know. So he took us in Nepal because we are Nepali. So then my dad he thought that Nepal is our place we can get that place to hide, you know, to stay. And then we he took us in Nepal and we being a refugee. We didn't know we being a refugee, you know. And he took us in Nepal and he keep us in there. And I asked him, "Dad when we're going back?" And he said, "After a few months".

Slowly my dad he left us alone. He passed away in the refugee camp and we don't know what we do. And my dad he passed away in Nepal refugee camp in Beldagi. And I don't remember it might be like 1992, we became a refugee. In 1993 or 1994 he died. Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.

Nobody asks, "Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you." Nobody asks us. That's the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.

And then yeah as refugees, I spent like a 23 years a refugee. And I became like 35 something. Yeah my years and I totally grown up and I can decide what is good and what is bad, you know.

And slowly I changed my life and then in the refugee camp in Nepal I got the Jesus Christ. From before that I didn't know about the Jesus Christ. I never heard from anyone.

Yeah in Nepal refugee camp, I got the Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe be I am still in a Hindus or Buddhist.

Maybe it's God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.

Sermon #2 Were there times when you were persecuted for being a Christian?

John: So after that, the neighbor, my community, they did not allow me to go inside their house. And I remember one moment that happens in my life, I used to call her my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in the kitchen and I ate food. But one day she heard about me that I became a Christian. And then when I was inside her kitchen, she beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me that, now you became a Christian. Now you're not going to come inside my house because you're not good for me and now you're a Christian boy. So I don't allow you to enter inside my house. And that's very painful and it's broken my heart. And then I never go from next time.

Meena: Yeah, some people they are Christian but my parents they don't want to, you know, Christian is the lower caste, do not go and talk, do not eat with them. They say this one. They think that Christian people is a lower caste people. They say this one.

Shiva: I don't know about Bhutan, but Nepal. If I carry the Bible and some people like this and throw away and, you know, the people hate Jesus. Because they don't like Jesus. Sometimes like, oh, yes, Jesus, you're no, good. You're like that.

Yes. Jesus no good. Your God no good. You're Christian. If I the Hindu people eat like something, if I Christian people touching, oh, you no good. Why am I touch food? No, you go away. Don't come near and don't touch my food like this. Like go.

But in Nepal, like this. Like a thief. You know thief. Like stolen. Like this going. Oh, somebody look at me. Someone know can see me and he go and Christian family group like one group and they starting Bible and talks about Jesus and the finish time. And he running like this and go home. Like a secret. Yes, secret. Now openly. Oh my Lord. And I'm thinking, "Thank you, Jesus." You sending me my family here because Jesus call me. Come on. You are free here. Oh my God.

Gagan: Yeah This is my one best friend. Kind of I grown with him. And mostly I eat a food with him also. And I sleep with him. I go to school with him. I come back home with him. I go to a plane with him. One day I never expect that word. One day his mother said to me, "I'm sorry. He is not here." Now she already passed, you know. So, yeah I'm going to tell her, you know. And this time, uh, one day she told me that, "Gagan do not come anymore to my house. Do not work, do not eat, do not make friends with my son." She told me that. I never expect that. And I feel something inside, you know. Something paining inside. Why this mom telling this all the things on me? I'm a part of her son. I spent a lot of years with her son and in his home. I feel some things.

But, you know, God brings her in to our church. I didn't say any things to her on that time. I say, "Okay auntie, okay." But after a few months, a few years, she

became a Christian in our church. And she told me that, Gagan, "I'm sorry. I tell you the bad word on that time. I tell you don't come at my home. I did wrong. I'm sorry." She said that, and I say, "It's okay every people they do that those who don't understand about the Jesus' love. Every people they do that, it's normal auntie. It's okay." She became a good Christian. She died in America. She came in America and after that she died.

Sermon #3 How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?

John: So, baptism is not only the plain water, but baptism is that the word of God is connected with the water. And then it's very important to do the baptism and to baptize in Christ.

Yeah, so when we baptize in Christ, I think Nepali people and the American people, so I already told you that we are the children of God and we became the children of God. So, there is no any discrimination, no any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the children of Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ. We all are in brother and sister in Christ. So, there is no more any denomination, no more any discrimination. So, we all are same in Christ and brother and sister in Christ when we baptize. And we became a child of God.

Yeah. Especially, the Ascension people are very helpful. They are very kind and they are honest. And they are like when someone is in need for physical help or in spiritual or mental help, they are ready to help spiritually or physically or mentally or sometimes economically also.

And also, another thing that Ascension Church is important is they are doing the blessing service. And also, the Nepali people, they are affiliated with them. And also, we are helping to read the Bible verses in Nepali. And these are the things that Ascension Lutheran Church provides us, that opportunity to serve the Lord even in different languages like Nepali, English. So, this could be very helpful for me and also the Nepali community. These are the things that could be very helpful for the Nepali community, the Nepali congregation, the Nepali people from the Ascension Lutheran Church.

Meena: Ascension Lutheran when we become a membership every parts everything help us. They pray, our pastor, you pray for us there's a good you know every time, every difficult situation also you give hand. You know we help every time. Helping heart you know as very good.

Shiva: Yes. Now I'm so happy, we have to best with my family, like a Christian family, like Ascension Church, the Ascension Church, too much helping me, really, really good.

Like Ascension Church is my house like that. I feel this is my family. This is my house I'm thinking because I love this family and this church also. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I like a sad, mad that I'm so many times helping me. Like when my husband like passed that time also helping so much. Everything, everything helping. I'm really sorry. Thank you so much. Ascension like a pastor, member, everyone. I say thank you. Thank you for helping.

Gagan:

Yes, even sometimes I'm getting in a struggle, you know. What do I say, you know, how can I ask for help? You know? I didn't know. Nobody knows my language. I cannot share my language. It happens in our life. You know when I came on we came on here with no friends. No one our skin color friends. No one knows our language friends on here, you know.

Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath. And what next we can think. Before that we didn't know about the Ascension Church. Through CFNA they Join us on the Ascension Church.

Yeah, so yeah ascension church. They did a lot of help us Because of this is our home. We got safe on here. They teach us. They give us. They lead us how to be safe in Christ. They lead us Ascension Church lead us to be a good spiritual life in Christ.

APPENDIX THREE

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS MEANING UNITS

Tika “John” Gurung

1. And then the Bhutan government, they started sending the police and army in different parts of the village and torturing the people in Bhutan. And some are put into the jail, and some are killed, and they started doing some sexual harassment.

Theme: Cultural Discrimination

Theologically Transformed: Judgement against someone based on the cultural aspects of his or her life rather than viewing the person as one who is created by God and for whom Christ died is discrimination.

2. And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it's very tough and not easy. There's nothing to eat, and there's no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too.

Theme: Lack of Citizenship

Theologically Transformed: We are created to belong to community and have a place to call home, but the refugee has no place in which to be a citizen.

3. In Nepal, we have no land, we have no citizenship, and we became a refugee, and we landed in eastern part of Nepal. And it was very broken, tough, and we are suffering. It was very painful.

Theme: Refugee Experience

Theologically Transformed: Rather than showing compassion for neighbor, those placed in refugee camps are treated as unwanted.

4. And then they talked to me about Christ, they talked to me about Jesus Christ, like they evangelized me and then they started telling me about Jesus is our life Savior.

Theme: Coming to Faith in Christ

Theologically Transformed: The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives now and for eternity.

5. And one day when I came from my school and then when I was sitting inside my room, I saw 10, 12 people are gathering. The old people are gathering around my house and then they're sitting inside my house. And they told me that, now you became a Christian and then now you have to leave Christ right away and you became a Buddhist priest.

Theme: Culture and Religion

Theologically Transformed: Castes, class, community, and family influence a person's religious beliefs in a culture like Nepal.

6. I remember one moment that happens in my life, I used to call her my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in the kitchen and I ate food. But one day she heard about me that I became a Christian. And then when I was inside her kitchen, she beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me that, now you became a Christian. Now you're not going to come inside my house because you're not good for me and now you're a Christian boy. So I don't allow you to enter inside my house. And that's very painful and it's broken my heart.

Theme: Persecution for the Sake of Christ

Theologically Transformed: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

7. So when I talk with other people also, like when they baptize, their sin will be washed away. And then they will be free from the bondage and then they will become the children of the God.

Theme: Freedom in Baptism

Theologically Transformed: Baptism sets a person free from sin, death, and the devil as one is connected to Christ.

8. Yeah, so when we baptize in Christ, I think Nepali people and the American people, so I already told you that we are the children of God and we became the children of God. So there is no any discrimination, no any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Theme: Horizontal Baptismal Transformation

Theologically Transformed: Baptism not only gives forgiveness of a person's sin before God, but it also shapes one's relationship with other baptized Christians.

9. So when I first came to the United States in St. Louis, Missouri, when I landed in America, I was totally lost. I was totally, I don't know where I have to go. I have no ideas and I have no cars. I have no food in the room. And I was very kind of, I was suffering.

Theme: Stranger in the United States

Theologically Transformed: Jesus and His family are familiar with the experience of being a cultural outsider in their flight to Egypt.

10. And then CFNA is a very good organization. And it's very helpful for the people who are in need.

Theme: Work of Christian Friends of New Americans

Theologically Transformed: Christians are called to care for the stranger in our midst who may be new to the land in which we live.

11. Especially the Ascension people are very helpful. They are very kind and they are honest. And they are like when someone is in need for physical help or in spiritual or mental help, they are ready to help spiritually or physically or mentally or sometimes economically also.

Theme: Ascension Caring for Members

Theologically Transformed: As we have opportunity we care for others, especially those who are of the household of faith.

12. And these are the things that Ascension Lutheran Church provides us, that opportunity to serve the Lord even in different languages like Nepali, English. So, this could be very helpful for me and also the Nepali community.

Theme: Cross-Cultural Engagement

Theologically Transformed: One culture in a congregation can cross over into the culture of another to engage with them.

13. I already told you that, especially to close a relationship with Nepali people and Ascension people. So I think number one is we are the child of God. We are the children of the God and we are baptized and then we all became the children of God and we are not any discrimination.

Theme: Church Family

Theologically Transformed: The Church is a family made up of brothers and sisters in Christ united by the waters of Holy Baptism.

14. In the same way, if something happened in Ascension Lutheran Church, we can help them for praying for them, for encouraging from the sermon, from the verse. So in that way we can make a good relationship with each other, with the Ascension Lutheran Church and Nepali community.

Theme: Intercultural Engagement

Theologically Transformed: A congregation that is composed of people from different cultures can engage with one another at an intercultural level where collaboration takes place.

15. My son goes to Ascension Word of Life in the school, and especially he is getting the scholarship from the Word of Life. Another thing is that he is learning not only the activities that are given in the school, or they are taught in the schools from the books only, but he is learning from the Bible also.

Theme: Ministry of Word of Life School

Theologically Transformed: Christian education provides an opportunity for children to hear the truth of God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis.

16. Thank you so much, Pastor, for your great opportunity, giving me this great opportunity to share my little bit about my life testimony. Thank you so much.

Theme: Grateful to Share Oral History

Theologically Transformed: Intentionally being slow to speak and quick to listen demonstrates that what a person has to say is of value and can be learned from.

Meena Rai Gurung

1. Yeah, basically in our past years when we are in our refugee camp, very, very hard time to settle our life. We struggled many times and very hard to live, you know, difficult to exist.

Theme: Refugee Experience

Theologically Transformed: Rather than showing compassion for neighbor, those placed in refugee camps are treated as unwanted.

2. And here the United States of America gave us opportunity to come here and that's a great opportunity, and we decide to come here.

Theme: Citizenship in the United States

Theologically Transformed: God has blessed us with nations in which we live, fulfill our vocations, and pray for those in authority.

3. When I come to America, I become a Christian because my family members all are Christian and I know about the Jesus. I heard about Jesus is our Savior Lord and I accept Jesus is my Savior.

Theme: Coming to Faith in Christ

Theologically Transformed: The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives now and for eternity.

4. In our country, we Nepali, but also they told us we were refugees. We live in Nepal and also we speak the same language. What they speak with the same language, also they call us a refugee tag. They give us a refugee tag. They are not our country.

Theme: Cultural Discrimination

Theologically Transformed: Judgement against someone based on the cultural aspects of his or her life rather than viewing the person as one who is created by God and for whom Christ died is discrimination.

5. In our country, we called that thatch and bamboo. Bamboo. And bed also bamboo. Before bamboo bed, we had mud. Mud make a mud bed and sleep over that. And sometimes when we sleep on the mud bed, sometimes the insect bite our ear. It's very hard.

Theme: Refugee Experience

Theologically Transformed: Rather than showing compassion for neighbor, those placed in refugee camps are treated as unwanted.

6. Yeah, some people they are Christian but my parents they don't want to, you know, Christian is the lower caste, do not go and talk, do not eat with them. They say this one. They think that Christian people is a lower caste people.

Theme: Persecution for the Sake of Christ

Theologically Transformed: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

7. And when I come to America I become free. And I come here in America my uncle and auntie they already Christian they are already member in Ascension Lutheran Church and they told me to go. Yeah, America is easy to be a Christian it's not easy in back country they don't like to be.

Theme: Religious Freedom

Theologically Transformed: In the United States citizens are blessed to have a freedom of religion provided by the First Amendment, with which a Christian can openly live out his or her faith in Christ and witness to others.

8. After baptism before life and after baptism is a very very different. And after baptism, after become I Christian my life is changed.

Theme: Baptismal Transformation

Theologically Transformed: As a Christian lives in their baptismal grace, the Old Adam is daily drowned and a new man arises to live before God in purity.

9. Most of the things, when I become a Christian my friend are separate they don't want to talk and then you now Christian, I make a Christian friends only.

Theme: Sanctified Life in Christ

Theologically Transformed: The Holy Spirit works through the baptized people of God to live in righteousness.

10. Remember the hard part first language problem. Yeah I don't understand English I need to interpret a little bit I understand English. I don't know how to talk.

Theme: Stranger in the United States

Theologically Transformed: Jesus and His family are familiar with the experience of being a cultural outsider in their flight to Egypt.

11. Ascension Lutheran when we become a membership every parts everything help us. They pray, our pastor, you pray for us there's a good you know every time, every difficult situation also you give hand. You know we help every time. Helping heart you know as very good.

Theme: Church Home/Family

Theologically Transformed: The local Christian congregation is a place where brothers and sisters in Christ assemble as they find sanctuary and a place to belong.

12. Yeah, yeah I have to remember CFNA. So is important you know parts of our life CFNA also helped many things when I was new. When I was new the health and screening time that's good.

Theme: Work of Christian Friends of New Americans

Theologically Transformed: Christians are called to care for the stranger in our midst who may be new to the land in which we live.

Shiva Gurung

1. Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much.

Theme: Refugee Experience

Theologically Transformed: Rather than showing compassion for neighbor, those placed in refugee camps are treated as unwanted.

2. Now, when I come to America, that time, our family so scared because new people, new language, new food, everything new. And I'm thinking, no, I don't want to stay here.

Theme: Stranger in the United States

Theologically Transformed: Jesus and His family are familiar with the experience of being a cultural outsider in their flight to Egypt.

3. Before when I come here, we feeling so sad. Now I find like a good church, good family, good person, everything now going good.

Theme: Church Family

Theologically Transformed: The Church is a family made up of brothers and sisters in Christ united by the waters of Holy Baptism.

4. Now I'm so happy, we have to best with my family, like a Christian family, like Ascension Church, the Ascension Church, too much helping me, really, really good... I don't want to lost like this church and this family, this member, everything, I love.

Theme: Ascension Caring for Members

Theologically Transformed: As we have opportunity we care for others, especially those who are of the household of faith.

5. The people helped me that time, like a blanket, like food, you know, furniture, like bed, everything the Peace Center helping me. And I learn like English, how can I write, how can I speak, and how can I stay, everything they teach me.

Theme: Work of Christian Friends of New Americans

Theologically Transformed: Christians are called to care for the stranger in our midst who may be new to the land in which we live.

6. Like how many people I can't count, but five, I think five house Nepali people, mean my family, my three brother-in-law family, and my two sister-in-law family, and me, but big, big family. Then we together, baptism, at the Peace Center, we are so happy that time, because we find them Jesus.

Theme: Baptismal Transformation

Theologically Transformed: As a Christian lives in their baptismal grace, the Old Adam is daily drowned and a new man arises to live before God in purity.

7. I don't know about Bhutan, but Nepal. If I carry the Bible and some people like this and throw away and, you know, the people hate Jesus. Because they don't like Jesus. Sometimes like, oh, yes, Jesus, you're no, good. You're like that.

Theme: Persecution for the Sake of Christ

Theologically Transformed: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

8. Jesus no good. Your God no good. You're Christian. If I the Hindu people eat like something, if I Christian people touching, oh, you no good. Why am I touch food? No, you go away. Don't come near and don't touch my food like this.

Theme: Cultural Discrimination

Theologically Transformed: Judgement against someone based on the cultural aspects of his or her life rather than viewing the person as one who is created by God and for whom Christ died is discrimination.

9. Now openly. Oh my Lord. And I'm thinking, "Thank you, Jesus. You sending me my family here because Jesus call me. Come on. You are free here. Oh my God."

Theme: Freedom to Follow Christ

Theologically Transformed: In the United States citizens are blessed to have a freedom of religion provided by the First Amendment, with which a Christian can openly live out his or her faith in Christ and witness to others.

10. There's a Christian like when I, like Ascension Church is my house like that. I feel this is my family. This is my house I'm thinking because I love this family and this church also.

Theme: Church Family

Theologically Transformed: The Church is a family made up of brothers and sisters in Christ united by the waters of Holy Baptism.

11. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I like a sad, mad that I'm so many times helping me.

Theme: Ascension Caring for Members

Theologically Transformed: As we have opportunity we care for others, especially those who are of the household of faith.

12. He no want to go other schools. He loves this school. I say, one time I asked him, "Why you like this Ascension Church?" Because studying good and this all people good. No talk like bad thing, no fighting, no like something bad habit. It's very good, "Mommy, I don't want to go other school."

Theme: Ministry of Word of Life School

Theologically Transformed: Christian education provides an opportunity for children to hear the truth of God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis.

Gagan Gurung

1. And yeah, and because of the Bhutan government there is a lot of issues with the Nepalese traditions like dress, language, the letter, you know, the alphabet and all the religion systems.

Theme: Cultural Discrimination

Theologically Transformed: Judgement against someone based on the cultural aspects of his or her life rather than viewing the person as one who is created by God and for whom Christ died is discrimination.

2. Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.

Theme: Refugee Experience

Theologically Transformed: Rather than showing compassion for neighbor, those placed in refugee camps are treated as unwanted.

3. Nobody asks, "Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you." Nobody asks us. That's the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.

Theme: Feeling of Isolation

Theologically Transformed: While nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, a lack of concern from others causes one to feel alone.

4. And slowly I changed my life and then in the refugee camp in Nepal I got the Jesus Christ. From before that I didn't know about the Jesus Christ.

Theme: Coming to Faith in Christ

Theologically Transformed: The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives now and for eternity.

5. We obey all the Hindu system. Our Gurung tribe it says we are the Buddhist, but we all connected with the Hindus, you know.

Theme: Culture and Religion

Theologically Transformed: Castes, class, community, and family influence a person's religious beliefs in a culture like Nepal.

6. And when back to my bed I turn on the Bible I can read it. I can understand totally from there. And then I feel that God's angel came on there and blessed me to understand the Bible.

Theme: Work of Holy Spirit through God's Word

Theologically Transformed: The Holy Spirit calls a person by the Gospel and enlightens them with His gifts.

7. Then I feel that this is the not real life. The real life is in Jesus Christ. And I start to go to church continually and I involved regularly with youth fellowships and every church program.

Theme: Sanctified Life in Christ

Theologically Transformed: The Holy Spirit works through the baptized people of God to live in righteousness.

8. Maybe it's God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.

Theme: God's Plan for Citizenship of Heaven

Theologically Transformed: God desires that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth even as He chooses people to have faith in Christ Jesus.

9. When I became baptized and when the Christian peoples, when the peoples they do the baptism, you know, and they dedicate their life in Christ. They cannot lie after that. They cannot say after that, "I'm a Hindu." They cannot say after that, "I am a Buddhist." They cannot say, "I am not a Christian," when they got the baptism they totally submitted their life in Christ. Because, Jesus, he died for us. Jesus he born for us. Jesus he resurrected from the dead for us.

Theme: Baptismal Transformation

Theologically Transformed: As a Christian lives in their baptismal grace, the Old Adam is daily drowned and a new man arises to live before God in purity.

10. One day she told me that, “Gagan do not come anymore to my house. Do not work, do not eat, do not make friends with my son.” She told me that. I never expect that. And I feel something inside, you know. Something painning inside.

Theme: Persecution for the Sake of Christ

Theologically Transformed: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10).

11. She became a good Christian. She died in America. She came in America and after that she died.

Theme: Changing Hardened Hearts by the Gospel

Theologically Transformed: No one is beyond the work of the Holy Spirit and the call of the Gospel, not even persecutors of Christians.

12. And one by one I try to make them a Jesus Christ. I try to preach the Jesus Christ, slowly slowly. Yeah, some of they became Christians.

Theme: Christian Witness

Theologically Transformed: Christians are called to make disciples of all nations.

13. There is no our language, there is no our letter, there is no our food, there is no our system, there is no my size people.

Theme: Stranger in the United States

Theologically Transformed: Jesus and His family are familiar with the experience of being a cultural outsider in their flight to Egypt.

14. But Christians, the CFNA, the Christian Friends of America. Oh, wow they do help me a lot.

Theme: Work of Christian Friends of New Americans

Theologically Transformed: Christians are called to care for the stranger in our midst who may be new to the land in which we live.

15. Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It's our home. It's our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath.

Theme: Church Home

Theologically Transformed: The local Christian congregation is a place where brothers and sisters in Christ assemble as they find sanctuary and a place to belong.

16. We have a family Ascension Church So we can call them in our citizen time and Pastor Clark was there my citizenship time, you know.

Theme: Church Family

Theologically Transformed: The Church is a family made up of brothers and sisters in Christ united by the waters of Holy Baptism.

17. Yeah, so my wife she is very happy because she got those ticket and she's very nervous, you know. What is next? What I need to do? So we feel guilty, you know, and what is next we need help. We don't have the higher level friends on here, but only we have a hope for the church people.

Theme: Ascension Caring for Members

Theologically Transformed: As we have opportunity we care for others, especially those who are of the household of faith.

18. That's why the Ascension Church helps our kids to learn about the Jesus also as well as us in a worldly education, as well as in a Bible education. That's why I decide to my send my son on here.

Theme: Ministry of Word of Life School

Theologically Transformed: Christian education provides an opportunity for children to hear the truth of God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis.

19. I don't have any pressure now. I'm free I can go to any country. Being a citizen of United States, I can go heaven citizen of his grace Jesus Christ.

Theme: Citizenship in United States and Heaven

Theologically Transformed: God blesses us with temporal citizenship, but the citizenship of heaven made possible in Christ's death and resurrection is far greater.

20. Thank you pastor for that good opportunity.

Theme: Grateful to Share Oral History

Theologically Transformed: Intentionally being slow to speak and quick to listen demonstrates that what a person has to say is of value and can be learned from.

APPENDIX FOUR

FULL TEXT OF DIALOGICAL SERMON SERIES SERMONS

Sermon #1: Refugee and Citizen Matt. 2:13–23

The day was March 13, 1999—all the way back in the last century—when my wife Lisa and I went on our very first date. What did we do on our first date? Dinner and a movie. Dinner went well, and then it was time for the movie. Now, this was back in the days before online ticket sales, so when we got to the theater to buy tickets, there was really only one movie that wasn't sold out. It's a film entitled, "The Other Sister." The movie ended up being more emotional than we had anticipated.¹

The movie is about the Tate family: parents Radley and Elizabeth and their oldest daughter Heather. But the movie's main character is the *other* sister—Carla Tate. Carla is a young adult, who has mild mental disability. The story is about the struggle Carla and the family has in finding the right level of independence for Carla. It wasn't the most romantic movie for our first date, but it did provide some thought-provoking conversation for the ride home.

The title of this movie is telling—"The *Other* Sister." The other sister is the one who had a different level of cognitive ability from the rest of the family. That term "other" is sometimes used in our world today. Sometime negatively. But if I were defining what the term "other" means, it would simply be "someone who is different from me." Not better or worse, not superior or inferior. Just different.

We each have those in our life we might consider the other.

Maybe it's someone who is our vocational other: working class or professional; white collar or blue collar or clerical collar. Not better or worse, just different.

Maybe it's our geographical other: someone from the inner-city, the rural country, other side of the world, or even from California.

Maybe it's our life circumstance other: someone who is unborn and still in the womb, an individual with a disability, or a person in hospice care.

Or maybe it's our ethnic other: someone who has a different skin color, different language, different culture than us.

God, the maker of heaven and earth, has not created everyone identical. Not everyone is like me—and that's a good thing! God's Word is clear, all people are included in God the Father's love for the whole world, the world that He sent His only Son to save.² All are people included in

¹ *The Other Sister*, directed by Gary Marshall (Touchstone Pictures, 1999).

² See John 3:16.

Jesus' instruction to make disciples of all nations.³ All are people loved by Christ.⁴

In our sermon series over the next three weeks, we'll be learning more about those, who for many of us, are our ethnic other. At Ascension we are blessed to be a multicultural congregation. On any given weekend you'll find worshipping at Ascension people who are Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, and Asian.

But sometimes, especially when it comes to our members who are refugees from Nepal, we might be content to simply coexist side by side. Depending on which worship service time we attend, maybe we haven't even met one of our Nepali worshipers. A goal of this sermon series is to simply listen and learn from our Nepali members. After all, as new Americans, Nepali people do a lot of listening and learning from Americans on a day-to-day basis.

So, it's good to take time to learn about their experience as a refugee, and their journey of coming out of the darkness of Hinduism and Buddhism into the light of Christ. And through this listening, perhaps we'll become more intercultural as a congregation, worshipping together, working together, witnessing together, as the baptized brothers and sisters in Christ that we are.

In each week of our three-week series we'll highlight one question that was asked of four of our Nepali members as I recorded their oral histories. This week's question is, "What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?" There's much to be learned from their answers. But we also want to look at this topic through the lens of the Word of the Lord—Holy Scripture—the foundation of any sermon. And so we first focus on today's Gospel reading from Matthew 2.⁵

We're probably familiar with the account of the wise men, the magi, visiting Jesus as a child, worshipping Him, and bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But we might not be as familiar with what happens next. That's what today's Gospel reading is about. After the wise men leave, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and has this message: "Rise, take the child and His mother—take Jesus and Mary—and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."⁶ And Joseph does. It seems that very night, under the cover of darkness, they leave for Egypt.

For political reasons, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph have to go to a foreign land. The ruler in Judea at the time, King Herod the Great, was a megalomaniac, a ruthless ruler. So, to protect himself from a new potential king, Herod cruelly orders that all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger be killed.

It's because of King Herod that Jesus and His family are displaced from their home. They leave in the middle of the night with not much more than the clothes on their back, and travel 200 miles to Egypt. And how long are they supposed to stay in Egypt? The angel simply instructs

³ See Matt. 28:18–20.

⁴ Reference to part of Ascension Lutheran's Mission Statement, "Loved by Christ; sharing Christ's love."

⁵ The Holy Gospel for this sermon was from Matt. 2:13–23.

⁶ Matt. 2:13

Joseph, “remain there until I tell you.” Forced to flee their home for safety, it’s fair to say that Jesus and his family become refugees in Egypt.

There’s a painting by the British artist Edwin Long, that I think helps depict the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt.⁷ It shows Jesus, Mary, and Joseph arriving in Egypt. Around them are different sights and sounds and smells. People dressed different than them, speaking a different language than them, worshiping different gods than them. They are outsiders. For the people of Egypt, this family of three is their ethnic other.

Yet, even this displacement of Jesus and His family has a purpose. God had a purpose. Through Jesus’ going to Egypt the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea would be fulfilled. That promise, “Out of Egypt I will call My Son.”⁸

Another purpose of this flight to Egypt is that Jesus’ life be preserved. Preserved so He might give you life and salvation. You see, there would come a time when God the Father would allow His Son to die at the hands of a political leader, but it won’t be Herod the Great who will give the death sentence, it will be Pontus Pilate. And Jesus’ death some thirty years later, on that Good Friday, will be for the life of the world. Jesus will lay down His life for people of all nations, from Israel to Egypt, from the United States to Nepal. It may have been hard for Joseph to see at the time, but in fleeing to Egypt God had a purpose. A greater purpose than Joseph could have imagined.

We can hear echoes of Jesus’ experience as a refugee in the accounts of our Nepali members who were refugees. In their recorded oral histories, we heard that they too became refugees for political reasons. They were no longer welcome in their home. Another king, the King of Bhutan, established a policy called “One Country, One People,” and forced Nepali-speaking people in Bhutan to move into refugee camps, becoming people without a home.

We heard a little about what life was like in a refugee camp earlier in the video interviews.

We heard John talk about how people suffered from different kinds of sicknesses in the camp and with even some dying as a result.

From Meena we heard about what a house in a refugee camp looks like. Beds made of mud and roofs made of plastic tarps.

Shiva shared that the food they ate came from the government and other agencies, and that they felt completely dependent upon them.

And Gagan talked about a lack of support as he lived as a refugee for 23 years with no mom or dad, no strong house, no good food, no one who asked, “How can I help?”

⁷ Edwin Long, *The Flight into Egypt*, 1883, oil on canvas, Russell-Cotes Art Museum and Gallery.

⁸ Matt. 2:17; Hos. 11:1.

And in each of these stories you can hear a longing for home. A place to be a citizen. A searching for purpose. Perhaps God has built that into our hearts—a longing for home.

After years of living as a refugee, eventually, our Nepali members came to the United States and settled here in St. Louis. Many have become naturalized citizens of the US and have finally found a home. One of the greatest joys I've had as a pastor is attending naturalization ceremonies with our Nepali members and celebrating with them. I remember attending John Gurung's ceremony. It included 51 new Americans from over 20 different countries. And these new Americans come from every walk of life—doctors, software engineers, teachers, factory workers, moms, and dads. The joy in the room at the Federal Courthouse downtown was palpable as “America the Beautiful” was sung, and the pledge of allegiance recited. The ceremony was the culmination of a long path to US citizenship that took years of waiting, months of studying for the civics test, and saving money to pay for all the fees associated with the process.

Perhaps the highpoint of the ceremony is when all the new Americans stand and repeat after the presiding judge the words of the Oath of Allegiance. The oath begins with these words:

I hereby declare that I absolutely and entirely renounce all allegiance to any foreign prince, state, or sovereignty of whom I have been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, that I will bear true allegiance to the same...⁹

New citizens reciting a pledge of allegiance to their new home. Thanks be to God!

Yet, there's still a greater home that our Nepali members have, a citizenship in an even greater land. And ironically it's a home, a citizenship, that for some was first found in the refugee camp of all places. We heard about this in Gagan's interview. He says:

In the Nepal refugee camp, I got Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe I would still be a Hindu or a Buddhist. Maybe it was God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get Jesus Christ. It was God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.

God had a purpose for Jesus to go to Egypt. God had a purpose for Gagan to go to a refugee camp. It was there in that place with no home, no mom or dad, no strong house, no good food, that Gagan first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And through faith, this refugee received all the riches of heaven—an eternal home, an eternal citizenship.

All our Nepali members have taken a pledge even greater than the one recited at their naturalization ceremony. A pledge connected to baptism where they renounced, not a foreign government or prince, but the prince of this fallen world, the devil, with all his works and all his

⁹ Paraphrase of the “Oath of Allegiance,” <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-j-chapter-2#:~:text=“I%20hereby%20declare%2C%20on%20oath,the%20United%20States%20of%20America.”>

ways. When they were asked, “Do you desire to be baptized?” They answered, “Yes, I do.”¹⁰ And with that, God worked through water and His Word to connect them to Jesus’ death and resurrection. To give forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. The very same gifts God has given you in your baptism.

The experience of being a refugee, an outsider, a stranger. It’s not unique to just Jesus or our members from Nepal. God’s people have always been refugees of sorts. Take Hebrews chapter 11 for instance, there’s a whole list of people who lived...by faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the list goes on. Yet the list ends saying this: “All these acknowledged that they are strangers and exiles on the earth...they desired a better country, a heavenly one.”¹¹ The same is true for us strangers, exiles, pilgrims, refugees, pick your word—this fallen world is not quite home. We long for heaven. As Philippians 3 puts it, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹² But until then, God has as purpose for you—even in this fallen world. To love your neighbor. To make disciples. To share Christ’s love.

As we talk about immigrants and refugees, for the United States, perhaps one of the most powerful symbols of welcome is the Statue of Liberty, located right next to Ellis Island where countless immigrants and refugees came to our shores—some of them our own ancestors. Inside the base of the Statue of Liberty, mounted to the wall on a bronze plaque, is a famous poem by Emma Lazarus. It concludes with these words:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"¹³

It’s as if the Statue of Liberty herself is crying out with these words of welcome to a new home. But in a much greater way, Jesus cries out to us:

Come to Me, all you who are weary and I will give you rest.
Come to Me, you huddled masses.
Come those who are considered the wretched refuse of the world.
Come those by nature sinful and unclean.
Come Nepali and American alike.
Come for I have died for you and I live for you.
Come you homeless, longing for an eternal home.
Come for I am the one who transforms from refugee to citizen—citizen of heaven.

¹⁰ See Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 268–71.

¹¹ See Heb. 11:13–16.

¹² Phil. 3:20.

¹³ Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” first appearing in *The New York Times*, 1903, public domain.

AMEN.

Sermon #2: Persecution and Freedom
Acts 16:16–34

We begin today’s sermon by talking about new Americans, but not Nepalese new Americans. No, we begin with the new Americans who established the church body that our congregation is a part of, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They came to the United States in the early 1800s not as refugees, but as immigrants—immigrants who chose to come to the US for a variety of reasons, but for one main reason in particular. There’s an article that recently appeared in the periodical *Interest Time* that does a great job of articulating why these Lutherans made the move. It says:

Having traveled the distance from Saxony, Germany, to the pioneer country of the United States of America, Lutheran immigrants from the old country left behind everything they knew and stepped foot into the unknown. If Lutherans don’t like change, certainly no one told these brave Europeans.

But they came from Germany and other areas of central and northern Europe for good reasons, and that can motivate even the most change-averse people. They came to escape poverty and high taxes for the hope of starting a new life in a new land. The main reason, though, was much bigger: They were largely seeking religious freedom.

They wanted to keep safe the Christian Gospel and its truth among them, they wanted to be free to teach it to their children without fear of persecution. This was the chief reason that they gave at the time of the emigration; it was the official reason.¹⁴

These new Americans, may not be our forefathers and foremothers by blood for all of us—myself included. But they are our forefathers and mothers in the faith. Immigrants who came to the US to have the freedom to live out their faith, as they handed down the Gospel to their children, and handed off the Gospel to others.¹⁵

We are blessed to live in a land with something like the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the US Constitution. And the very first line, of the very first amendment, states this: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹⁶ The freedom of religion. The freedom of worship. The freedom to attend Bible study and carry our Bible out in public. The freedom to operate a Lutheran, Christian school. The freedom to live our faith in word and deed in our day-to-day life. The freedom to hand down the Gospel and hand off the Gospel. A freedom worth immigrating from Germany for. A freedom we too often take for granted.

¹⁴ “We Stand on Broad Shoulders: Celebrating 175 Years of the LCMS,” *Interest Time*, Issue 123, <https://interesttime.org/issues/>.

¹⁵ See Larry Vogel, “Behind the Numbers,” 24.

¹⁶ “The Bill of Rights: A Transcription,” National Archives, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript.

In today's reading from Acts 16,¹⁷ we see that Paul and Silas did not enjoy this same level of religious freedom. In the years following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, Christians were a minority in the Roman Empire. In fact, many wrongly confused Christians as just another sect of the Jewish religion.

In our reading we find Paul and Silas in one of the leading Roman cities—the city of Philippi in what is now modern-day Greece. Earlier the city had been given special status by Emperor Octavius so its citizens were near equal to that of Rome. In this place, Roman culture and Roman pagan religions went hand in hand. To be Roman is to blur the lines between culture and religion.

What leads up to today's reading is that Paul and Silas heal a servant girl who was demon possessed. You would think the girl's owners would be happy for the girl, but they weren't. She had been making money for them as a fortune teller of sorts, as the demon somehow spoke through her.

Upset that their money-making scheme is gone now that the girl is healed, they drag Paul and Silas in front of the magistrates accusing these foreign Jews of advocating customs that Romans can't follow. A mob forms, their clothes are stripped off them, they're beaten with rods, and chained up in prison. And keep in mind, Paul and Silas have done nothing wrong. All they did was give freedom to a girl.

There in the inner prison, their feet fastened in stocks, bruised and bloody, what do Paul and Silas do? They pray and sing hymns to God. And the other prisoners, and perhaps even the prison guards, they listen. Even when persecuted, Paul and Silas still praise God. They still trust in the Lord. What a powerful witness!

I would guess that in refugee camps in Nepal, the level of religious freedom looks more like Roman Philippi, than American St. Louis. In Nepal there's no Bill of Rights. No First Amendment guaranteeing the freedom of religion. Nepal is a country that is 81% Hindu, 8% Buddhist, and less than 2% Christian.¹⁸ With such an overwhelming majority of Hindus, you can imagine that Nepali culture and Hinduism go hand in hand. To be Nepali is to blur the lines between culture and religion.

One area where this is seen is in the caste system. In countries like India and Nepal, society strictly follows the Hindu idea that there are dozens of different castes or levels in society. What caste a person is part of determines what they can and can't do and where they can or can't go.

For our Nepali members who became followers of Jesus in Nepal, becoming a Christian meant not only adopting new beliefs, but it also meant being viewed by Nepali Hindus as if they were

¹⁷ Acts 16:16–34.

¹⁸ “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nepal,” US Department of State, www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/.

betraying their culture. To become a Christian is to be treated as a lower caste or lower class—to become a Christian, is to become an outcast. We heard this in Meena and John’s video interviews earlier:

Meena shared this: Christians are the lower caste, do not go with them, or talk with them. Do not eat with them. They think that Christian people are a lower caste people.

John shared a personal story about how this persecution of Christians played out in his personal life. He tells this story: I used to call one woman my auntie. Every day I used to go to her house in her kitchen and I ate her food. But one day she heard about me, that I became a Christian. She beat me with a bamboo stick and she told me, now that you became a Christian, you're not going to come inside my house, because you're not good for me. John said, “And that's very painful and it's broken my heart.”

We hear these accounts and maybe we’re surprised by them. Or maybe we’re not so surprised. Maybe we should be more surprised by times when a Christian is *not* looked down upon because of his or her faith. After all, the one who is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, was looked down upon, unwelcome, an outcast, falsely accused of crimes, beaten, and finally crucified. If this is what happened to Jesus, why should His followers expect anything different? Yet, our Savior promises: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁹

Back to Paul and Silas in that prison in Philippi. As they’re singing hymns, there’s a great earthquake, the doors of prison are opened, and everyone’s chains fall off. In despair the jailer is about to take his own life, but Paul lets him know that no one has left. The jailer falls down before Paul and Silas and pleads, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul simply answers him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” The Holy Spirit had called this jailer by the Gospel—it seems the Gospel in the form of hymns sung by two inmates. That very hour, Paul and Silas are taken by the jailer to his house where he and his whole household are baptized—it seems servants and children included.

When you think about it, spiritually speaking, who were the ones who were really free in this account? I would suggest that even chained to a wall, Paul and Silas were free. The jailer was the one imprisoned by unbelief and fear. As Jesus says, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”²⁰ The power of the Gospel.

This account reminds me of the story that Gagan told in his interview. The mother of a very close friend no longer welcomed him into their home, or allowed him to be friends with her son after Gagan became a Christian. It was heartbreaking for him.

But then Gagan shares this: But, you know, God brings her in to our church. After a few months,

¹⁹ Matt. 5:10

²⁰ John 8:36

a few years, she became a Christian in our church. And she told me, Gagan, “I’m sorry. I told you don’t come at my home. I did wrong. I’m sorry.” And I said to her, “It’s okay people do that who don’t understand about Jesus’ love. It’s okay.” She became a good Christian.

Those who don’t understand Jesus’ love, they can mistreat those who do. Yet, no one is beyond the work of the Holy Spirit. No one is beyond the power of the Gospel. Not a Gentile jailor in Philippi, not a Hindu mother in a refugee camp, not a Muslim neighbor in St. Louis, not a social media influencer who is hostile to Christianity online, not someone who has strayed away from the church, not even people like you and me who are by nature sinful and unclean—no one is beyond the power of the Gospel. Understanding Jesus’ love shown in His teaching and healing, His dying and rising, His Word and Sacraments—it changes lives. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

We are truly blessed to live in a land with the freedom to live out our faith. A blessing cherished by those 19th-century Lutheran immigrants from Germany and also realized by our Nepali members today. In her interview, Shiva talks about the fear that came from being a Christian in Nepal. She describes feeling like a thief; like she had to sneak around going to Bible study or worship while carrying a Bible. But she also said this is what she thinks now that she lives in the United States. She says:

Then, [back in Nepal] faith was like a secret, but now openly. I’m thinking, “Thank you, Jesus.” You sent my family here because Jesus called us. We are free here. Oh my God.

Thanks be to God for this freedom! But yet, even here in America, even with the freedom of religion, there’s freedom and then there’s *freedom*.²¹ There’s freedom of religion, but then there’s freedom in the Gospel. Not all in America are spiritually free. Some are still imprisoned in unbelief and no belief at all. Some don’t understand Jesus’ love. It’s all the more reason for us who do, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is worth sharing anywhere—anywhere people are not yet free, whether the jail cell, the refugee camp, or wherever God has placed you.

The Gospel is worth sharing no matter what the consequence. After all, ours is the kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel is worth sharing so others may believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. So that along with us, they may be set free by the Son. Free indeed.

AMEN.

²¹ For a similar comment, see William Willimon, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Acts* (Louisville: Westminster, 2010).

Strangers and Family
Acts 2:1–11, 37–47

The hymn we just sang together is one of our favorites here at Ascension. The text of “Thy Strong Word” was written by Martin Franzmann who taught at Concordia Seminary here in St. Louis. But I’d also like to share something else Franzmann wrote—a quote from him concerning the all-nations, universal nature of the Church, followers of Jesus Christ. He once wrote this:

We place no bars—racial, political, or social. The Lutheran Church is not a German church, an English church, or a Chinese church; it is neither a white man’s church nor a black man’s church; neither a rich man’s church nor a poor man’s church. The Gospel that we preach is a universal Gospel and the grace it offers is a universal grace.”²²

What I find striking is that Franzmann wrote these words back in 1947—even before an organized civil rights movement. That’s because Franzmann’s words reflect a timeless, biblical truth. The Gospel and the grace it offers is a universal grace meant for all people.

There’s no room for discrimination when it comes to the Church. Merriam-Webster defines discrimination as a “prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment.” There can be discrimination based upon all sorts of things. Skin color, wealth or poverty, whether someone is a cat person or a dog person, or who a person is rooting for in the Super Bowl. (Go Chiefs!)

But sometimes discrimination can lead to evil acts. This past week the world just marked the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The world remembered the 1.1 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis at Auschwitz alone. But the Church is called to be different—different from the rest of the world. The Church is called not to discriminate, but to welcome. Not to treat fellow Christians as strangers, but as family.

There was no discrimination on the Day of Pentecost. God makes no discrimination based on ethnicity or where people are from as He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

On that day we learn that in Jerusalem there were worshipers of the God of Israel who were Jews and who were proselytes, in other words, ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles. They were from every nation under heaven. Cretans and Arabians—people from east to west, people from islands and the mainland. In fact, there are twelve diverse regions mentioned in our reading from Acts representing all people.

And it’s to these people, from the four corners of the earth, that God chooses to reveal Himself. As tongues of fire rest upon the disciples, they speak in different languages so that all might understand. No one was left out, the Lord wants all to hear and understand the mighty works of God—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But God’s desire for the salvation of all people doesn’t begin at the Day of Pentecost. No, we see

²² Brinkley, *Thy Strong Word*, 15-16

God's love for all people from the beginning. In Gen. 3, God promises a Savior for Adam and Eve and their descendants—that includes all people. In Gen. 12, the Lord promises Abraham that all the families of the earth will be blessed through him—through the Savior that will come from his line.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, Jesus commissions His disciples to make disciples of all nations. And in Acts 1 Jesus instructs His followers to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Again and again, we see the Lord's desire that all people, from all places, be saved—no discrimination.

As we return our attention to the Day of Pentecost, Peter preaches a sermon. He concludes his sermon saying:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” And with that the people were cut to the heart and ask, “what shall we do?” And Peter answers, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

Peter shares that repentance, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, baptism, is for them and all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls. Even people living 2,000 years later in the year 2024. Even people living in St. Louis, Missouri. Even people from Nepal.

John Gurung talked about this gift of baptism for all people in his interview. He says: “When we were baptized in Christ...we became the children of God. There is not any discrimination, not any kind of discrimination between even the American or Nepali. We all are brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if we are speaking in a different language like Nepali, American, whatever. We all are in Christ.”

We are made brothers and sisters in Christ in baptism. Amen! Now that doesn't mean we stop being Americans. That doesn't mean we stop being Nepali. That doesn't mean we need to check our culture at the double red doors when we come into Ascension's building. No. But it does mean that baptism transcends culture. Whether American or Nepali. Whether baptized in this font or in a river in central Asia, we are still part of the same baptized family.

This is what we might call the horizontal dimension of baptism. So often we emphasize the vertical dimension of baptism. In other words, we stress that baptism changes our relationship with God. We are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection. We are made a child of God. But we dare not forget the horizontal dimension of baptism. It changes our relationship with each other. We are connected to one another. We are made brothers and sisters in Christ.

We see this horizontal dimension of baptism in the baptismal service. I remember when I was first installed as pastor here at Ascension there were already Nepali people who were waiting to be baptized. After instruction, we scheduled the baptism of 21 Nepali people of all ages, from toddlers to older adults. All of them baptized in this font. After these new Americans who were

different from most in the congregation with a different skin color, different clothing, different language were baptized, I said these words from the hymnal:

“In Holy Baptism God the Father has made you members of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs with us of all the treasures of heaven in the one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We receive you in Jesus’ name as our brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.” To which the mostly Caucasian congregation resounded in unison, “Amen. We welcome you in the name of the Lord.”

One Church. Fellow heirs of heaven. Brothers and sisters in Christ. If in baptism we are made family, then this is our home. In our family’s South City home in the Lindenwood Park Neighborhood, we have this simple sign hanging. Home sweet home. It’s in a place where we can see it when we come through the front door. After a long day, no matter what challenges have come, no matter what frustrations, I can come home and take a nice deep breath. Home is a place of refuge and relief; safety and sanctuary. A place of love. Home sweet home.

We heard Gagan describe this place, Ascension, as home, a safe place in the midst of a sometimes difficult world. He says: “We came to the United States, with no friends. No one of our skin color. No one knows our language. Ascension Lutheran Church is our protect home. It’s our home. It’s our resting place. Rest place, breathing a long breath.” In a new place full of challenges, frustrations, and so much that is unfamiliar, Ascension is a place to take a long breath. A place of refuge and relief; safety and sanctuary. A place of a love. And our Father’s house is a home not only for our Nepali members, but for each of us. Home sweet home.

Recognizing each other as family, how do we treat each other? We love one another. We care for one another. That’s what family does, for better or for worse; in sickness and in health. We see this kind of love and care following the Day of Pentecost. Listen to the beautiful description of a faith family’s love for one another that we heard in Acts 2:

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

A love for others so great that you’d sell your personal items, do without, so that others’ needs might be met? Sharing your resources for your neighbor’s benefit? Showing hospitality and breaking bread with others in your home? That’s typically not what the world does. Yet, the Church is called to be different from the rest of the world.

In her interview, Meena described a type of giving as a “helping heart.” She said this: “Ascension Lutheran, when we become members everyone helps us...In every difficult situation you give a hand. A helping heart.”

In Shiva’s interview she recalled the death of her husband Chatra, leaving her a single mother

with two children. The most emotional part of these interviews was when Shiva shared how much Ascension's love and care during that devastating time meant to her. She said:

“Ascension Church is my house. My home. I feel this is my family. Because so many times helping when I hurt, when I am sad. Like when my husband passed away. At that time also helping so much. Thank you so much. I say thank you. Thank you for helping.” As pastor, I too want to thank you. Thank you for helping. Thank you for loving. Thank you for caring.

Again, today's interview question was, “How do you view your relationship with Ascension Lutheran Church?” And the answers given by our Nepali members are moving. Ascension is a place where baptized brothers and sisters in Christ don't discriminate. A safe home to take a long breath. A place with helping hearts. A place of love and care—especially in times of need. Thanks be to God!

And yet, our congregation is not perfect. Your pastors are not perfect. Sometimes we still discriminate. But one day the Lord's Church will be perfect. Perfect at Christ's return. We get a glimpse of what that perfect Church will look like in heaven. From Rev. 7: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Until this perfection, may God grant that Ascension is a small reflection of heaven—at home with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Home sweet home.

AMEN.

APPENDIX FIVE

DIALOGICAL SERMON SERIES ORDER OF WORSHIP

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 20 & 21, 2024

5:00 PM & 8:30 AM

AS WE GATHER

Epiphany is a season in the Church Year where we celebrate that Jesus has come as Savior of the Nations. Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection was for the salvation of the world. It's God's promise that all who believe in Christ have the promise of life everlasting. At our Savior's return will be part of the "great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." (Revelation 7:9). This Epiphany season we will hear from some of Ascension's members who are Nepalese as they share God's work in their lives. Perhaps you will hear your own story reflected in theirs. After all, we are each members of the same family by Baptism, and connected to the One who is the Savior of the Nations.

Savior of the Nations Sermon Series Schedule

| | |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| January 20/21 | "Refugee and Citizen" |
| January 27/28 | "Persecution and Freedom" |
| February 3/4 | "Strangers and Family" |

PRELUDE

Organ

RINGING OF THE BELLS

WELCOME

OPENING HYMN: O CHRIST, OUR TRUE AND ONLY LIGHT

LSB 839

NEPALESE MEMBERS' ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS:

"What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?"

John: And with my family, in 1992, I came to Nepal, and they kicked us out from our country, Bhutan, and we landed in Nepal, in eastern part of Nepal. And so in the beginning, in Nepal, it's very tough and not easy. There's nothing to eat, and there's no food, no house, no land, no citizenship, and totally my family is broken, and even me too. So at the time, I was like a very young guy, like five years old. At the age of five, I came to Nepal, and it was very

tough.

So yeah, in this way, we came to Nepal, and in the beginning, I heard from my parents that a lot of people, are dying from sickness. They're suffering from different kinds of disease, and they died, a lot of people. They died from different kinds of sickness, and they're suffering from the sickness and some diseases. Yeah. So in this way, we landed in Nepal, and that's all.

Meena: In our country, we called that thatch and bamboo. Bamboo. And bed also bamboo. Before bamboo bed, we had mud. Mud make a mud bed and sleep over that. And sometimes when we sleep on the mud bed, sometimes the insect bite our ear. It's very hard. The house also sometimes too much rain, sometimes too much rain, it will drop the water and we make cover with plastic and we sleep like that. That's very hard.

Shiva: Yeah, same like we have to stay the, the small, small house. But it's too hard. Like plastic, you know, the plastic cover it like ceiling, and we have to stay, it's too hard, raining sometimes. So many people died that time because too much. Like a new place, new, like everything new. But my life is, yeah, that time I'm younger, this time not bad, not good, but it's too hard.

Now I'm feeling it's too hard because we can go other, like, place, go to work and bring money. We have to stay the inside and what did the government give me, then we have to accept and eat instead.

Gagan: And my dad he I takes us in Nepal because the Bhutan politicians having a lot of issues. And he wants to save us, or he wants to save himself I don't know. So he took us in Nepal because we are Nepali. So then my dad he thought that Nepal is our place we can get that place to hide, you know, to stay. And then we he took us in Nepal and we being a refugee. We didn't know we being a refugee, you know. And he took us in Nepal and he keep us in there. And I asked him, "Dad when we're going back?" And he said, "After a few months".

Slowly my dad he left us alone. He passed away in the refugee camp and we don't know what we do. And my dad he passed away in Nepal refugee camp in Beldagi. And I don't remember it might be like 1992, we became a refugee. In 1993 or 1994 he died. Yeah, and then we became the kind of the real refugee. From there we became a real refugee. Physically not any support, you know. Spiritually not any support. No dad, no mom, no real land, no strong house, no good food.

Nobody asks, "Gagan, what do you want? Gagan, how can I help you? How can I help you." Nobody asks us. That's the refugee life. What we get we need to survive that.

And then yeah as refugees, I spent like a 23 years a refugee. And I became

like 35 something. Yeah my years and I totally grown up and I can decide what is good and what is bad, you know.

And slowly I changed my life and then in the refugee camp in Nepal I got the Jesus Christ. From before that I didn't know about the Jesus Christ. I never heard from anyone.

Yeah in Nepal refugee camp, I got the Jesus Christ. If I was not a refugee maybe be I am still in a Hindus or Buddhist. Maybe it's God's plan. This guy needs to be a refugee and then he will get the Jesus Christ. On there the God's plan so I became a refugee. And from refugee I got the citizenship of heaven. I'm happy now.

(Please Stand)

INVOCATION *Matthew 28:19b; 18:20*

P In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

OPENING SENTENCES

P Arise, shine, for your light has come!

C **Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.**

P All the nations shall come to the light of Christ.

C **Kings shall bring Him gifts.**

P For Christ reveals the mystery hidden through the ages,

C **that all nations are partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

C **But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

(Silence for reflection)

P Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

C **Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

P Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

(or)

P In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. *John 1:12; Philippians 1:6*

C **Amen.**

HYMN OF PRAISE: I WANT TO WALK AS A CHILD OF THE LIGHT

LSB 411 v. 1

1 I want to walk as a child of the light.
I want to fol - low Je - sus.
God set the stars to give light to the world.
The star of my life is Je - sus.
Refrain
In Him there is no dark - ness at all.
The night and the day are both a - like.
The Lamb is the light of the cit - y of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Je - sus.

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SALUTATION

P The Lord be with you.
C **And also with you.**

COLLECT OF THE DAY

P Let us pray.
Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C **Amen.**

(Please Be Seated)

✠ WORD ✠

OLD TESTAMENT READING *Jonah 3:1-5, 10*

¹Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them....

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

त्यसपछि परमप्रभुले योनालाई फेरि भन्नुभयो, ² “तिमी निनवेको ठूलो शहरमा जाऊ अनि म जे कुरा तिमीलाई बताउँछु सो त्यहाँ प्रचार गर।”

³ यसैले योना उठे अनि परमप्रभुको आज्ञा पालन गर्दै निनवेमा गए। निनवे साह्रै ठूलो शहर थियो, त्यो पार गर्न तिन दिन लाग्थ्यो।

⁴ योना शहरको मध्य भागमा गए अनि मानिसहरूलाई प्रचारगर्न शुरु गरे। योनाले भने, “चालिस दिन पछि निनवे शहर नाश हुनेछ।”

⁵ परमेश्वरबाट त्यस्तो संदेश आएपछि निनवेका मानिसहरूले परमेश्वरमाथि विश्वास गरे। अनि तिनीहरू उपवास बसे र तिनीहरूले गरेका पापहरूका निम्ति सोच्न थाले। मानिसहरूले दुःख व्यक्त गर्नका निम्ति बिशेष प्रकारको वस्त्रहरू धरण गरे। शहरको सबै साना-ठूलाहरूले यसै गर्न थाले।

L This is the Word of the Lord.
C **Thanks be to God.**

EPISTLE 1 Corinthians 7:29–35

²⁹This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, ³¹and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

³²I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. ³⁵I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

²⁹ दाज्यू-भाइ, दिदी-बहिनीहरू हो! मेरो भन्नुको तात्पर्य: हाम्रो लागि समय छोटो छ। जस-जसको पत्नीहरू छन्, पत्नी नहुनेहरू झैं बस। ³⁰ जो दुःखीत छन् तिनीहरू दुःख नपाएको जस्तै बसुन्। जो हर्षित छन् तिनीहरू हर्ष नभएको जस्तै बसुन् किनमेल गर्नेहरू तिनीहरू केही नभएको जस्तै बसुन्। ³¹ जो सांसारिक वस्तु व्यवहार गर्छन्, तिनीहरू ती वस्तुहरूमा चासो नभए झैं गरी बसुन्। तिमीहरू यसरी नै बसु पर्छ किन कि यो संसार, जुन अवस्थामा अहिले छ, चाँडै बितेर जाने छ।

³² तिमीहरू चिन्ताबाट मुक्त होऊ भन्ने म चाहन्छु। एक अविवाहित मानिस प्रभुको काममा पूर्णरूपले मग्न रहन्छ। उसको उद्देश्य नै प्रभुलाई खुशी तुल्याउनु हो। ³³ तर विवाहित मानिस सांसारिक वस्तुसँग सम्बन्धित हुन्छ। उसको लक्ष्य आफ्नी पत्नीलाई खुशी पार्नु हुन्छ। ³⁴ उसको ध्यान दुइवटा लक्ष्य तिर छुटिन्छ। एउटी अविवाहित स्त्री अथवा एउटी कन्या प्रभुको सम्बन्धमा व्यस्त रहन्छे। ऊ आफ्नो सम्पूर्ण शरीर र आत्मा प्रभुलाई अर्पण गर्न चाहन्छे। तर विवाहित स्त्री सांसारिक कुराहरूमै सम्बन्धित रहन्छे। उसको प्राथमिक कर्तव्य आफ्नो पतिलाई खुशी पार्नु रहन्छ। ³⁵ तिमीहरूकै भलाईको निम्ति म यी कुराहरू गर्दैछु। मैले तिमीहरूलाई नियन्त्रण गर्न खोजेको होइन। तर तिमीहरू ठीक ढङ्गले बाँच्न सक भन्ने म चाहन्छु। अनि आफ्नो समय अरू कुराहरूतिरबाट मुक्त गराई पूर्णतया प्रभुमा लगाएको मन पराउँछु।

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

(Please Stand)

ALLELUIA AND VERSE John 6:68



HOLY GOSPEL *Matthew 2:13-23*

P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the second chapter.

C **Glory to You, O Lord.**

¹³When the wise men had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸“A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

¹⁹But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” ²¹And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C **Praise to You, O Christ.**

APOSTLES' CREED

C **I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ,**

**His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Please Be Seated)

HYMN OF THE DAY: O CHRIST, WHO CALLED THE TWELVE

LSB 856

SERMON

Rev. Matthew Clark

Title: "Refugee and Citizen"

Text: Matthew 2:13-16

Interview Question: What was your experience as a refugee in Nepal?

(Please Stand)

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

P Let us pray to the Savior of the Nations. Lord, in Your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

P Savior of the Nations, in Your flight to Egypt You became a refugee without a home so that your life might be preserved for our salvation. Grant that we rejoice in our citizenship in heaven that You made possible through your dying and rising. Lord, in Your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

P Savior of the Nations, You were persecuted during your life on earth, so also are those who bear your holy name in our world today. Give us freedom from fear in your promise that blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Lord, in Your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

P Savior of the Nations, in Holy baptism we are connected to your death and resurrection, so that we are assured of salvation. Remind us that through baptism we are also united to one another as members of the same family with one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Lord, in Your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

P Savior of the Nations, you came to bring God's reign over sin as you healed and restored. So also today, continue to have compassion upon those in need of restoration among us, (especially...). Give healing and wholeness according to your gracious will. Lord, in Your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

(Additional Petitions)

P Savior of the Nations, hear our prayer for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C **Amen.**

GATHERING OF OFFERINGS

Please place offerings in the wooden box located in the church narthex/lobby. Giving is also available online at ascensionstl.com. Your tithes and offerings shape the lives of people through the Gospel of Jesus Christ for now and eternity. Thank you for your generosity!

OFFERTORY: *Psalm 116:12-13, 17-19*



What shall I ren - der to the Lord for all His ben - e-fits to



me? I will of - fer the sac - ri - fice of thanks - giv - ing and will



call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of sal-

va-tion and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my
 vows to the Lord now in the pres-ence of all His peo-ple, in the
 courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Je-ru-sa-lem.

✠ SACRAMENT ✠

We believe Holy Communion is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink. If you are a communicant member of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation, please feel free to commune with us. If not, please speak with the pastor before receiving the Lord's Supper.

How should we each examine ourselves before coming to Holy Communion?

1. *Be aware of our sins and be sorry for them*
2. *Believe in our Savior, Jesus Christ, and in His words in the Sacrament*
3. *Intend, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to live as God's forgiven people walking in newness of life*

PREFACE

P The Lord be with you.

C **And also with you.**

P Lift up your hearts.

C **We lift them to the Lord.**

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C **It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**

PROPER PREFACE

P It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord; for what had been hidden from before the foundation of the world You have made known to the nations in Your Son. In Him, being found in the substance of our mortal nature, You have manifested the fullness of Your glory. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and singing:

SANCTUS *Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 21:9*



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of
 pow'r and might: Heav'n and earth are full of Your
 glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
 Bless - ed is He who comes in the name
 of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

WORDS OF OUR LORD

- P Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My T body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My T blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

LORD'S PRAYER

- C **Our Father who art in heaven,
 hallowed be Thy name,
 Thy kingdom come,
 Thy will be done on earth
 as it is in heaven;
 give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses
 as we forgive those
 who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For Thine is the kingdom
 and the power and the glory
 forever and ever. Amen.**

PAX DOMINI *John 20:19*

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.
C **Amen**

AGNUS DEI *John 1:29*



☐ Lamb of God, You take a-way the sin of the world;
have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, You take a-way the
sin of the world; have mer-cy on us. Lamb of
God, You take a-way the sin of the world;
grant us peace, grant us peace.

(Please Be Seated)

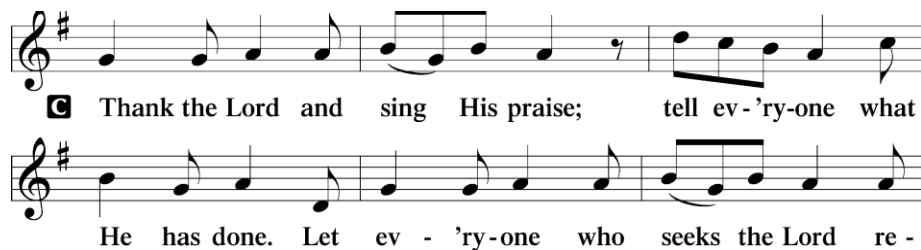
✠ **DISTRIBUTION HYMNS** ✠

MY FAITH LOOKS UP TO THEE
LSB 702

LET US EVER WALK WITH JESUS
LSB 685

(Please Stand)

THANK THE LORD *Psalm 105:1-3, 42-43; 1 Chronicles 16:8-10*



☐ Thank the Lord and sing His praise; tell ev-'ry-one what
He has done. Let ev - 'ry-one who seeks the Lord re -

joy and proud - ly bear His name. He re-calls His prom-is-
 es and leads His peo - ple forth in joy with shouts of thanks -
 giv - ing. Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

BENEDICTION *Numbers 6:24-26*

- P The Lord bless you and keep you.
 The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.
 The Lord look upon you with favor and T give you peace.
- C **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN: JESUS SHALL REIGN
LSB 832

POSTLUDE
Organ

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX SIX

PROJECT-RELATED DOCUMENTS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Encouraging Dialogue: Sharing the Oral History of Nepali Refugees Through Dialogical Preaching to Inspire Intercultural Collaboration

Researcher: Matthew Clark

Email Address and Telephone Number: clarkm@csl.edu; 314-832-5600

Research Supervisor: Dr. David Schmitt

Email Address: schmitt@csl.edu

You are invited to be part of a research study. The researcher is a student at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri as part of the Doctor of Ministry program (D.Min.). The information in this form is provided to help you decide if you want to participate in the research study. This form describes what you will have to do during the study and the risks and benefits of the study.

If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the researcher. Do not sign this form unless the researcher has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

In this study, the researcher is seeking to explore how the gathering of oral histories among Ascension's refugee population will serve the dialogical preaching task in the congregation. The purpose of this study is to incorporate selections of recorded oral histories of member of Ascension who are Nepali refugees in a series of dialogical sermons to inspire intercultural collaboration where people of different cultures work together in shared ministry.

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO BE IN THE STUDY?

You are invited to be in the study because you are:

- A refugee who has come the United States from Nepal or Bhutan and is now a baptized member of Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri. You have also been selected because you are one of the leaders within the Nepali community at Ascension. For the purposes of this study, a refugee is some who has come to the United States under refugee status. Under United States law, a refugee is someone who, before coming to the Unites State:

- Is of special humanitarian concern to the United States
- Demonstrates that they were persecuted or fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group
- Is not firmly resettled in another country
- Is admissible to the United States¹

If you do not meet the description above, you are not able to be in the study. In addition to the requirements, participants in the study must also be above the age of 18 and a legal adult as defined by the state of Missouri

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THIS STUDY?

Four participants will be in this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher is pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church. The researcher is also the Vice-Chairperson of Christian Friends of New Americans in St. Louis, Missouri.

WILL IT COST ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to pay to be in the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study, your participation will last approximately 90 minutes. You will have to come to Ascension Lutheran Church for one evening to record your oral history by video.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you decide to be in this study and if you sign this form, you will do the following things:

- Give personal information about yourself, such as your age, gender, occupation, and education level.
- Answer questions during an interview about your experience as refugee including living in a refugee camp and relocating to the United States. Questions may also include an account of your baptism and how you heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While you are in the study, you will be expected to:

- Follow the instructions you are given.
- Tell the researcher if you want to stop being in the study at any time.

¹ “Refugees,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant and Citizenship Services, accessed July 6, 2023, www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees.

WILL I BE RECORDED?

Yes, the researcher will record on video your 90-minute interview. The researcher will use the video in order to create written transcripts for data interpretation. The researcher will also use the recordings in order to compose three dialogical sermons which will incorporate content from your interview. Portions of your interview may be shared in worship, Bible class, and other settings such as conferences. These recordings to be shared in whole, or in part, indefinitely. The researcher requests that you sign a Deed of Gift which will allow your interview to be more broadly available, and will help insure that the researcher will not infringe upon U.S. copyright laws.

WILL BEING IN THIS STUDY HELP ME?

Being in this study will not help you. Information from this study might help researchers help others in the future.

ARE THERE RISKS TO ME IF I AM IN THIS STUDY?

No study is completely risk-free. However, we don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

WILL I GET PAID?

You will not receive anything for being in the study.

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to be in the study and you can change your mind about being in the study at any time. There will be no penalty to you. If you want to stop being in the study, tell the researcher. The researcher can remove you from the study at any time. This could happen if:

- The researcher believes it is best for you to stop being in the study.
- You do not follow directions about the study.
- You no longer meet the inclusion criteria to participate.

WHO WILL USE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT MY BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Any information you provide in this study, outside of the recorded oral interviews, will be kept confidential. The researcher will keep the information you provide in password protected computer as well as in a locked desk drawer in the researcher's home office. Only the researcher and research supervisor will be able to review this information. Video recordings of oral interviews will only be accessed by the researcher and a member of Ascension Lutheran who will assist with the editing.

Even if you leave the study early, the researcher may still be able to use your data to compose three dialogical sermons as well as in worship, Bible class, and other settings such as conferences.

Limits of Privacy (Confidentiality)

Generally speaking, the researcher can assure you that he will keep everything you tell him or do for the study private. Yet there are times where the researcher cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person might harm themselves or another, or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to hurt themselves or another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS STUDY?

You can ask questions about the study at any time. You can call the researcher if you have any concerns or complaints. You should call the researcher at the phone number listed on page 1 of this form if you have questions about anything related to this study.

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read this form, and I have been able to ask questions about this study. The researcher has talked with me about this study. The researcher has answered all my questions. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I agree to allow the use and sharing of my study-related records as described above.

By signing this form, I have not given up any of my legal rights as a research participant. I will get a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I attest that the participant named above had enough time to consider this information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED/VIDEOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape and videotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Deed of Gift

I, _____ (name of interviewee) of
_____ (address of interviewee), herein permanently give, convey, and assign to Matthew Clark my interview consisting of my oral history recorded on video. In doing so I understand that my oral history interview will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any medium that the researcher shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in my oral history interview as well as my rights, title, and interest in any copyright which may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of: reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, Matthew Clark, accept the oral history interview of _____ (name of interviewee) for inclusion in my Major Applied Project in partial completion of the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry program at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Signature of donor

Signature of researcher

Printed name of donor

Printed name of researcher

Letter of Support from Ascension Lutheran's Ministry Council for Project's Research



5347 DONOVAN AVENUE • SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63109-2695
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A MEMBER CONGREGATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

To Whom It May Concern,

August 22, 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church has been very supportive of Pastor Matthew Clark working to complete the Doctor of Ministry degree through Concordia Seminary and completion of his Major Applied Project. He has kept us up to date on his progress and has explained his project as well as the goals he hopes to achieve. We approve of his research at Ascension as he records the oral history of Nepali Refugee members and look forward to reviewing the results of his research.

I am pleased to write this letter of support for Pastor Clark on behalf of Ascension Luther Church Ministry Council. If there is any further documentation that is needed, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert Bremer,
President, Ascension Lutheran Church
Cell: 314-413-2603
5347 Donovan Avenue
Saint Louis, MO

Loved by Christ, Sharing Christ's Love

REV. MATTHEW CLARK
Pastor

MARIE MÜHLKE
Administrative Assistant

PAMELA FOX
Office Manager

GABE MAICHEL
Director of Music

GAGAN GURUNG
Nepali Evangelist

A MEMBER CONGREGATION IN WORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

APPENDIX SEVEN

LINKS TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW VIDEOS SHOWN IN WORSHIP

Sermon and Divine Service #1

<https://youtu.be/U9VaFzFI5RE>

Sermon and Divine Service #2

<https://youtu.be/2zOUiSEOWjc>

Sermon and Divine Service #3

<https://youtu.be/uYa6nproHyU>

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