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Chen, Gary Yigong. "Contextualizing and Testing the BELLS Model in a Missional Community in a Canadian Diaspora Chinese Church." D. Min., Tyndale University, 2022.

Tyndale University

Contextualizing and Testing the BELLS Model in a Missional Community in a  
Canadian Diaspora Chinese Church

A Research Portfolio

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale University

by

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Toronto, Canada

September 2022

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## **ABSTRACT**

This portfolio aims to find a practical and effective way to increase missional awareness in the congregants at Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church and inspire them to be more active participants in this objective. This portfolio is composed of three major parts: a Personal Narrative and Ministry Context (Chapter 2), a Philosophy of Christian Leadership (Chapter 3), and a Field Ministry Project (Chapter 4). In Chapter 2, the author uses a narrative approach to describe how becoming a Christian not only profoundly changed his worldview and values but also focused his leadership philosophy from being power-based to service-based. In Chapter 3, through a literature review, the author elaborates on what servant leadership really means and argues that it should be a distinguishing feature of Christian leaders. In Chapter 4, the author explores whether or not the hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional Chinese church community context increased both participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a culturally appropriate way. This exploration was conducted through a series of in-person and online gatherings, interviews, and weekly practices of BELLS in a missional community format. The author uses the BELLS model, developed by

Michael Frost (2016), the missional community strategies developed by Mike Breen (2010), and his own ecclesiology, missiology, and Christian leadership philosophy to guide the entire research project. Qualitative research data was collected and analyzed through interviews with seven participants, weekly DNA (Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability) Forms, and the author's own participatory observations during in-person gatherings and online discussions. The results of the research project indicated that the practice of the BELLS model helped increase most of the participants' missional awareness and passion for evangelizing their Chinese compatriots. It also helped most of them to live out their belief in the cultural context of the Chinese diaspora.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have profound gratitude to God for giving me passion and insight during every step of this research project. It was by his grace and mercy that I was able to complete my DMin study. He made me strong when I was low and lifted me up again when I fell. May this portfolio be pleasing to him.

I offer my appreciation to my wife Xiaozhen, who has been my helper and motivator throughout this journey, and my daughters Diana and Hope, who have been tremendous sources of strength to me throughout this process. Without their love, sacrifice, and encouragement, it would not have been possible for me to finish this project. My special thanks to Hope for editing every single paper I wrote. She is a great comfort to me as someone who, on the one hand, wants to express thoughts perfectly in English but, on the other hand, simply does not have the ability to do so. I really should share this doctoral degree with her.

I cannot adequately thank my church family, Toronto RenAi Chinese Church, for accepting me and working with me all these years. Special thanks to the board and staff team who allowed me to take a half-year sabbatical in 2021 and some extra time off in 2022 due to the delay in completing my DMin study as I originally planned. I am so grateful to the seven church members who volunteered to step into this research project in their busy schedule and allowed themselves to experience the blessings and challenges of missional living. Without their active participation and candid opinions in the interviews, in-person gatherings, and weekly online sharing sessions, I would not have had the vital

data needed for my research project. I am convinced that God has already started to use this project to cultivate missional living habits in their lives, and I believe that through them, the whole church will be revived.

I am so grateful to my academic family at Tyndale. My thanks to the committee members for their immense guidance and advice. I want to thank Dr. Mark Chapman for his encouragement, as well as his valuable questions and comments, which have inspired me to think more deeply and express myself more clearly in this research project. Thank you to leadership track director Dr. Michael Krause for reading the thousands of words that I have written and for shepherding me from my MDiv studies years ago through this doctoral pilgrimage. Special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Bill Thornton, for inspiring me to keep going when I was about to give up. He spent tremendous time revising my paper and, more importantly, chatting with me almost on a weekly basis when my spirit was extremely low. He showed me what integrity, patience, kindness, and love really are, and he demonstrated to me how to make others better. I want to thank my Cohort 11 friends with whom I have shared this journey over the past few years for their encouragement and prayers, which made my Doctor of Ministry study all the more enjoyable.

Last but not least, I dedicate my research project to the memory of my beloved father, Chen ShanJiao, and my mother, Dai XiuFeng, who passed away in August 2021 and June 2022, respectively. Because of the global pandemic, I was unable to go back to China to see them one last time, and this has become my lifelong regret.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BELLS - Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn, Sent

CAST - Complex Adaptive System Theory

DNA - Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability

GTA - Greater Toronto Area

TRCCC - Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This research portfolio contains three main sections: Chapter 2 is my personal narrative and ministry context. In this chapter, I used a narrative approach to describe how my upbringing, education, and ministry experiences have shaped me. I devoted a large portion of this section to explaining how a specific political culture accompanied me as I grew up and how I went from being a determined atheist to becoming a Christian. In this section, I also unfold how my Christian faith not only profoundly changed my worldview and values but significantly affected my leadership philosophy and practice when serving in the church. I will unpack the formation of my leadership philosophy in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 details my philosophy of Christian leadership. In this section, I will argue that among so many different leadership theories, there are contrasting models of leadership based on power and control and not based on service. I will devote a large part of the chapter to introducing my own philosophy of leadership: servant leadership. As some researchers criticize this servant leadership theory for not having a precise definition and lacking empirical support, I will present a way to establish a set of characteristics of servant leadership and form a practical model. The leadership framework of the missional community is an application of my leadership philosophy.

Chapter 4 will outline my field ministry project report, in which I describe what I did and discovered through my research. This research project took place

between August 2021 and November 2021 and explored whether or not the hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community setting would increase participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a Chinese church context. This exploration was conducted through a series of in-person gatherings, interviews, and practices of the BELLS model in a missional community format. The BELLS model, developed by Michael Frost (2016), the missional community strategies, developed by Mike Breen (2010), and my own ecclesiology, missiology, and Christian leadership philosophy, were used to guide the entire research project. Seven participants were invited to co-host this project. Their interactions during various gatherings provided data that was supplemented by natural observation and interviews. Qualitative research data was collected through interviews with the participants, personal journals, and participatory observations.

The BELLS model was the primary testing model throughout this research project. This model consists of the following five aspects (Frost 2016, 29-97):

1. Bless. Bless three people on a weekly basis, at least one of whom is not your own church member.
2. Eat. Every week, eat with two people; at least one of them must be someone outside of your church.
3. Listen. Have a period of dedicated time to listen to the Holy Spirit's voice at least once a week.
4. Learn. At least once a week, spend one period of time learning about Christ.

5. Sent. Identify yourself as a missionary sent by God.

The outcome of the research project was that the practice of the BELLS model helped increase most of the participants' missional awareness and passion for evangelizing their Chinese compatriots. It also helped them to live out their belief in the cultural context of the Chinese diaspora.

### **Problem**

This portfolio was a product of many years of reflection on the problems that I have encountered during my church ministry. The genesis of this research project began in early 2018 when I was invited to attend the Intentional Disciple Making Churches conference organized by the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelization. During the conference, the topic most discussed by the participants was how to stop the steady decline in church membership and attendance, and in particular, how to attract and help the younger generation to return to church. Some of the workshop speakers told me that Western churches in Canada were shrinking while immigrant-based churches were growing. They believed that immigrant-based churches were more viable in all aspects than Western churches, and as the most populous and fastest-growing minority in Canada, the fast-growing diaspora Chinese church plays an important role in the change and development of the entire Canadian Christian church situation.

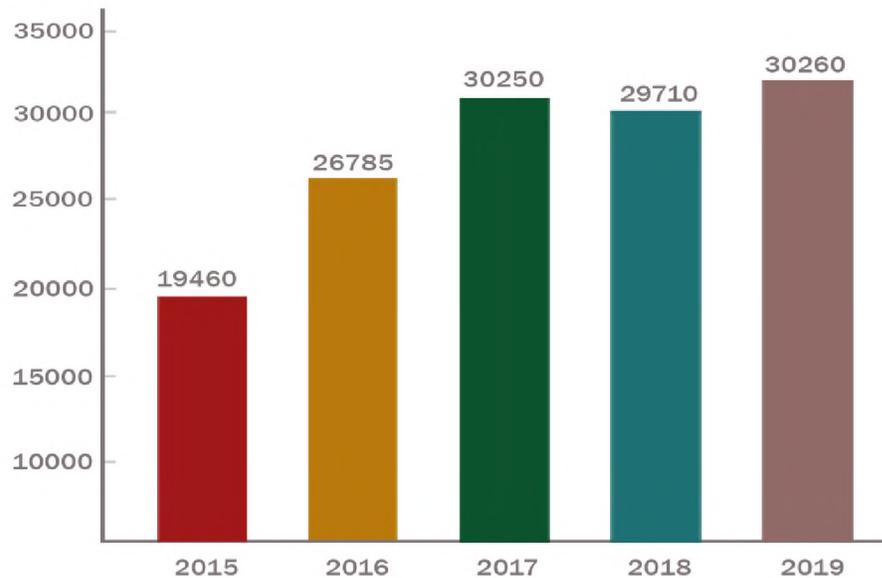
Did what they told me correspond to the facts? Based on my experience serving at Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church (TRCCC), I found that the reality of most immigrant-based churches (Chinese churches, for example) was not as optimistic as people may have thought. In fact, Western churches have

existed for hundreds of years, but most of the diaspora Chinese churches in Canada have only been around for a few decades. In the entire Greater Toronto Area (GTA), apart from the Toronto Chinese Presbyterian Church, which was first established in 1910, the vast majority of Cantonese-speaking churches were established after the 1970s (Ming Pao 2011), and the first Mandarin-speaking church in Toronto did not start until 1991 (Hua Xia 2009).

So, what is the reality of the diaspora Chinese churches in Canada? I have had in-depth conversations with pastors of several Mandarin-speaking churches about this. During our conversations, almost every pastor expressed concerns about how they could keep the church from losing relevance and how they could hand over the baton of leadership to the younger generations. Given that the average age of existing church members continues to increase in their churches, these pastors were concerned that the Mandarin-speaking diaspora Chinese churches would become one-generation churches. Using TRCCC as an example, I found that more than half of their second generation stopped attending church after leaving for university. Also, the number of Chinese immigrants and international students who attended TRCCC decreased year by year. Following this trend, TRCCC would become a one-generation church within the foreseeable future.

People may argue that the demise of diaspora churches of any ethnic group is inevitable as the second generation of immigrant families gradually integrates into the local language and culture. However, a fact that cannot be ignored is that, to this day, there are still thousands of immigrants coming to

Canada from China every year (see Figure 1). In addition, there are thousands of Chinese students studying in Canada every year. One report by the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE 2018) shows that the Chinese student body is the largest among all the international students studying in various Canadian universities and secondary schools.



**Figure 1: Chinese Immigrants to Canada from 2015 to 2019 (The Canadian Magazine of Immigration 2020)**

According to Qiang Zha, a professor at York University, in 2017, there were more than 91,000 Chinese students studying in Canadian universities and colleges and more than 31,000 students in kindergarten to grade twelve schools. On the one hand, as Zha points out, “Chinese students in Canada are perceived as always sticking together, showing little interest in interacting with local peers, and not being committed to Western liberal values” (Zha 2019). On the other hand, based on my ministry experience, I realized that they enjoy living in the middle of a Chinese subculture and are very eager to get help from the Chinese community. The high volume of new immigrants and Chinese international

students gives the diaspora Chinese churches in Canada no reason to stagnate. More importantly, since it has historically been difficult for these Chinese immigrants to hear the gospel in atheist culture and under autocratic rule, the diaspora Chinese church in Canada has the inescapable duty of sharing the gospel with them. Despite this, the Christian ministry that could be thriving seems to be less and less effective in churches that I am familiar with, including TRCCC.

According to the surveys I conducted at TRCCC years ago, one of the reasons why the diaspora Chinese church ministry turned out this way was because more and more of the younger generation at TRCCC hold negative views of Chinese churches and Christianity. So, what is the solution for us to engage the younger generation of Mandarin-speaking people in the relevant ministry? Like many other Chinese churches in Canada, the most common practice at TRCCC was to provide a series of discipleship training courses (cultivating co-workers), and seeker-friendly activities (attracting non-believers). I called this approach the traditional model. This model had played a role in solving the problems faced by the church. However, after many years of practice with this traditional model, the church's stagnant state remained.

### **Opportunity**

For the above reasons, three years ago, with the approval of the TRCCC deacon board, I started designing a new ministry. The goal of this ministry was to cultivate missional disciples and to attract non-believers to church by establishing missional communities in downtown Toronto—particularly among the younger

generation of Mandarin speakers—based on my ecclesiology, missiology, and Christian leadership philosophy. I called this the missional community model. This model aimed to use hands-on, inquiry learning to conduct discipleship training by requiring participants to establish a missional community in a secular environment, such as downtown Toronto. In order to implement the missional community model, first, I needed to understand what inquiry learning is. The following is a working definition of inquiry learning:

In contrast to other learning methods, inquiry-based learning is characterized by the fact that learners shape, learn and deliberate on the process of a research project, which is aimed at obtaining insights that are of interest to third parties, doing so throughout all the essential phases of said project; from developing questions and hypotheses, selecting and implementing the methods, through testing and presenting the results, either by working independently or in active collaboration with an overarching project. (Mieg 2019)

Inquiry learning is designed as a form of active learning that involves individuals asking questions. In contrast, traditional guided learning is based on having instructors demonstrate factual and personal knowledge about different topics. Facilitators, not lecturers, help individuals identify problems and develop new knowledge or solutions in an inquiry learning environment. Such an environment is particularly conducive to the establishment and development of missional communities.

It was not easy to implement the missional community model at TRCCC since it has historically focused on the attractional and small group models. One of the reasons TRCCC has adhered to the attractional model from the day it was founded is that most of the leadership team was influenced by this model when they became Christians. They believed that if the attractional model helped them

accept Jesus many years ago, then the same approach should also help people accept Christ today. Such logic and belief made any change difficult. Also, the flatter leadership structure and lack of rituals advocated by the missional community model seem a bit nondescript in the Chinese culture, which is accustomed to hierarchy and pays attention to ritual.

Before I began establishing a missional community, the first question I had to address was how to implement an appropriate method to cultivate and increase the missional awareness of our congregation. After consulting the DMin professors at Tyndale Seminary many times, I ended up planning to implement a small-scale inquiry-based research project over a three-month period. This research project was jointly undertaken by me and seven volunteers. The objective of the project was to explore whether the practice of BELLS could increase participants' missional awareness.

The research question that drove the inquiry learning project was this: Would a three-month-long, hands-on, inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community setting increase participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a Chinese church context?

It was impossible to determine over a three-month period the overall impact this project could have on TRCCC. However, through this experiment, we have started exploring what relevant ministry should look like in a diaspora Chinese church context. Also, we improved this hands-on inquiry learning of BELLS based on feedback from participants and promoted the BELLS model in other diaspora Chinese churches across the GTA.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the activities originally envisioned had to be moved online. Also, the missional community was not limited to downtown Toronto anymore but expanded to the entire GTA. After the pandemic is over and now that this project is complete, I hope to return to downtown Toronto and conduct the research project again based on the original plan. In the Context section, I will explain the reason why I am focusing on the Chinese ministry in downtown Toronto.

Before moving on to the next chapter, Personal Narrative and Ministry Context Assessment, I want to make a few more comments. First, I used the New International Version for all the scripture references in this project. Second, I may repeat some of the content in different chapters in order to maintain clarity.

## **CHAPTER 2: PERSONAL NARRATIVE AND MINISTRY CONTEXT**

In this chapter, I will narrate my upbringing, education, faith journey, and ministry experiences in order to help readers understand more clearly how I came from being a determined atheist to becoming a Christian and how I was shaped into a suitable vessel by God. My hope is that this chapter will also help readers understand that my philosophy of leadership, which will be introduced in detail in Chapter 3, was not formed overnight but formed after many years of struggle and reflection. As readers will see in this chapter, I have longed to be a leader since I was a little boy. After I became a Christian, I saw the essence of leadership through the lens of the Christian faith. What C.S. Lewis wrote in “Is Theology Poetry?” best expresses what I want to say: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (1962, 164-165).

Much of this chapter also talks about my ministry context and experiences. I hope to help readers understand that the ultimate goal of my research project is to explore a way to solve some of the problems faced by TRCCC and many other diaspora Chinese churches in Canada. I also hope that readers will realize how serious these problems are from my ministry context. The reason why I am so burdened with this research project is that I do not want TRCCC to be one generation away from extinction. I pray that God would let those of my own ethnicity “inherit a double portion of your spirit” (2 Kings 2:9)

and let me be under the obligation to preach the gospel to the next generation of Chinese people—a task I am eager to accomplish.

### **My Upbringing**

I was born in China a couple of years before the start of China's Cultural Revolution. This revolution lasted ten years and threw the whole country into a state of chaos. Both of my parents were government officers. Like many other innocent people who suffered in the Cultural Revolution, my father became a victim of the political power struggle in the Communist Party. He was accused of being a Capitalist-roader and a traitor to the revolution. One night when I was six years old, a group of guards came to our home and turned everything inside out. I was so scared when one of the leaders took me aside and told me that my father was a bad guy. He also said that he was the class enemy and that my brother and I should keep away from him. The guards took my father away without any legal evidence. After the guards left, I continued to hide in my bedroom, dreaming of the day when I would grow up and become a powerful man so that I could fight against these rebels and rescue my father from detention. This was the start of my hunger to become a leader.

After Mao Zedong died in 1976, the new leader advocated for reform and the opening of the country to the world. Students were asked to return to school and encouraged to study hard to improve the country's Four Modernizations: agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. In 1977, the national entrance exam for higher education, called *Gaokao*, was reinstated. All students,

whether rich or poor, were invited to take this exam after graduating high school. The exam changed the lives of tens of millions of people like me. Because of the lack of higher education resources, getting into university at that time was very challenging. When I took the *Gaokao* in 1979, the enrolment rate in higher education was less than 6% (ACIC 2019). I was among the top 6% of high school graduates and was admitted into one of the elite Chinese universities at the age of sixteen. As an ambitious student who wanted to lead the next generation, words could not describe how excited I was over my admission and the subsequent prospect of a brighter future.

### **My Faith Journey**

Due to my upbringing and education in a predominantly atheist society, I did not believe in anything supernatural that could not be proved scientifically. During university, I was prideful and believed that I was the leader of my generation and that I alone had full control over my life. I studied very hard and won many awards. My parents, relatives, and friends were all very proud of me and dubbed me a role model for my generation.

I am so grateful to my parents. Because I am the eldest son in a Chinese family, I was conditioned by my parents from day one to become a courageous leader. They taught me how to work in a team and how to deal with failure and hardship constructively, and they demonstrated these lessons to me in their own lives. Eventually, I learned to think of leaders as people with a mission, or someone who has the power to act as a spokesperson, give directions, be

accountable, direct people to take action, and even control people. Based on this understanding, after graduating from university, I searched for hierarchical power structures in the workplace and social settings.

After several years of working in a research department of the Chinese government, I received an opportunity to study abroad, which I eagerly accepted. I went to the United States to continue my studies in mathematics and pursue my Master's and Ph.D. degrees. What I never expected was to be invited to a campus Christian fellowship during my first week at school. I had no idea what Christianity was, but I decided to go anyway. After that, I continued to attend a Bible study on Fridays almost every week. What really attracted me to go there was not the teachings of the Bible but rather the free dinner they provided after the fellowship. At the time, many international students like me went to church simply because they wanted help with things like getting used furniture, and quite a few of them ended up becoming Christians, myself included. This effective ministry model more than twenty years ago influenced me so much that I used the same model to attract Chinese immigrants and international students to come to church until a few years ago.

On my first Thanksgiving Day in the United States, I was invited to an American couple's house. They were very nice, and I learned later that they were Christians dedicated to ministering to students from mainland China. I still remember that night, there were six or seven new students from China at this couple's home for dinner, and I remember that I had never tasted such delicious turkey before. After dinner, the husband shared some messages from a little book

of spiritual principles with us. Before he even finished the first principle—that God loves us—I could not help but laugh because he had obviously overlooked the fact that, as atheists, we did not believe there is a god at all. But he kept talking about how much this non-existent God loves all people.

Things only got worse from there on. The couple proceeded to teach us how to brush our teeth after meals, and they explained how to use basic appliances such as refrigerators, washers, and dryers as if we had never seen these things before. During our conversations, they also asked if we had to wear the same uniform and an army hat when we were in China. When I was leaving, I curiously asked the couple if they had ever been to China. They said that they had been there in 1972 as English teachers after President Richard Nixon’s visit to China. They lived in a city in northwest China for about four months, and their knowledge of China had been frozen since then.

When I reflected on this event from many years ago, I realized that when I am ministering, it is very important to be a good listener and to understand the context of our ministry. Otherwise, our efforts will be counterproductive. On that night, the couple obviously ignored our cultural and religious background. They turned what should have been a dialogue into a monologue. It seemed to me that they did not want to listen to our stories and tried instead to unilaterally teach us modern American culture with a sense of cultural superiority. They also stereotyped the Chinese people and believed that the Chinese people must all still be the same as they saw in the small northwestern city they had lived in many years ago.

I have made similar mistakes as well. For example, after I became a Christian, I often tried to convince my Chinese friends that Western countries had a much higher social civilization, as well as more wealth and more advanced technology than China. I told them that because all of this was brought about by Christianity, they too had to accept the Christian faith to prevent China from always being a backward nation. I recall that whenever I had a chance, I told them these things passionately. Sometimes I did stop and listen to them, but the purpose of doing so was not to try to understand them but to gather more data with which to educate them more effectively. My intentions were good, but because the method was problematic, the final result was negative. Until a few years ago, I naively believed that international Chinese students in Toronto would come to church if free food were provided since that is what I personally experienced more than twenty years ago. I believed that if this was done, students could come to Christ in the same way I was led to Christ in the early 1990s.

For an atheist like me, who has long held to the supremacy of science and rationality, entering into the Christian faith has never been an easy task. After I gradually got acquainted with everyone in the Christian fellowship, I started to debate with them whenever I had the chance. I once heard Christians talk about how Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). I felt very offended when I heard it. I believed there was no absolute truth in this world, and I could not agree with their criticism of relativism and their other arrogant perspectives. As Alan Race said, "Given these kinds of assumptions about historically conditioned knowledge, no faith which proclaims itself as absolutely

a priori the true way can escape the charge of religious arrogance and imperialism” (1982, 29).

Even though I could not accept what those people in the Christian fellowship said, I still wanted to be friends with them. Their frankness, meekness, and humility fascinated me deeply. I was so grateful that when I was lost and had rejected God, I was “surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). It was because of the wonderful testimony of those Christians at that time that I gradually humbled myself and willingly listened carefully to the narrative of the redemption of Jesus Christ. I continued attending the campus fellowship for another year and ended up accepting Jesus Christ as my Saviour.

### **The Change Brought About by Faith**

Becoming a Christian changed my worldview and my view of leadership as well. Prior to becoming a Christian, my understanding of leadership was always based on the power model. However, Jesus introduced a new leadership style into the world, namely servant leadership. In Mark 10:43-45, Jesus defined servant leadership to his disciples: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Before I became a Christian, I aspired to be great—to be number one. Too often I interpreted leadership as command and control. Servant leadership, however, asserts that a person’s growth is based on promoting the growth of

others. In this model, leaders are not motivated by seeking power but rather by having the heart to serve others.

### **My Early Ministry**

In 2002, I started to serve on the church leadership board of a Chinese church in the USA, bi-vocationally. At the time, I felt that my spiritual life was not mature enough, and I was not yet ready to participate in the leadership ministry at the church. On the one hand, I had a special yearning for the meekness and humility that I should have been demonstrating in my daily life as a Christian. On the other hand, I still lived the old self. As Paul lamented, “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). However, with the repeated encouragement of my mentor and the church pastor, I reluctantly accepted the deacon position.

My ministry journey over the following few years can be described as a period of continuous learning among various challenges. The first challenge I experienced immediately after entering the church leadership team was struggling with someone who had authority over me. After several rounds of confrontation, I noticed how pride and self-interest had crept up and challenged my obedience. I knew that as a Christian, I should learn to obey. However, obedience was easier said than done for me. Although I desired to completely surrender to Christ, a part of me was strongly invested in constructing my own sphere of influence. I am grateful that at that time, I had a mentor who frequently helped me realize that following Christ and leading in his name requires that I surrender and submit

myself to his leadership style, which means serving instead of disputing over who is the greatest. As Jesus said to his disciples when they were arguing over who would be the greatest, “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27)

In the first two years of serving on the church leadership team, I was assigned to lead the caring ministry. I believe that anyone who knows my personality would say this ministry was not the right fit for me. I am a typical ESTJ (Extraverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging), according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. ESTJs tend to be task oriented. They do not hesitate to tell others that their work is not up to standard. ESTJs “usually come forth as overbearing and controlling at times. The more sensitive followers may sometimes be offended by the straightforward and frank approach of the ESTJ leader ... also ESTJs can become inflexible to changes when they have decided on a plan, even though changes may be necessary for a more effective outcome” (Personality Central 2018). As an outspoken ESTJ, I tended to quickly judge people in the ministry. It was difficult for me to hide my judgment before learning the details of the situation. The apostle James said, “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (1:19). However, I was just the opposite. I was a “slow to hear, quick to speak” kind of person.

While listening, I liked to comment based on my own thoughts and understanding. Usually, I would start from my own perspective and immediately judge the speaker instead of spending some time listening carefully. It was

difficult for me to forget my own opinion and patiently wait for the other person to finish explaining theirs. On this point, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated the crux of my problem:

Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. (Bonhoeffer 1954, 97)

Unsurprisingly, during my first two years of ministry, I dropped the ball on many things I was responsible for, as shown by the following three examples.

### **Mainland versus Taiwan**

The first mistake I made was concerning conflicts between church members originally from mainland China and from Taiwan. At the time, about 70% of the church members at the church I served in were originally from mainland China. However, only two of the nine board members were from mainland China; the rest were from Taiwan. To make matters worse, the church had appointed a deacon from Taiwan to lead a fellowship group composed entirely of members from mainland China. This caused those members from mainland China to complain that they did not feel taken care of in their spiritual lives, and they felt that the composition of the church leadership team was unfair. Some even threatened to leave the church if this situation was not changed.

When I heard these complaints, I immediately expressed my full understanding and agreed with their views that this kind of unfairness should not

happen in the church. I invited the pastor of the church, who was also from Taiwan, to hold a hearing to explain further and to calm everyone's anger. However, the results were minimal, and my one-sided promise caused those who complained to become even more upset.

I am so grateful that every time I encountered ministry difficulties, my mentor was there to help me. He told me that this kind of conflict was not new to the church. In Acts 6, there was a conflict between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew Jews over food distribution. The widows of the Greeks felt neglected, and the apostles' response to this issue was very enlightening. They came up with a solution, assigning responsibility to certain people to take care of the widows. The solution was straightforward: they assigned the right personnel to the task. The lesson I learned from the apostles is that leaders must know how to appoint the appropriate people with certain skills and attitudes to perform the tasks instead of just sympathizing with or complaining about the congregation.

Later, I learned that the church I was serving had attached greater importance to cultivating brothers and sisters from mainland China. The reality at the time was that the vast majority of believers from mainland China were new Christians. However, the church had already begun to train some of them to become future leaders. My indiscriminate blind impulse almost caused division in the church.

### **Mandarin-speaking Chinese versus English-speaking Chinese**

People may think that in a church made up entirely of Chinese people, there should be no problem with any cross-cultural or intercultural challenges.

However, that is not the case. The second conflict I met arose from a debate between English-speaking Chinese (ESC) and Mandarin-speaking Chinese (MSC) members of the church. The MSCs had largely taken a conservative or even skeptical position toward the relationship between the gospel and culture. Some of them even thought that apologetics was a product of the enlightenment that did not conform with the Bible. When they immigrated to North America, many of them were able to maintain their Chinese culture and enjoyed living in their Chinese sub-culture.

On the other hand, the ESCs did not share the same views as the MSCs on many topics such as issues around refugees, social care and social justice, LGBTQ, and women's status in the church. This created difficulties in communication between the two segments of the church. The ESCs were no longer closely bound by Chinese tradition and were more open to Western culture and theology, but the MSCs continued to maintain their unique Chinese identity.

Furthermore, I realized that, by and large, the epistemology of MSCs and ESCs was very different. For the MSCs, understanding comes after experience. For the ESCs, understanding comes before experience. The ESCs believe that God can be expressed through reasoning and logical thinking. They advocate that the church should actively involve social issues and dialogue with culture. However, most of the MSCs disagreed with this view.

During the church's Great Commission Month of that year, the ESCs submitted a proposal promoting a new way of evangelism: belong, then believe. The proposal suggested that the best way for non-believers to believe in the Lord

was by first belonging to a faith community, gaining an in-depth knowledge of others, and being deeply understood. This approach to evangelism believes that the Christian community is the primary apologetic of the gospel. According to this proposal, the church should involve and embrace everyone, both believers and non-believers. The starting point of gospel ministry is intimate fellowship gatherings with non-believers rather than Bible study. For non-Christians to believe in the gospel message depends on whether or not they have experienced the belief that is lived out in a community. The MSCs quickly opposed this proposal, and their opposition to it seemed unreasonable to me. I continued to stand firmly on the side of ESCs, and because I supported them in this dispute, some of them never talked to me again, which ended up harming my ministry at that church.

### **Tutoring class**

The third challenge I encountered was regarding an after-school tutoring class. For the vast majority of families, both parents had to work. Every day after school, their children would have nothing to do. Because of this, several families submitted a joint proposal to start an extracurricular tutoring class for kindergarten to grade twelve students twice a week at the church. They recommended that some parents could act as teachers for this tutoring class, and they also suggested that older students could teach the younger students. To attract more students, the tutoring classes would be free, and students outside of the church would also be encouraged and welcomed to sign up.

When I received this proposal, my first impression was that if it was conducive to the development of the church and could help attract the youth back to the church, we should try it. Therefore, before the church board could even discuss it, I set out to form a parent team to implement the plan. However, when we reported that the church was preparing to start extracurricular tutoring classes for students for the whole congregation, there were a lot of disputes. Some people were very supportive while many others opposed it. They believed that this would disorient the church and prevent it from using its limited resources on the gospel ministry. Some board members worried that it would be an anticlimactic task, considering we had very limited resources. Those who supported the proposal called on the church to start this ministry as soon as possible; otherwise, they would have to take their children to other churches. Those who opposed it said that the church must stop this ministry, or they would transfer to other churches. These two groups stayed divided for about half a year. As the caring deacon who oversaw this situation, I had no idea what to do at the time. However, it was then that a group of mothers spontaneously rented a small venue not too far from the church and started an extracurricular tutoring class by themselves. They took turns being on duty and hired two intern college students to help.

This time, I learned the lesson of arbitrary expression—a mistake that I had often made in my past ministries. When we needed to decide whether or not to start an extracurricular tutoring class at church, I neither agreed nor disagreed and took a neutral stand to avoid further conflict. Deep in my heart, however, I understood well that I shied away from unpredictable consequences. I failed to

connect with people on both sides of the dispute, and I did not realize that new solutions and practices would only emerge if I kept communicating with the people involved in the dispute. As Birute Regine and Roger Lewin point out, “Anything that enhances the interactions will enhance the potential creativity and adaptability of the system” (2000, 12).

As I will highlight in the next couple of sections, the challenges I faced during my first few years of ministry turned out to be good case studies during my DMin program.

### **My Coming to Canada**

In 2010, when I took a new job in Toronto, our family immigrated to Canada. In retrospect, the move was not easy. Since we did not have any relatives or friends in Canada, we needed to start everything from scratch when we landed, including finding a place to stay and transferring my daughter to a new school. Plus, in this new environment, I needed to spend a lot more time adapting to my new job. For my daughter, the difficulty of adapting brought about by the move was even greater as she was just becoming a teenager, and it was not easy for her to say goodbye to the friends she had for so many years and come to a place that was new and foreign to her.

After a few years, I realized that God’s goodwill was behind this move. Since my first day as a Christian, I have always wanted to go back to China and share the gospel with my compatriots. However, due to many family reasons, such as my children’s education, moving back to China long-term seemed unrealistic. In Toronto, however, where the streets are full of Chinese immigrants,

I can share the gospel with them in my own language instead of going back to China. I have also always wanted to find a chance to study theology systematically. However, since there was no seminary where I lived, my dream of being able to go to seminary without leaving my family was never able to come true. Thanks to God, in the first month that I came to Toronto, I met a Tyndale student at the church I started to attend. In 2011, without any hesitation, I enrolled myself in the MDiv program at Tyndale.

Meanwhile, starting in 2012, I gathered with a few brothers and sisters weekly to pray for a Christian church that would minister to new immigrants and international students from China. In August 2014, after a couple of years of prayer, two families and I started a new church called Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church (TRCCC) in North York, Ontario. *RenAi* simply means “love” in Chinese. I did not have much experience, but I had a strong desire to serve the Lord.

Although TRCCC has focused on evangelizing the Chinese compatriots in Toronto from the very beginning, it is not a missional church in any sense. TRCCC is one of the few churches in the GTA where almost the entire congregation is from mainland China. In 2018, in order to move the church toward adopting more missional practices, the TRCCC board decided to start a church planting ministry in downtown Toronto. The newly established church in downtown Toronto is called Wuxi Church, a name that comes from the Bible. There are five named valleys in the Bible (Zered Valley, Besor Valley, Kidron Valley, Nimrim Valley, and Kerith Valley), and all of them are located in the

beautiful land of Canaan. In Chinese, *Wu* means five, and *Xi* means valley. In addition, because the registered name of the church is called City Community Chinese Christian Church, we abbreviate it to the 5C Church. The pronunciation of the letter C and the Chinese word *Xi* are very close. Wuxi also symbolizes that the church is planted like a tree by the stream and will be nourished and grown in the beautiful land promised by God.

### **My Doctor of Ministry**

When I was an MDiv student at Tyndale several years ago, I shared with Dr. Michael Krause, the Director of the Tyndale Seminary Internship Program, about the ministry challenges and problems I encountered during my internship. During our conversation, I mentioned to Dr. Krause that I wanted to try some ministry models that Chinese churches usually did not attempt. After I briefly described my idea of establishing missional communities in a Chinese church context, Dr. Krause suggested that this idea could be a good research topic for the DMin program. I remembered that conversation in my mind, and in 2019 I enrolled in the DMin program at Tyndale and became a Cohort 11 Leadership Track student.

More than three years of DMin study opened my eyes and gave me the chance to reflect on the blind spots of my past ministry from the perspective of theology and leadership philosophy. It was a journey of my knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. The DMin program was the first time I heard about the Complex Adaptive Systems Theory (CAST). According to CAST, the church is a

complex adaptive system. As Peter M. Dickens and Gary V. Nelson (2015, 85) state, the church is “a collection of individuals with the freedom to act in ways that are not always totally predictable and whose actions are interconnected so that one person’s actions change the context for other people.” In this kind of system, small fluctuations in a certain way have a great impact on other parts of the entire system. Also, leaders in this system cannot control the future. Instead, as Richard Knowles points out: leaders “enable the future by cultivating conditions where others can produce innovations that lead to productive future states” (2001, 112). Leaders give meaning to ongoing or future events. Moreover, according to Michael Patton et al., “what may appear at a particular moment as a defect can, from a systems perspective, attract needed energy to support unexpected realignments and new synergies” (Patton, Westley, and Zimmerman 2006, 53). In a complex system, the relationship determines everything. “Connections or relationships define how complex systems work. The church is a sum of its relationships, not of its flow chart. And this perception is crucial in understanding how complex systems differ from simple or complicated systems” (Patton, Westley, and Zimmerman 2006, 7).

In the DMin program, I learned that when dealing with a complex system, it is better to start with smaller initiatives called mustard seed initiatives. As Peter Dickens and Gary Nelson state, “these smaller initiatives allow you to constantly evaluate and learn so that adjustments can take place” (2015, 84). As I mentioned previously, when I received a proposal from church members to start an extracurricular tutoring class at church, I had not seriously considered it from a

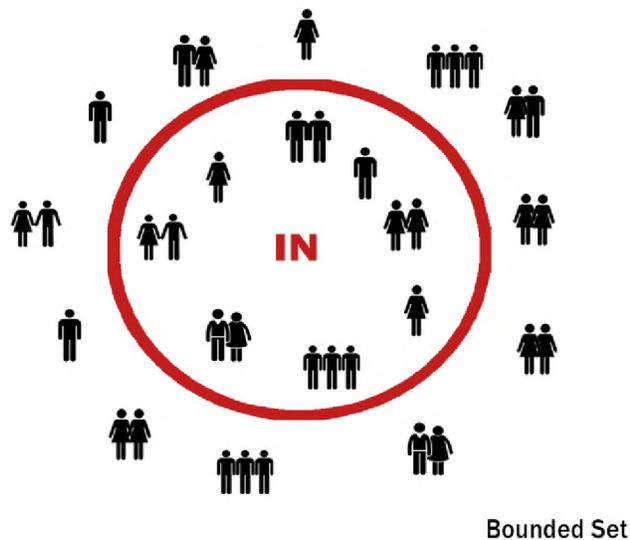
CAST perspective. When some members of the church objected to the initiative, I failed to try and start a smaller pilot project by having the after-school tutoring classes limited to only grades nine to twelve—the number of students in this group was about 20% of the total number of students and the group of students that the parents were primarily concerned with.

From a CAST perspective, when the change is made, the effects are unpredictable. Very small changes may have global impacts. This helped me realize that even a proposal for starting an extracurricular tutoring class after school could cause chaos throughout a church. As a leader, when determining the goals to be achieved in the future and guiding the congregation to achieve these goals, it is essential to know that the future goals that can be achieved are often unknown because they are formed through constant interaction and self-renewal within a system. Back to the tutoring class proposal, I realized that one thing I should have done but did not do was interpret the changes the parents brought in and be aware of the significance of what was happening. By marking the emergent changes, I would be able to change what people were talking about in the TRCCC church family. I should have nurtured the idea of caring for the students at church and nourished people by supporting their growth and celebrating their maturity.

Back when I was in the middle of the conflicts between the church's MSCs and ESCs, I did not understand what caused them to have such different views on how to share the gospel with others. In the DMin program, I learned about set theory and the differences between a bounded set and a centred set. A

bounded set says there is a boundary that distinguishes people on the board from those who are outside of it. However, a centred set means that there is no such boundary to determine who is in and who is out. Instead, there is a centre with its core values. There is no question of who is in and who is out, only that some people may be closer to the centre and others further away from it.

There are some similarities between a bounded set and a fence, which farmers might build a fence to keep their livestock in (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Bounded Set (Redeeming God 2022)**

A good example of a centred set is a watering pool in the grasslands. Livestock in a certain area usually do not go very far from the water; otherwise, they will die. There is no fence to keep them inside and no farmers to maintain peace, but the desire for water guarantees that both can be achieved (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Centered Set (Redeeming God 2022)**

By considering set theory, I realized that those MSCs who criticized the “belong, then believe” model held the view that the church must be a bounded set. Those ESCs who supported the “belong, then believe” model believed that the centred set was biblical and that the church should be built on a clear centre rather than through patrolling borders. This centre is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the church should invite everyone, both believers and non-believers, to reorient their lives around this centre. Of course, this does not mean there is no boundary at all, but rather that people at church should not spend time playing boundary games and excluding anyone. Instead, they should focus more on the centre and bring people closer to that centre. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch state,

In a centered-set church it is recognized that we are all sinners, all struggling to be the best people we can be. But we also believe that the closer one gets to the center (Christ), the more Christlike one’s behavior should become. Therefore, core members of the church will exhibit the features of Christ’s radical lifestyle (love, generosity, healing, hospitality, forgiveness, mercy, peace, and more), and those who have just begun the journey toward Christ (and whose lives may not exhibit such traits) are still seen as “belonging”. No one is considered unworthy of belonging because they happen to be addicted to tobacco, or because they are not

married to their live-in partner. Belonging is a key value. The growth toward the center of the set is the same as the process of discipleship. (Frost and Hirsch 2013, 70)

The DMin program not only enhanced my leadership competencies in a Christian ministry setting but also helped me experience spiritual growth and equipped me to navigate the complexities of life and ministry in my God-given vocation. In July 2019, as part of the DMin course requirement, I went on a personal retreat in Puslinch, Ontario. As a worker bee living in a noisy, busy city, silence and solitude had become extremely foreign concepts to me. As an extrovert, I enjoyed reading about spiritual life, but I did not really want to live it out. I talked about solitude and silence more than I practiced it. Although I did practice it occasionally, God knows how far I really was from it. I loved the disciplines of silence and solitude as much as I loved reading or watching some great adventures. Instead of developing these practices for myself, I chose to appreciate them from a distance.

During the three-day long retreat, Dr. Ruth Barton's book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* helped me understand that God cultivates a leader over time. From this book, I realized that Christian leaders can often get lost in self-centredness and self-motivation unless they can get into a rhythm of spiritual renewal from time to time. Using the physical law of gravity as a metaphor, Barton explained that because of gravity, "sediment swirling in a jar of muddy river water will eventually settle and the water will become clear, so the spiritual law of gravity ensures that the chaos of the human soul will settle if it sits still long enough" (2008, 47). She argued that "in solitude, we are rescued from

relentless human striving to solve the challenges of ministry through intellectual achievements and hard work so that we can experience the life of the spirit guiding toward that true way that lies between one polarity and another” (Barton 2008, 28). This book helped me understand that the reason practicing solitude and silence was so hard for me was because I was constantly busy with various ministries and believed that this was my leadership role. However, as Barton states, “activities and experiences associated with leadership can be very addictive” (2008, 31).

This retreat allowed me to meditate repeatedly on 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” One challenge I had experienced in the past was that practicing confession was extremely hard for me. I believed that leaders should establish a positive image for themselves. Time and time again, my wife reminded me to constantly reflect on my words and deeds and to admit my wrongdoings. I acted as though the things I were doing were not big sins and did not accept any responsibility for them. This retreat helped me realize that in the past I would constantly hide my sins from people and God. The Holy Spirit illuminated this to me and let me know there was nothing more destructive than hiding my sins.

Before this retreat, I had many conversations with Dr. Janyne Peek Emsick and shared with her my painful confession experience. Dr. Peek Emsick encouraged me by telling me that while confession was not easy, a Christian life without confession was impossible. She gave me the following tips to help me

develop my spiritual discipline of confession: 1) Find a spiritual partner you can trust who can remind you when you are not walking in God's will; 2) Take ownership of what you did. You must know that no one has ever forced you to sin; you made your own choices. You have an inescapable responsibility for everything you have done; 3) Although confession itself cannot remove sins, it can help avoid these sins in the future. By God's grace and mercy, it can also bring peace of mind.

During the retreat, I also spent a lot of time meditating on Henri Nouwen's question of what Christian leadership will need in the twenty-first century. In his book *In the Name of Jesus*, Nouwen leads his readers through each of the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4. He encourages us to go "from relevance to prayer ... from popularity to ministry ... [and] from leading to being led" (1989, 25, 49, 71). I finally began to truly understand that "the most important quality of Christian leadership is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest" (1989, 82). This retreat strengthened my relationship with God and gave me space to apply what I had learned.

The 360° assessment tool provided by the DMin program at Tyndale helped me reflect critically on myself. Understanding what others say about me provided me with the opportunity to enhance my ministry, improve my leadership and communication skills, and encourage my active participation. The assessments were done thoughtfully and prayerfully and strengthened the unity of spirit between my congregation and me. The assessment report helped me

recognize the problems in my past ministry and focus on the purpose of God's calling for my future ministry. I considered this feedback as a testimony of teamwork in a faith community. Even the differences between my own assessments and the church's expectations proactively helped reduce my blind spots in future ministry.

There have been many times I wondered which leadership domain I was strongest in. The StrengthsFinder assessment I took in the DMin program gave me the answer by helping me pinpoint my five greatest talent themes. Through this, I discovered how to leverage them for personal and organizational success. This StrengthsFinder program provided me with specific strategies to take advantage of my top five strengths in leadership. In the book *Strengths Based Leadership*, I read the stories of some of the most successful business leaders, including the Chief Executive Officer of Best Buy, on how they used their unique strengths to achieve success. With so many creative and doable strategies, I learned a lot about how to create a new roadmap to lead my future ministry.

In the process of finalizing my DMin portfolio and preparing for my hearing, God gave me an extra credit course outside of the regular curriculum of Tyndale Seminary. My original plan was to complete the entire DMin study in March 2022 so that I could return to full-time ministry. To achieve this goal, I was desperate to sprint towards it. However, God allowed me to calm down by letting me get frustrated with my original plan. I spent four whole months doing nothing, waiting quietly before God. God made me realize that what I thought I had already figured out in the monastery years ago was something I did not

understand at all. I was still living in a noisy, busy environment, keeping spiritual practice thousands of kilometres away. I was like the muddy water Ruth Barton explained in her metaphor (2008, 47). The chaos of my soul could not settle because I had never been quiet long enough. The road Henri Nouwen showed me that “from relevance to prayer ... from popularity to ministry ... [and] from leading to being led” (1989, 25, 49, 71) seemed extremely long to me. Four months of painfully quiet waiting made me realize many problems in my past ministry. My day-to-day hectic life almost made me lose my way.

I was so grateful that during this period of time, my professors helped me beyond just imparting knowledge. They shepherded me through this difficult time and inspired me to keep going when I was about to give up. They showed me what compassion, integrity, kindness, and love really were and demonstrated to me how to make others great.

As the book of Isaiah records, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). My DMin study did not go according to my plan but entirely according to God’s plan, which is much higher than my thoughts. God hit the pause button just in time when I was not ready for graduation but was eager to get involved in his ministry. He made me make up for the most valuable lesson in my DMin study, which is probably also one of the most valuable lessons in my life.

## **New Challenges and Opportunities**

As I mentioned earlier, back in 2018, the TRCCC deacon board approved starting a new church called Wuxi Church in downtown Toronto. But we did not rent the Salvation Army facility at the junction of Jarvis and Dundas Streets to be the new church's gathering place until the second half of 2019. The birth of Wuxi Church originated from two problems encountered by the TRCCC. The first problem was that fewer and fewer young people were willing to attend TRCCC. It seemed that our church was losing its appeal to both international students from China and new Chinese immigrants. As I will state in detail in Chapter 4, this was not because we were no longer able to find enough people who spoke Mandarin in our surroundings anymore. On the contrary, thousands of new Chinese international students and immigrants are arriving every year.

The second problem was the lack of young leaders who could lead the church and carry on the ministry in the future. Given that the average age of existing church members was continuing to increase at TRCCC, if we were unable to figure out a strategy to both keep the church from losing younger people and hand the leadership baton over to the younger generation over the next decade, TRCCC would cease to be a church after only one generation.

The difference between this church plant and the church plants I have observed in the past is twofold. The first difference can be found when asking, "what is a church?" I believe that the Church is a who, not a what. It is a verb, not a noun (McNeal 2011, 25). Congregational expression is only one form of the

church. In fact, for the first three centuries, Christianity was less an organization and more a movement and a way of life. The church I planted in downtown Toronto was not a single Chinese church but rather a missional community networked within a larger church community. The target audience of this new church plant was mainly Mandarin-speaking young professionals and university students living or working in downtown Toronto.

The second difference between this church plant and the church plants I have observed in the past is in the planting method. Church plants usually send a portion of their existing congregation (e.g., twenty families) from the mother church to become the base of the new church. However, this new church plant was based entirely on a Bible study group that already existed in downtown Toronto and relied mainly on inviting unchurched Mandarin-speaking young professionals and university students who lived and worked downtown. Since the purpose of this ministry was to engage the younger Mandarin-speaking generation with the gospel, the newly established church was to be led entirely by younger lay believers instead of by clergy.

I wanted to carry out this research project in downtown Toronto because the Mandarin-speaking mission field there is very large. In addition to the increase in Chinese immigrants every year, the number of Chinese international students is also increasing year over year. According to the University of Toronto, the total number of Chinese international students (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) exceeded 14,000 during 2019-20 (see Table 1).

**Table 1: University of Toronto International Students from the top eight countries/regions during 2019-20 (Source: www.utoronto.ca)**

<b>Country/Region</b>	<b>Students</b>
China	13,845
India	1,553
United States	931
Korea (south)	696
Hong Kong	362
Taiwan	337
Iran	256
Turkey	237

Due to cultural, political, and other historical reasons, most Mandarin-speaking young professionals and students are atheists. Over the past twenty years, I have evangelized people with Buddhist backgrounds and atheistic beliefs. Based on my experience, it is easier to preach the gospel to those who believe in nothing than to those with other beliefs. In addition, I have observed that being far from their home country helps young people be more spiritually receptive to the gospel and more ready to receive a loving new community.

It is my hope that through this church plant, TRCCC will train and cultivate a group of next-generation church leaders. The urgency of cultivating and raising younger church leaders has been discussed at TRCCC for a long time. However, TRCCC has not made cultivating younger church leaders its top priority. Although younger believers were invited to join the leadership team in the past, in most cases, these younger co-workers did not have the responsibilities and rights to speak up as decision-makers due to cultural reasons and church traditions. Despite being on the leadership team, these younger leaders were not trained to play their roles properly. Thus, I proposed to our deacon board that we use a hands-on, inquiry learning model to conduct discipleship training for these

younger leaders. This model assumes that simply attending Sunday services or Sunday school will not produce disciples, no matter how good the programs are. As Reggie McNeal states, “we should go from program development to people development in terms of core activity, and from church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership” (2009, xvi). We wanted to make some big changes by equipping individuals born in the 1980s and 1990s with leadership roles from the first day of Wuxi Church’s establishment. The newly established Wuxi Church was indeed led by younger lay believers.

To ensure that the leadership of Wuxi Church would be entirely carried out by those who were born in the 1980s and 1990s, I proposed not sending any existing deacons there to the TRCCC deacon board. My role at Wuxi Church would be limited to teaching and coaching rather than being a lead pastor. The ministry responsibility of Wuxi Church would be fully taken care of by a leadership team of twelve younger people. Within the team, there would be a chair and a vice-chair who would rotate people every year. The vice-chair would automatically become the chair in the next term. The reason why we rotate every year is because of the high turnover of people in the downtown area. This rotating approach aimed to create opportunities for every team member to practice his/her leadership skills. In addition to chair and vice-chair, there were other ministerial positions that were assigned to different people based on their spiritual gifts.

Unlike the institutional church, where leadership mainly relies on the clergy system and its structure is more hierarchical, the leadership structure of Wuxi Church was much flatter. At Wuxi, all were expected to contribute to

teaching, Bible study, prayer, food preparation, clean-up, visitation, and so on. People may criticize this form of church life as disrespecting spiritual authority and may lead to chaos in church administration. However, based on my own experience, spiritual authority was manifested not by position but by service. In the orderly management of the church, everyone’s enthusiasm had been mobilized.

In order to understand each person’s spiritual gifts, I designed a questionnaire based on the teachings of Ephesians 4:11-12. Each team member was asked to answer a seventy-question questionnaire. Each question had three answer choices: often, sometimes, and rarely. The answers were scored with the term often getting two points, the term sometimes getting one point, and the term rarely getting zero points. The reason I doubled “often” scores is that, based on my previous experiences with questionnaires, there is a big difference between those who answer often and those who answer sometimes. We added up the number of the often points, doubled the result, and added it to the number of the sometimes points. Each person’s primary and secondary spiritual gifts were then identified based on the scores each participant received. It was believed that God empowers believers with different spiritual gifts, and all the spiritual gifts are to glorify him.

The survey results are shown below:

**Table 2: Spiritual Gifts Survey**

	Shepherd	Teacher	Evangelist	Prophet	Apostle
Primary	5	1	3	2	2

Secondary	0	1	4	4	4
Total	5	2	7	6	6

There was a total of five people whose primary or secondary spiritual gifts were shepherd, two for teacher, seven for evangelist, six for prophet, and six for apostle. Except for the teacher, the other four spiritual gifts were well balanced. This result matched what each of the twelve young leaders knew and observed about each other.

Due to the global pandemic and the government’s restrictions on gatherings, the establishment and development of Wuxi Church have not been implemented in full accordance with the original plan. At present, most of the church activities have only been carried out online. However, I have already started small-scale in-person gatherings, and it is hoped that as government restrictions and people’s fear of COVID-19 fades away, the original plan of building missional communities may resume.

In terms of my goals and vision for the future, God calls me to do Mandarin ministry in downtown Toronto through church planting. Breen and Absalom asked three simple questions in a field guide for launching missional communities: “1) What does the church of the future look like? 2) How do we reach people who don’t know Jesus? and 3) How do we make missional disciples?” (Breen and Absalom 2010, 6). My church planting ministry will try to answer these three questions by launching missional communities and using them to cultivate missional discipleship and increase the church’s passion for the Great

Commission. This ministry will be consistent with my ecclesiology, missiology, and philosophy of Christian leadership. The leadership structure of missional communities differs from that of hierarchical power structures. The important thing when leading a missional community is not the position but the service. It requires low control and high accountability. In a missional community, everyone is expected to contribute. According to Terence Schilstra, “The mark of missional community leaders is servanthood. MC leaders should set nothing before them but the necessities and the advantage of others” (Schilstra 2021, 55). The Servant Leadership Theory will be the guideline for implementing and developing missional communities. I will unpack it in detail in Chapter 3: Philosophy of Christian Leadership.

### CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

I have longed to be a leader since my childhood. Prior to becoming a Christian, leadership, for me, was all about control, attainment, and retention of power. Later I learned that there was another type of leadership model—one that is service-based rather than power and control-based. However, the phrase servant leadership is confusing and can make no sense to some people. A servant is one who is led, and being led is the opposite of leading. This paradoxical servant leadership does not look like leadership at all. Instead, as Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell point out, it seems like somebody is talking about “the inmates running the prison or trying to please everyone” (2018, 247). I spent many years figuring out what the term servant leadership is really talking about.

Blanchard and Broadwell note that “there are two parts to servant leadership: a visionary/direction, or strategic, role - the *leadership* aspect of servant leadership; and an implementation, or operational, role - the *servant* aspect of servant leadership” (2018, 7; author’s emphasis). In the past decades, many scholars have created all kinds of different definitions and descriptions of servant leadership. The following definition comes from Greenleaf’s classical essay *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf states,

Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead ... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant – first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test ... is: do those served to grow as persons; do they, which being served, become healthier,

wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived? (Greenleaf 1970, 15)

There are various types of leadership theories, such as trait approach, skills approach, situational approach, path-goal theory, and leader-member exchange theory, to name a few. For the purpose of this research portfolio and due to space limitations, I will not review all these leadership theories demonstrating how each theory can inform practice. Instead, I will focus on elaborating on what servant leadership really means. Due to the close relationship between servant leadership and transformational leadership theory, I start my review with transformational leadership theory and the inner connections and differences between the two. Then, I review the history of servant leadership, servant leadership as a theory, its biblical context and in a contemporary secular scholarship. Based on this review, I explain why I believe that the two models of leadership—one based on control and another based on service—are in complete conflict. Since some researchers criticize servant leadership theory for not having a precise definition and lacking empirical support, I review some practical models from the attribute's perspective. Ultimately, my philosophy of leadership states that servant leadership is an alternative model for Christian leaders. This leadership philosophy is also the guideline for the establishment of missional communities, which I will elaborate on in detail in Chapter 4.

What is leadership? In this chapter, a definition from Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter is used: "Leadership involves a person, group, or organization who shows the way in an area of life - whether in the short - or the long-term -

and in doing so both influences and empowers enough people to bring about change in that area. Such leadership may be good or bad depending on the leader's style and the content of what the leader is advocating" (Banks and Ledbetter 2004, 16).

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Considering the close relationship between servant leadership and transformational leadership theory, I will start my review with the transformational leadership theory first. Knowledge and understanding of transformational leadership can help better compare the similarities and differences between this theory and servant leadership theory which I will discuss in detail in the next section.

According to Peter Northouse, transformational leadership was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. As its name indicates, this theory mainly focuses on transformation in both leaders and followers. Northouse points out that "Transformational leadership is quite different from power because it is inseparable from followers' needs ... Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (Northouse 2021, 186).

Transactional leadership emphasizes the exchange between leaders and followers. However, in transformational leadership, leaders are engaged with the needs of their followers. To a point, they are willing to use their own changes to motivate changes in their followers. The example of Mahatma Gandhi is given for

this in that he “raised the hopes and demands of millions of his people and, in the process, was changed himself” (Northouse 2021, 186).

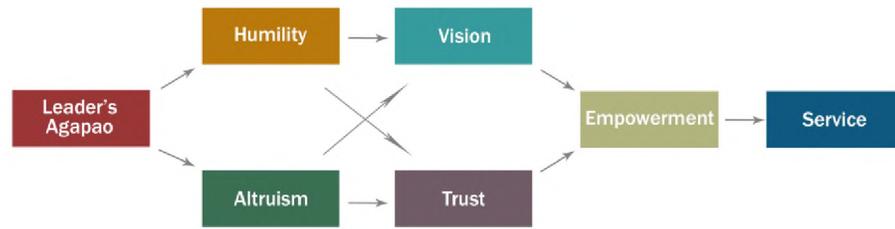
In transformational leadership, there is a branch that is more concerned with using influence for personal gain and changing people's thinking, words, and actions in negative ways. According to Northouse, the term pseudo-transformational leadership was coined by B. M. Bass in 1998 (2021, 187). While pseudo-transformational leadership is like transformational leadership in that there is a transformation in both leaders and followers, it is different because this kind of transformation is dictated by the leader and usually based on their own interest. The example given for this is Adolf Hitler (Northouse 2021, 187).

J. R. Latham (2014, 14) argued that although transformational leadership is generally accepted and applied, it does not fully address the various problems leaders face, such as the abuse of power given to the leaders and allowing the end to justify the means. Thus, another theory is needed to fill the gaps in transformational leadership, and Latham saw servant leadership as an alternative and believed that it would provide a viable perspective to the leadership literature. He states that “the main limitations of transformational and transactional leadership theories could be, at least partially, remedied by integrating key constructs and concepts from values-based leadership theories such as servant leadership and spiritual leadership” (Latham 2014, 14). Before going into detail about servant leadership, it should be compared with transformational leadership theory to gain a deeper understanding of servant leadership as a theory, practice, and way of life.

## **Comparison Between Transformational Leadership Theory and Servant Leadership Theory**

Scholars have compared servant leadership with transformational leadership in the past decades. Patterson argues that “the theory of servant leadership as a logical extension of transformational theory” (2003, 38). However, A.I. Choudhary, S.A. Akhtar, and A. Zaheer argue that, on the one hand, transformational leadership and servant leadership look the same in many ways, but on the other hand, their differences can be even more pronounced. They argue that “the difference between a servant and transformational leadership is the focus of the leader. Both these leadership styles focus on the followers; servant leaders pay more attention to service to the followers, while transformational leaders use their energies to engage followers toward goal attainment” (Choudhary et al. 2012, 7).

Patterson points out that transformational theory does not deal with things like love, humility, acting altruistically, or being a visionary for followers. She argues that servant leadership addresses phenomena such as humility and love toward followers (see Figure 4). Patterson states that servant leadership focuses on others—particularly on the followers that they lead and serve. He suggests that “the leader that leads with agape love has a focus on the employee first, then on the talent of the employee, and lastly on how this benefits the organization” (Patterson 2003, 12) (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Servant leadership model (Patterson 2003, 10)**

Some might think that servant leadership is, at best, a subset of transformational leadership. In response to this view, Patterson (2003, 5) believes that servant leadership is characterized by the prioritization of his/her followers. The concerns of the leader are in perfect harmony with the concerns of the followers. Even from this alone, it is difficult to conclude that servant leadership is only a subset of transformational leadership because transformational leadership ultimately focuses on corporate goals, not the interests of followers.

### **The History of Servant Leadership**

In the 1970s, Robert Greenleaf articulated the modern concept of servant leadership in his book *Servant Leadership – A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. While most people credit Greenleaf for first introducing servant leadership, its philosophical roots are thousands of years old. Many scholars view Jesus as the greatest servant leader in history (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 38). As John Stott points out, “We need to remember that Jesus introduced into the world a new style of leadership, namely leadership by service and example” (1992, 285).

Greenleaf suggests that the basic concept of servant leadership is putting others above oneself. Servant leaders care about the people who work for them and put followers' agendas before their own (see Table 3). It is fascinating that for Greenleaf, servant leadership is not just a theory or a management technique but a way of life with "the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (1977, 13). Greenleaf profoundly changes the long-standing hierarchical management system and unprecedentedly links leadership behaviour with people's way of life. In theory, one could be a hierarchical leader that cares primarily for other people. However, in practice, it is difficult to do so. It is much easier to practice putting the interests of followers over the interests of the leaders in a servant leadership system than in a hierarchical management system.

**Table 3: To Lead is to Serve (Sendjaya and Sarros 2002, 59)**

<b>Primary Intent (doing)</b>	Serve people first, rather than lead first
<b>Self-concept (being)</b>	Servant, rather than owner

According to co-authors John H. Humphreys, Alex Williams, Stephanie Pane Haden, Mario Hayek, Mildred Golden Pryor, and Brandon Randolph-Seng, "leaders with a desire to serve and motivation to lead display the six servant leader elements of empowering people, showing humility, revealing authenticity, accepting others for who they are, providing direction when needed, and acting as stewards who consider what is in the best interest of the whole" (Humphreys, Williams, Haden, Hayek, Pryor, Randolph-Seng 2014, 49). S.T. Akindele and Y.A. Afolabi argue that "Servant leaders provide services – through committed stewardship spirit – to the people. They serve the people they lead. To a servant

leader, employees/subordinates are an end in themselves rather than a means to an organizational purpose” (Akindele and Afolabi 2013, 36).

In the opening pages of his book *Leadership Is an Art*, Max De Pree (1989, 9) states that “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.” He further argues that a leader is a steward rather than an owner, and leadership is service rather than control and power. He writes,

Try to think about a leader, in the words of the gospel writer Luke, as one who serves, leadership is a concept of owing certain things to the institution. It is a way of thinking about institutional heirs, a way of thinking about stewardship as contrasted with ownership...the art of leadership requires us to think about the leader-as-steward in terms of relationships: of assets and legacy, of momentum and effectiveness, of civility and values. (De Pree 1989, 10)

John Maxwell says that “when seen through the lens of a servant’s heart, leadership becomes not just a job but a calling” (as quoted by Kouzes and Posner 2006, x).

### **Servant Leadership as a Theory**

S. Sendjaya and J.C. Sarros state,

In order to develop a theory of servant leadership that systematically draws the concept together into an intelligible whole, there exists a need to explore the following questions: What are the differences between servant leaders and those who choose not to be? What does it take for a would-be servant leader to embrace the nature and play the role of servant leader? Are certain types of people likely to feel more comfortable with the role and nature of servant leader? Does the practice of servant leadership produce results that differ from other models/paradigms of leadership? Can servant leadership be measured? What are some organizational factors that are likely to foster and inhibit servant leadership practice?

(Sendjaya and Sarros 2002, 63)

Researchers have made the following criticisms of servant leadership as a theory.

First, servant leadership as a theory needs to be defined clearly. Most researchers, including Greenleaf himself, descriptively define servant leadership. Denise Parris and Jon Peachey argue that scholars have not yet been able to come up with a definition of servant leadership that everyone agrees on (2013, 378). This lack of consensus is manifested in that different people define and build models according to their own understanding. Furthermore, servant leadership has different meanings in different cultural contexts. For example, in a Chinese cultural context, the word servant can be easily interpreted as subservient. As Nathan Eva points out, “the lack of coherence and clarity around the construct has impeded its theory development” (2019, 111).

Greenleaf states that servant leadership is a way of life. This illustrates that the interpretation of servant leadership can be different in a person’s lifetime and servant leadership is difficult to test as “it is meant to be neither a scholarly treatise nor a how-to-do-it manual” (Greenleaf 1977, 49).

Second, it is difficult for people to accept a way of life as a leadership theory because if it is a theory, then it must be empirically tested. However, the interpretation of a way of life can differ in a person’s lifetime, so it is impossible to test a way of life. In addition, many researchers consider Jesus Christ the greatest servant leader in history (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 38). This makes servant leadership less likely to be a theory of “servanthood – through

leadership – through practice” (Prosser 2010, 28) because it not only manifests in a person’s behaviour and abilities but involves a person's character deep inside.

Despite many critical views of servant leadership as a theory, some other scholars believe that servant leadership is qualified to be a leadership theory, which highlights phenomena such as altruism and humility, and these aspects are not clearly explained in other leadership theories. Patterson argues that servant leadership is about virtue: “Virtues have a place in leadership through their focus because they focus the leader on the common good, rather than on profit-maximizing” (Patterson 2003, 7).

Servant leaders handle leadership power differently. Patterson states that servant leaders are those who use their authority to help other people. She indicates that servant leadership has seven virtue structures. These are agape love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson 2003, 8). Patterson argues that love is the base for the leader-follower relationship—especially agape love. She states that “agapao love means to love in a social or moral sense ... the call of agapao love in the organization is to go far beyond seeing people as ‘hired hands,’ to seeing them as ‘hired hearts.’ Love for a leader is exhibited by leading with feeling, which fosters understanding, gratitude, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion” (Patterson 2003, 12). In the words of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, “Exercising leadership is a way of giving meaning to your life by contributing to the lives of others. At its best, leadership is a labour of love” (Heifetz and Linsky 2002, 223).

To conclude, among much research on leadership, there are two different viewpoints. One holds that servant leadership is qualified as a leadership theory while another believes it is not. Both sides of the argument have evidence in academic research. In my opinion, servant leadership has provided a leadership framework for facing challenges and issues in ministry. Servant leadership indeed needs to be empirically tested. As discussed below, researchers have already begun to work on establishing a set of attributes for servant leadership. These attributes are then introduced into a practical model to further servant leadership as a theory.

### **Biblical Basis of Servant Leadership**

As we see from the analysis above, servant leadership differs from mere leadership in many ways. Unlike many other leadership theories, servant leadership values serving others as its high priority. According to a collection of essays about servant leadership edited by Blanchard and Broadwell, servant leadership has had a huge impact on raising corporate ethical standards and improving social morality (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 247). To be a servant leader, the important thing is not the position but rather the heart to dedicate one's life to serving others, just as Jesus did.

People may think that the Bible does not contain what Jesus said about leadership. As Stacy Rinehart points out, "Christ never laid out a clear blueprint for how to lead. If we are looking for a written-on-tablets model of leadership, then we will be disappointed. But if we look to the triune God, we see that he has

modelled leadership for us. His leadership values and principles are everywhere in the Scriptures” (Rinehart 1998, 86).

Jesus showed us a whole different kind of leadership amidst a dictatorial leadership style in the time of the Roman Empire. In Mark 10:43-45, Jesus explained to his disciples what servant leadership really was. As sinners, the disciples aspired to be great, to be number one even when they served and followed Jesus. In Matthew 18:1, they approached Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” and in Matthew 20:20-21, the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus, kneeling down, and asked a favour of Jesus to allow one of her sons to sit at the right and the other at his left in his kingdom. In this context, Jesus subversively presented his disciples with a completely different model of leadership: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43).

The perspective that service is the essence of the gospel is often overlooked by the disciples. In the Gospel of John, Jesus gave a new commandment to his disciples: “Love one another. As I have loved you” (13:34). However, love comes through service since “The new element of this commandment is that the essence of God is Love” (Banks and Powell 2000, 64). God works out his love through acts of service and sacrifices through Jesus Christ. As Blanchard and Broadwell point out, it is so important that Christian leaders “teach people the power of love rather than the love of power. After all, servant leadership is love in action” (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 247).

From the four Gospels, the main mission of Jesus is to “publicly confront the power-oriented, legalistic system” (Rinehart 1998, 73). In fact, Jesus was a revolutionary in opposing power and control-based leadership. His teachings in this regard were even seen as blasphemous by the formal authorities of his time.

For a clearer discussion that servant leadership is rooted in the Bible, next, I will analyze the biblical basis of servant leadership by focusing on three texts in the New Testament: Mark 10, John 13, and Philippians 2. By examining how and what Jesus taught, it will be evident that Jesus was a true servant leader.

Mark 10:35-45 gives a brilliant description of servant leadership. According to these verses, John and James’ request for power annoyed the other disciples because they held the same views as John and James about leadership. As Gene Wilkes notes, “If the ten other disciples had understood that leadership is not a matter of position, James and Johns’ request would not have been a threat to them” (1998, 89). However, Jesus immediately described how being first meant being a servant. Servanthood was Jesus’ measure of who was great. Jesus’ teaching of “whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:44) fundamentally overturned the value system inherent in the disciples. Jesus used the word servant to define greatness and taught his disciples that a leader’s greatness depends on how they serve others. As William Lane describes, “The order of life for the common dealings of the disciples is to be love, expressed in the form of service. This transforms the question of rank and greatness into the task of service” (Lane 1974, 382). Jesus points out that the disciples’ understanding of leadership is that leaders are those who can control others and

freely exercise power over them (Mark 10:42). However, “In their struggle for rank and precedence, and their desire to exercise authority for their own advantage, the disciples were imitating those whom they undoubtedly despised. James and John are still thinking in terms of a Messiah who will free them from the rulers of Rome” (Lane 1974, 123). To confirm this point, Jesus leads people to think from the perspective of the cross when he says, “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus wants disciples to know that true leaders are those who are willing to give up and sacrifice their own interests for the maximization of the interests of others.

What was the problem with the disciples’ understanding of leadership? The problem is twofold. First, they believed that leadership meant having power and position, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Even today, there are still many Christians who believe that if the church had control over society, then we could eliminate all kinds of evil things speedily. However, as James Smart points out, “Power exerted from above, even by persons of the purest character, could never produce the changes that were needed. That was to be confirmed over and over by events in Christian history ... the world had to be transformed not from above but from beneath by a race of servant people who would take upon their shoulders, whatever the cost, the burdens of mankind” (Smart 1979, 291).

Second, although the disciples had been following Jesus for several years, their deeply ingrained worldview still had not changed. They thought that they were ready to suffer with Jesus, to drink the cup Jesus drank on the cross. But

they were willing to do so only because they believed that they would end up in positions of extraordinary power and influence. The kingdom of God, as understood by the disciples of Jesus, is at best nothing more than “the same old order with a new set of rules” (Smart 1979, 291). Unfortunately, the disciples’ view of leadership 2000 years ago is the same view that many Christians still hold today. Over the years of my ministry, I have met several Christians who have confessed to me that what they truly love is God’s blessings, not God himself. They told me that the purpose of working so hard at the church for so many years was to get into the church’s deacon board.

Each sentence in John 13 reveals new insights into the leadership role. Before this section in the book of John, Jesus had done things that no one had ever done before, for example, changing water into wine and healing an official’s son. Here, he did something that everyone could do but was reluctant to: wash his disciples’ feet. Peter could not understand and asked, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” (John 13:6). Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (v. 8b). Jesus’s answer contained another question for the disciples to think about. Clearly, Jesus did more than just remove the dirt from their feet. Jesus showed his followers how they should serve each other. Behind the washing of the disciples’ feet, what Jesus told them was that the true basis of leadership was to serve, and the influence and real authority came from loving service. This is consistent with what Jesus taught in Mark 10. As Bell points out,

Christ’s revolutionary act on that Thursday evening turned the concept of dominant leadership on its head forever. Jesus had already taught the disciples that leadership in His community is not modeled after the very familiar Gentile domination of others.

In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus told His disciples, in response to their request for the highest seat in His kingdom, that “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Bell 2014, 318)

The disciples gave their entire attention to wanting to know who was the greatest of them all, but Jesus wanted them to understand that the most important thing was how the greatest among them could become less and how the leaders could become servants. When the disciples were completely unwilling to play the role of servant, Jesus himself acted as a servant and washed their feet to demonstrate what servant leadership really meant. Jesus took an extraordinary leadership transformation and redefined the meaning and function of leadership by washing his disciples’ feet. Therefore, Jesus’ new definition of leadership shows how leadership must serve people.

The words of Jesus, “if I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (John 13:8b), reveal the exclusiveness of Jesus as “the way” (John 14:6) to eternal life and to have a share in the kingdom of God. The washing away of sins comes from none other than Jesus Christ, and it is for this purpose that Christ came. He came from the heights of heaven to a broken and corrupted earth.

Paul writes:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

This passage reveals how Jesus left his position of power and glory when he was incarnated in human form. It shows how the servant nature of Jesus is based on his power and authority in heaven. The apostle Paul describes Jesus as one who took “the very nature of a servant” (v. 7). This is the paradox of servant leadership that Greenleaf tries to focus on when he uses the term “the servant as leader” (Greenleaf 2002, 22), and it also tells the difference between the leader who is willing to serve and the individual who first and foremost sees himself as a servant.

The Westminster Larger Catechism explains Christ’s humiliation as “that low condition, wherein he for our sakes, emptying himself of his glory, took upon him the form of a servant, in his conception and birth, life, death, and after his death, until his resurrection” (The Larger Catechism, 1647). This is an ontological statement about leadership. Jesus came into the world to serve people out of love, which suggests that service will lose momentum without love. It is more important for a leader to have a servant’s heart than a clear vision.

Walking with Jesus is the way to experience servant leadership, but this path may not be easy. The path may be difficult or heading towards a dead-end, and this may be caused by not following Jesus’ guidance or not looking for the end of the journey. Denny Gunderson eloquently pointed out that servanthood is a dusty road. The Greek word used by Jesus for servant is *διάκονος*. It consists of two words: *διά* meaning “through” and *κονος* meaning “dust” (Gunderson 2006, 13). Thus, *διάκονος* means “through the dust” (Gunderson 2006, 13). This Greek word helps us understand what Jesus expected from his disciples. Gunderson thus

says that a servant must fight his way through the dust storm “to sustain the lives of people other than himself” (Gunderson 2006, 14).

In a Chinese cultural context, it is so easy to misunderstand servant for subservient. People may think that “servant leaders bow down to the whims of their teams. They mistakenly think that a servant leader only takes orders and acts like a doormat at the front door of the business – trampled on by everyone who walks in” (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 196). The servant leaders that Jesus describes are not those who are weak but those who are meek. Jesus says in Matthew 10:23 that he is both meek and humble. According to Gunderson, “true meekness is one characteristic of the servant leader. But what does it mean to lead from the place of meekness? It obviously does not mean that a leader should be a spineless individual with a weak resolve. Nor does it mean that [the individual] should be indecisive and hesitant while mumbling pious platitudes about being a servant” (Gunderson 2006, 158). In contrast, a servant leader is a courageous person who dares to challenge, is willing to take responsibility, and is willing to change when necessary. As Trevor Hall points out, “servant leaders become real by living courageously through the challenges and changes we face” (2007, 30).

### **Servant Leadership in Contemporary Secular Scholarship**

In the introduction to their collection of essays about servant leadership, Blanchard and Broadwell state, “The world is in desperate need of a different leadership role model. We have all seen the negative impact of self-serving leaders in every sector of our society. Why is that? Because these leaders have

been conditioned to think of leadership only in terms of power and control” (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 1). In the last few decades, servant leadership has increasingly begun receiving attention in secular scholarship. It has become a very popular term in leadership seminars. It brings great hope to create better and more caring organizations in the future. In addition, servant leadership has gained great interest in the public press, such as in Fortune magazine. In fact, companies like Southwest Airlines have successfully integrated servant leadership into their corporate cultures. According to M. Kincaid, Southwest Airlines leverages servant leadership traits to inspire 32,000 employees and satisfy more than ninety-six million customers. Kincaid described Colleen Barrett, president emeritus of Southwest Airline, as “growing, inspiring, and supporting others to lead with a servant’s heart” (2012, 162).

Although servant leadership has been promoted in many companies’ management and has been supported by many scholars, it has also been challenged and criticized by secular scholarship. They describe servant leadership as simply a preference for certain values and ethics and believe that it should therefore not be viewed as a unique leadership model. Because of the lack of empirical research and precise definition, S. Morrisette and W. Oberman argue that while servant leadership can be an ideal leadership style, it does not make sense for a broad range of entrepreneurs (2013, 74).

It is also worth mentioning that when people talk about servant leadership from a business perspective, they usually focus on it as a stepping stone to power. As Rinehart points out,

Servant leadership is a popular term today in both the business and power-oriented ministry worlds. But often those who speak and write about it focus on the second word: servant *leadership*. Viewed with this emphasis, serving is simply a means to an end: “I’ll serve you, so you’ll respect my leadership and follow me. I prime the pump, so you will deliver.” This is just another subtle form of power leadership. In *servant* leadership, serving is the expression of leadership, regardless of how people follow. Serving is both the end as well as the means. (Rinehart 1998, 41; author’s emphasis)

In this business model of servant leadership, leaders serve their employees because they want more respect from them and expect employees to follow them. Its ultimate purpose is still to increase power and reputation, and eventually, this servant leadership model becomes another form of power leadership. From a biblical perspective, however, the servant leadership model prioritizes service. It focuses on influence beyond one’s own life and “springs from a set of values, assumptions, and principles that counter those of the secular world” (Rinehart 1998, 38).

The servant leadership model that Jesus showed the world as he interacted with his disciples became a guide to action for everyone who believed in him and wanted to follow him. However, these practices are not necessarily well applied in a modern secular setting. Gene Wilkes states, “Jesus came to show what life in the kingdom of God looked like, not to modify how the world did things. The ways of God work in the hallways of humanity only when Jesus reigns in people’s hearts” (Wilkes 1998, 115).

## Power and Control versus Service

As mentioned above, there are two different models of leadership: one based on power and control and another based on service. For many, leadership is a game of power: “Being a leader is in some way a matter of climbing one’s way up an invisible ladder to the top. There, at the top, the reward was power, power to make things happen, power to control the options, power to influence others” (Rinehart 1998, 19). People who hold this view of leadership often interpret leadership as command-and-control, and control is the only answer to almost all the problems humans face. Some believe that being too close to followers can lead to leaders not getting enough respect from followers and thus losing their influence.

Peter Northouse states that “although there are no explicit theories in the research literature about power and leadership, power is a concept that people often associate with leadership” (2021, 10). Table 4 shows six position powers and personal powers. Leaders use these base powers to influence others.

**Table 4: Types and Bases of Power (Kotter 1990, 3-8)**

<b>Position Power</b>	<b>Personal Power</b>
Legitimate	Referent
Reward	Expert
Coercive	
Information	

Akindele and Afolabi (2013, 42-43) define power leadership as a privileged position where one can order others to obey unconditionally without

dissent. They associate power leadership with the respect that comes from reputation and the ability to handle people. The servant leadership model, however, is not based on control and command but on service. It is “leadership alongside, rather than from above. Leadership is exercised for the benefit of the people we lead, not to enhance our own reputation or to help get our own job done more effectively” (Gibbs 2000, 106).

The essence of the servant leadership model conflicts with the essence of the power model as well as human egocentricity. In this model, leaders in service know that their own growth is based on helping others grow. Leaders are motivated not by power but by serving the needs of others. Power motives allow leaders to be blinded by their own ambitions. If they use influence to measure leadership, then they risk sacrificing integrity. As Fons Trompenaars and Ed Voerman point out, “In some ways, you can say that the power model is all about taking, while the service model is all about giving, which is a completely different paradigm” (2010, 15). Skip Bell discusses how Jesus Christ put all his power into service in this statement:

Jesus did not gather power and authority to Himself. Though He was God, He emptied Himself and clothed Himself in humanity, complete with humanity’s limitations and inclinations. One of the most significant inclinations He rose above was humankind’s penchant to hold on to and not share power and authority. Jesus demonstrated an amazing ability to empower others, to trust others with leadership, to allow others to stumble and fail without condemning them, and to share whatever and all He had with those He led. In a true sense, Jesus was all about developing and multiplying leaders, doing so at any and all costs. Jesus developed the leadership abilities latent in every disciple. (Bell 2014, 283)

In his book *In the Name of Jesus*, Nouwen criticizes the power model of leadership and puts forward a lot of insightful suggestions for Christian leaders. As a response to “the request to reflect on Christian leadership in the new century” (Nouwen 1989, 19), Nouwen walks readers through each of the things Jesus was tempted by, as recorded in Matthew 4, and states how they are relevant to Christian leaders today. First, Nouwen explains that the first temptation of today’s ministers is to be relevant. He describes Christian leaders as “completely irrelevant and stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self” (Nouwen 1989, 30). Rather than trying to be relevant to the world, Christian leaders should use Jesus as the source of their guidance. It is through unceasing prayer that Christian leaders can do this because the temptation of being relevant is too strong to overcome for many Christian leaders.

The second temptation Nouwen mentions is the temptation to be popular. He states that in today’s churches, individualism is also very popular among Christian leaders. People like to go solo. However, Nouwen says that ministry is not done alone but in pairs. He encourages Christian leaders to lead “not as professionals who know their clients’ problems and take care of them, but as vulnerable brothers and sisters who know and are known, who care and are cared for, who forgive and are being forgiven, who love and are being loved” (Nouwen 1989, 61).

The third temptation today’s Christian leaders need to be aware of is the temptation of power. Nouwen argues that “power caused crusades, inquisitions, and the enslavement of Indians ... It seems easier to be God than to love God, and

easier to control people than to love people” (Nouwen 1989, 77). Power leadership is so common in the church that Nouwen said, “one of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power – political power, military power, economic power, moral and spiritual power – even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to His divine power but emptied Himself and became as we are” (1989, 76). Nouwen argues that the most important quality of Christian leadership “is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest” (1989, 82). According to Nouwen, Christian leaders are deeply affected by these three temptations. It is difficult to have an effective ministry unless all of these are overcome. In summary, Nouwen encourages Christian leaders to make three shifts “from a concern for relevance to a life of prayer, from worries about popularity to communal and mutual ministry, and from a leadership built on power to a leadership in which we critically discern where God is leading us and our people” (1989, 92).

### **Servant Leader and Character Development**

Many researchers view servant leadership as a valid leadership theory. Others criticize it for not having a precise definition and lacking empirical support, and most are anecdotal. Such criticism has led researchers to focus on establishing a set of attributes for servant leadership. These attributes are then introduced into a practical model as a base for future research. All the attributes

of servant leadership can be developed from an individual leader's values and core beliefs. Robert Neuschel explains that "the image of the leader is not his superficial self but rather the sum total of a system of values demonstrated over time" (1998, 47). On top of this, "if servant leadership is different from other forms of leadership, then one should be able to observe characteristics and behaviours in such leaders that are distinctive" (Russell and Stone 2002, 145).

According to Larry Spears, servant leadership is manifested through a set of characteristics. In a collection of essays about servant leadership, Spears lists ten useful attributes in analyzing and studying servant leadership as a theory (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 15-17).

### **Listening**

The reason listening is at the top of this list is that it is a critical but often lacking trait for most leaders. Listening enables leaders to be well informed and to find meaning in what is said and what is not said. Servant leaders respond by actively listening in order to understand each other. They listen before speaking, while speaking, and after speaking.

### **Empathy**

Because being accepted and recognized is what everyone desires, servant leaders try their best to understand and empathize with them. Servant leaders assume goodwill from their colleagues and do not reject them personally when rejecting their actions or performances. Empathy begins with recognizing that leaders are responsible for managing a group of unique individuals.

## **Healing**

Servant leaders understand that they should pay attention to those who are hurting and provide necessary assistance as they recover. Servant leadership has advantages in healing oneself and their relationships with others.

## **Awareness**

Awareness refers to the insight servant leaders possess into things such as morality, power, and values which allow them to assess the moral dimension of a situation from a more integrated, holistic, and values-based standpoint. Servant leaders usually have a very clear mind and inner serenity. This inner serenity does not come directly from the solace of awareness. On the contrary, awareness is often a disturber and an awakener. Servant leaders are often very awake and disturbed.

## **Persuasion**

Servant leaders rely not on position or power but on persuasion when they need to make a decision. Servant leaders drive change by building effective collective consensus. Servant leaders seek to persuade others and not force them to obey. This feature clearly distinguishes leadership models based on power and control and servant leadership models based on service to others.

## **Conceptualization**

Leaders are often busy with short-term operational goals. However, servant leaders try to develop their ability to have macro goals. Conceptualization is the ability to consider a thing from a conceptual perspective. Servant leadership can go beyond the everyday details and encompass a broader perspective. Of

course, a good balance is required between conceptualization and day-to-day attention. To do this, for many leaders, requires discipline and practice.

### **Foresight**

Foresight and conceptualization go hand in hand. Foresight is a trait of servant leaders. It empowers servant leaders to predict the likely outcome of things based on what happened in the past, present reality, and possible consequences of future decisions. Foresight helps servant leaders avoid detours and mistakes similar to those in the past and often predicts the outcome of future decisions. Foresight comes from intuitive thinking, which is still an underexplored area of leadership research.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship indicates responsible management of something in trust for others. The essence of stewardship, like service to others, reflects loyalty to the needs and interests of others. Servant leaders entrust their organization to others and serve the agency in the best interests of the common good. Stewardship emphasizes openness and persuasion in the process.

### **Commitment to the growth of people**

Servant leaders are aware that employees have their own values. With this realization, servant leaders deliberately foster the growth of their followers.

### **Building Community**

Servant leaders believe that human history is evolving from large corporations to local communities. Servant leaders have insight into the factors that affect the workforce, and they serve beyond the confines of their institution.

Of course, as Spears himself stated, “these ten characteristics of servant leadership are by no means exhaustive” (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 18). However, these ten characteristics differentiate servant leadership from other leadership theories and in some cases, they, in turn, affect each other.

In his book *Being Leaders*, Aubrey Malphurs lists Jesus displaying humility, service, focus on others, and love (2005, 34-42).

Humility is the number one quality a servant leader displays in his leadership. In Matthew 20:25-26, Jesus taught servant leaders to lead humbly. To understand the true meaning of what Jesus is teaching here, the concept of Gentile humility must be understood in contrast with what Jesus is advocating for. D.A. Carson writes, “In the pagan world humility was regarded, not so much as a virtue, but a vice. Imagine a slave being given leadership! Jesus’ ethics of leadership and power in his community of disciples are revolutionary” (Carson 1984, 432).

In Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus clearly told his followers that the nature of servant leadership was service rather than power and position. Similarly, since it is easy to fall into the temptation to serve ourselves, Jesus did not refer to disciples as servants in the general sense. He specifically advised them to be each other’s servants.

Finally, the love a leader has for his followers is what makes servant leaders willing to serve. A few days after Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 20:24-28, he washed the disciples’ feet. Jesus loved these people passionately, and such love made him pick up the towel instead of tossing it in. The degree to

which a leader is willing to serve others humbly depends on how much the leader loves them.

Characteristics of leaders play a very important role in servant leadership. Of all these characteristics, the most important characteristic of Christian leaders is that they do not rely on power and status to influence their followers. They are not empowered by the structure of human beings but by the will of God.

### **Conclusion**

Servant leadership believes that one's growth comes first and foremost by promoting the growth of others. In this model, leaders are motivated not to seek power but to serve others. "The power model is all about taking, while the service model is all about giving" (Trompenaars and Voerman 2010, 15). Servant leaders always exhibit a servant style. They do not use it as a way to increase influence or achieve personal ends but as a distinctive feature of biblical leadership. Great leaders are servants first, which is what makes them great. As Greenleaf points out, "Able servants with potential to lead will lead, and where appropriate, they will follow only servant leaders. Not much else counts if this does not happen" (Greenleaf 2002, 59).

For me, moving from self-centred leadership based on power and control to servant leadership based on serving others has always been easier said than done. However, I believe that becoming a servant leader is what I will strive toward for the rest of my life. In conclusion, servant leadership is more than modified leadership, it is exactly how leadership works. Servant leadership requires a personal commitment to serve others. As Blanchard and Broadwell

point out, “Not everyone who serves is a leader—while, paradoxically, no true leader leads without serving” (Blanchard and Broadwell 2018, 167). Such a leader is one who is willing to serve behind the scenes. This type of leadership is not about being in the limelight or showing up. Rather, it is a leadership style that reflects what Jesus Christ demonstrated to people.

In Chapter 4, I describe what I did and discovered through my research project in a missional community setting. Due to the fact that the leadership structure of missional communities is much flatter and differs from that of hierarchical power structures, it is easier to use servant leadership theory as the guideline for implementing and developing missional communities. In fact, the leadership framework of the missional community I unpacked in Chapter 4 is an application of servant leadership.

## CHAPTER 4: FIELD MINISTRY PROJECT

The purpose of this three-month research project was to explore whether or not hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community would increase both participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a Chinese church context. This exploration was conducted from mid-August to mid-November 2021 through a series of in-person and online gatherings, interviews, and weekly practices of BELLS in a missional community format. The guides used in this research project included the BELLS model, developed by Michael Frost in his book *Surprise the World* (2016), the missional community strategies developed by Mike Breen in his book *Launching Missional Communities* (2010), and my own ecclesiology, missiology, and Christian leadership philosophy.

Seven people were invited to participate in this research project. When practicing BELLS, qualitative research data was collected and analyzed through interviews, DNA (Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability) forms submitted by participants, and my own participatory observations during in-person gatherings and online discussions. The outcome of the research project was that the practice of the BELLS model helped increase most of the participants' missional awareness and passion for evangelising to their Chinese compatriots. It also helped them witness their belief in everyday life in a diaspora Chinese cultural context.

## **Opportunity and Research Question**

This field research project not only served as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree awarded by Tyndale University, but it was also a product of my years of reflection on problems I have encountered during my church ministry. In my years of ministry serving at Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church (TRCCC), I found that more than half of the second generation of TRCCC stopped going to church after leaving for university. I also found that the number of Chinese immigrants and international students who came to TRCCC was decreasing year by year. As our church members age, there is a real concern that TRCCC may soon die out. Simply realizing the urgency and seriousness of the problem itself does not free the congregation from this danger. As a diaspora Chinese church in Canada, in addition to retaining the second generation of our own church, the growth of TRCCC depends on the success of evangelism to those Mandarin-speaking international students and immigrants who are coming to Canada every year. To achieve this, the church needs to first find a practical and effective way to increase TRCCC church members' missional awareness and make the church an active participant in missions. This is what this research project aims to do.

The second challenge was a lack of young leaders at TRCCC who are willing to lead the church and carry on the ministry in the future. Although the church has always emphasized the importance of cultivating younger leaders, over the past several years, there has been no effective plan, resulting in very few young believers participating in the leadership team. Even when they do

participate, they are often just holding a title with no real leadership responsibilities. This is another issue that could make the church become a one-generation church.

For me, these two challenges mentioned above are also opportunities. So, I tried to start a new ministry model by implementing an inquiry learning project, and this project was based on the following research question: Would a three-month, hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community increase both participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel at TRCCC?

### **Context**

I have been serving as senior pastor at Toronto RenAi Chinese Christian Church (TRCCC) in North York, Ontario, since 2014. Almost the entire congregation at TRCCC is from mainland China. TRCCC is a non-denominational, medium-sized church with about 200 people attending weekly services. Over the past seven years, TRCCC has faced two problems. The first problem is that when the second generation of the church goes to university, more than half of them choose to leave the church at all. On top of that, the number of Mandarin-speaking international students and immigrants coming to TRCCC was decreasing year by year. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, this is not because we are no longer able to find enough Mandarin speakers in our surroundings. On the contrary, thousands of new Mandarin speakers arrive every year.

The second problem is a lack of young leaders at TRCCC who are willing to lead the church and carry on the ministry in the future. Although the church has

always emphasized the importance of cultivating younger leaders, over the past several years, there has been no really effective way, resulting in very few young believers participating in the leadership team. Even when they do participate, they are often just an embellishment with no real leadership responsibilities. As I mentioned in the introduction section of this chapter, if we cannot find an effective way to properly solve these two problems, the church could soon become a one-generation church.

In the past, to solve these problems, TRCCC has taken the following two approaches: an attractional approach and a small group approach. The church first attempted an attractional approach aimed at making Christianity relevant for all ages. Like a well-run business, this approach focused on designing and implementing attractive programs. Over the past several years, the leadership team has invited high-profile speakers, employed contemporary musicians, maintained excellent facilities, and organized church-wide retreats in Montreal, Niagara Falls, and Cambridge, Ontario. TRCCC's leadership team put extra emphasis on the use of facilities, staffing, and big events and focused more on building up programs than on the needs of the people.

One of the reasons why this approach had been very popular at TRCCC is that for most of the leadership team, including myself, this was the approach that initially attracted them to become Christians. If this approach helped them accept Jesus many years ago, then the same approach should also help people accept Christ today. Unfortunately, this was not the case because today's culture and people differ from those twenty-plus years ago.

The second attempt was a small group approach. While this approach still focused on regular Sunday worship services, the small group acted as a primary platform for discipleship and evangelism. While this approach made it easier to invite Christians to a small group, it was not as easy to invite non-Christians. In fact, very few seekers came to small groups. Because of this, small groups became more about the spiritual growth of group members who were already Christian.

Both approaches have been successful at proclaiming the gospel to some degree. However, there have been pitfalls to each as well. If these approaches continue, the church will remain in danger of becoming a one-generation church. Therefore, this study considers another approach that combines evangelism, discipleship, and community service more effectively and more like the early church. This is the missional community approach. Mike Breen and Alex Absalom define a missional community as this:

A missional community is a group of anything from 20 to 50 people who are united, through Christian community, around a common service and witness to a particular neighborhood or network of relationships. With a strong value on life together, the group has the expressed intention of seeing those they impact choose to start following Jesus, through this more flexible and locally incarnated expression of the church. The result will often be that the group will grow and ultimately multiply into further missional communities. They are most often networked within a larger church community. (Breen and Absalom 2010, 11)

Initially, this project was to be conducted in downtown Toronto. Due to the pandemic, however, the scope was expanded to the whole GTA, and I explain in detail why I made this change later in this section. The reason this research project targeted downtown Toronto was because the Mandarin-speaking mission

field in downtown Toronto has been very large. In addition to an increase in Chinese immigrants, the number of Chinese international students has also increased each year. According to the University of Toronto, the total number of Chinese international students (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) exceeded 14,000 during 2019-20 (see Table 1). Due to their culture, political background, and other historical reasons, most Mandarin-speaking immigrants and students from China are atheists. According to the World Economic Forum, China is one of the most secular countries in the world. Only 9% of Chinese people consider themselves religious (World Economic Forum 2017). In the past twenty-plus years, I have evangelized people with Buddhist backgrounds, and I have also evangelized people with atheistic beliefs. Based on my experiences, it is often easier to preach the gospel to those who believe in nothing than to preach to those with other faiths. In addition, I have observed that being far from their home country often helps young people be more spiritually receptive to the gospel and more ready to receive a new loving community.

Another reason why downtown Toronto was initially targeted is that, as far as I know, there are only five Chinese churches with both Mandarin-speaking programs and more than fifty members in the downtown Toronto area. They are Toronto Chinese Baptist Church, Chinese Gospel Church, Toronto China Bible Church (South Campus), Toronto Holy Word Church, and Toronto Chinese Alliance Church. I visited all five churches and found that by and large, they are all greying membership churches. I interviewed the senior pastor of one of these churches, located right next to the University of Toronto campus, and asked him

why there are no young professional and university student ministries in his church. He simply told me that the church did not have the resources for that. When I visited another one of these churches, I learned that the church tried to start a university student ministry many years ago, but after years of struggling with only a handful of students attending, the leadership eventually shut down the program. I do not know the specific details of why the leadership decided to terminate this ministry.

One final reason why this project initially targeted downtown Toronto is because I have the same cultural background as most of the Mandarin-speaking people in downtown Toronto to a certain extent in terms of local knowledge and experience. In addition, I have the experience of studying abroad in North America and converting from atheism to Christianity. Because of this, I can better understand why they are unwilling to believe in a God who loves them unconditionally. By God's grace and mercy, twenty-seven years ago, when I was about the same age as the younger Chinese students in downtown Toronto, I became a Christian. Although things have changed in society and culture over the past few decades, I found that the reasons for most Chinese international students to reject God are nothing new compared to the past, and my experience as a Chinese student studying abroad and moving from being an atheist to becoming a Christian is an asset for me when preaching the gospel to people from the same background.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Chinese international students living in downtown Toronto left Canada. Others moved to suburban areas outside

of downtown Toronto because the cost of rent and the risk of contracting COVID-19 were higher downtown and because most companies implemented remote work policies, which made a living elsewhere feasible. This also meant that those I originally wanted to invite to participate in this research project were no longer living downtown. As a result, I was unable to carry out this research according to the original plan. Instead, this research project was conducted across the entire GTA. In addition, because the government had restrictions on physical gatherings during most of the duration of the research project, and since many people were unwilling to meet in person, most of the activities in this research project were carried out online instead of in person, as originally designed.

Due to the three-month time limit, this research project mainly focused on testing and implementing the BELLS model in a missional community context in order to increase participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness and passion for the Great Commission. In the future, I intend to conduct more research that focuses on cultivating missional discipleship on a larger scale.

### **Models and Resources**

The BELLS model (Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn, Sent), developed by Michael Frost (2016, 29-97), was implemented and tested throughout this research project. BELLS is a simple, easy-to-adopt model that can both be applied in the context of this project and map a way forward to demonstrate how missional communities can help one another in their missional practices. It helps to “unleash missional values: engagement with neighbours, connection with each other, a deeper experience of God's leading, a stronger understanding of the

gospel, and a framework for identifying ourselves as missionaries” (Frost 2016, x). In the past, TRCCC has held many missional training sessions based on biblical teachings. However, these training sessions have often lacked actionability. BELLS can provide a practical guide that is both biblical and relevant.

At TRCCC, there are two different views on whether or not every Christian is an evangelist. One view is that every Christian should be an evangelist based on the Great Commission given to Christians by Jesus Christ. Another view is that only a few people are called to be evangelists. According to Ephesians 4:11, “Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.” Those with this view believe that these five types of people, including evangelists, all have the proper gifts for these callings. Since they need the gifts, it means that not everyone has them. However, Paul states in Colossians 4:2-6 that in addition to gifted evangelists, there are evangelistic believers. Peter declares in 1 Peter 3:15-16 that every believer is to be an evangelist. What the BELLS model emphasizes is that, although only a few people have the gift of evangelism, every believer is still called to be evangelistic. As Frost insists, “We need both gifted evangelists and ordinary believers who are habitually evangelistic” (2016, 27).

With all this in mind, DNA (Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability) groups were formed to hold each member responsible for the BELLS practice, as well as to encourage and cultivate each other (Frost 2016, 101-107). From mid-August to mid-November, participants used an app called WeChat to partner together every

week. The WeChat app was the means by which each DNA group member throughout the week brought people together to learn, act, have meaningful conversations, reflect, and grow. It also allowed each DNA group member the opportunity to express, in their own words, what their transformations looked like. These transformations include their new understanding of mission, what they learned about Jesus Christ, how they experienced the Holy Spirit's presence, and how they became a blessing to others in their everyday lives. Each DNA group consisted of three to four people, and they decided on their own meeting time and place (either online or on site). I will explain in the next section how these people were chosen.

The practice of the BELLS model in a missional community context is consistent with my ecclesiology, missiology, and philosophy of Christian leadership. First, I believe the church is a who, not a what. It is a verb, not a noun (McNeal 2011, 25). The nature of the church is missional. Lane Madison Scruggs, in his dissertation, expounds on the mission of the church:

The church finds herself looking to the New Testament for its ideal, which in its nature is *sent* to be a sign, witness, and foretaste of the kingdom of God – a counter-cultural community of action. The ongoing goal is not an exhaustive restoration of that New Testament church, but an attempt to employ a missional hermeneutic that can discover ecclesial patterns in the New Testament to contextually realize and employ them as an instrument of the larger unfolding *missio Dei*. (Scruggs 2018, 262)

Second, I believe that the missionary nature of God is reflected in the sentness of the church. South African missiologist David Bosch states in his book *Believing in the Future* that, “Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is the alerting of people to the universal reign of God

through Christ” (1995, 33). Mission is more than just inviting people to church. Rather, mission is going into the world and showing people Christ right where they are. Breen and Absalom provide insight to help understand this when they say, “Mission is God’s activity of love towards the world. He is a sending God, a going God, a God who incarnates himself into a specific time and context so that every person may come to know and love him. To be a follower of Jesus means that you too are called to be a missionary” (Breen and Absalom 2010, 21). For me, this missiology is the cornerstone of TRCCC moving from inward to outward, from a come-to model to a go-to model, from attractional to incarnational, and from a bounded-set model to a centred-set model which I explained in detail in Chapter 2.

Third, in terms of my Christian leadership philosophy, I argue that the leadership model of Jesus that the Bible demonstrates is servant leadership. Everywhere in the Gospels, Jesus is serving. John 13 gives a powerful picture of the servant nature of Jesus. Here, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and then challenged them to serve one another in love and humility (see Chapter 3).

The leadership structure of missional communities is much flatter and differs from that of hierarchical power structures. In a missional community, to lead is to serve. Terence Schilstra, a missional community leader serving among the urban poor in downtown Thorold, Ontario, and a Tyndale alumnus, particularly emphasized that the mark of missional community leaders is servanthood. As missional community leaders, “we should set nothing before us but the necessities and the advantage of others” (Schilstra 2021, 55).

In *Missional Communities*, Reggie McNeal (2011, xix) shows a different form of church that is not tied to a seven-day rhythm of the congregational modality of the church. McNeal introduces five working models of missional communities in chapters three to seven that helped me think creatively during the three-month-long research project about how to shape lives together to build discipleship and serve God's purposes effectively. The missional community cases presented in this book not only greatly encouraged me to carry out this research project but also guided me on how to operate BELLS in everyday life. For example, when developing missional communities, it requires more accountability to be in covenant with others than just to be a regular member of a congregation. Relationships have to be protected and worked out; hospitality and grace toward other community members have to be practiced.

In *Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood*, Mark Lau Branson (2014, 32) describes some common challenges faced by seven missional churches and explains how these missional churches differ from SPEC (Suburban Sprawl, Protestant Splitting, Expert Strategies, and Charismatic Figure) churches. Whereas SPEC churches are made up of a certain group of people, the missional churches focus on the people in their neighbourhood. This difference helped me re-think the strategies and priorities in practicing BELLS, for example, including those who are considered totally different from me. The part of the book on missional case studies was also very helpful, especially when implementing BELLS was not possible.

The book, *From the Margins to the Centre: The Diaspora Effect* edited by

Michael Krause, Narry Santos, and Robert Cousins (2018), helped me understand that in Canada the Christian diaspora is moving from the margins to the center of society. This book reminded me that I should put the challenge that TRCCC is facing as being a one-generation church within a larger context. It also helped me realize that the proven solutions of the past are not necessarily the answers to the questions being raised in the present situation at TRCCC.

### **Field**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for a few in-person gatherings, most of this research project was conducted online. As the researcher, I invited seven participants from TRCCC, all Mandarin-speaking believers, who were available to participate in this project from August to November 2021. Among them, one was the chairman of the church deacon board, one was the church's family care deacon, two were studying at Tyndale Seminary, and the other three were co-workers in the church's young professional ministry.

There were a few reasons why these seven people were chosen for this research project. First, the ultimate purpose of this research project was not only to increase the missional awareness at the individual level of the participants but also to have an impact on the entire church's ministry of reaching out to un-churched people. To this end, the participation of the deacons and chairman were necessary because, according to our church by-law, any new ministry must first be approved by the deacon board. Second, the two Tyndale Seminary students would be able to think about the challenges faced by TRCCC and many other Chinese churches from a practical point of view before they graduate. They

would also be able to participate in different ministries to inform their full-time ministry after graduation. Third, since TRCCC's younger generation ministry would be especially important to combat the danger of becoming a one-generation church, the young professional ministry co-workers were also invited. I engaged with each of these participants not just as the senior pastor of TRCCC, but also as a researcher and co-participant of the project. Including myself, eight people in total participated in this research project.

The reason these seven members were handpicked to participate in this research project was that if people were randomly asked to participate, I might have had to spend much more time working with them on things not related to this research project. This might have made it impossible to get results within three months. By next year, when I have gained some experience, some of the new believers will be able to participate.

### **Scope**

The purpose of this three-month project was to test if a three-month hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community setting could increase participants' missional awareness. In order to learn how the participants' understanding of the Church, culture, gospel, and Christian mission changed through practicing BELLS, I conducted pre-project and post-project interviews with them, observed the participants' behaviour during the entire project, and read their weekly reflection journals. The context of the research

project is TRCCC, and the researcher's location is in the GTA, a region with more than 610,000 overseas Chinese as of the 2021 census (Census profile 2021).

This research project was not directed toward a full-scale practice of establishing a missional community because research on that scale would be beyond the scope of the DMin requirement, and my DMin research was supposed to complement my ministry, not direct it. Also, time constraints restricted the depth to which participants were able to cultivate a habit and rhythm of missional living.

At this point, the outcomes of this research project could not be generalized to all the TRCCC congregants. If the pre-screening of the participants had not taken place, the outcomes would have been different. Hence, further research will be needed when the whole congregation is invited to participate.

### **Procedures**

After implementing and testing the BELLS model, I evaluated whether or not this experiment had a positive impact on increasing participants' missional awareness. I interviewed each participant before and after the project. Each interview took about forty-five minutes and consisted of a series of questions. Some of them were open-ended questions so that the participants could have the opportunity to share specific stories (see Appendix A for interview questions). All the participants were told that both interviews would be audio-recorded but that I would not mention their names without prior consent.

For the duration of the project, all participants attended three gatherings (see Appendix B for detailed activities). The first and third gatherings were held in person while the second meeting was online. These occurred on September 12, October 24, and November 21, 2021. At the first gathering, everyone briefly introduced their own current situation, shared their understanding of the BELLS model and DNA group, and put forward constructive suggestions on how to practice BELLS. At the second and third gatherings, everyone emphatically shared what they had learned, and the biggest challenges and gains of practicing BELLS had been over the past several weeks.

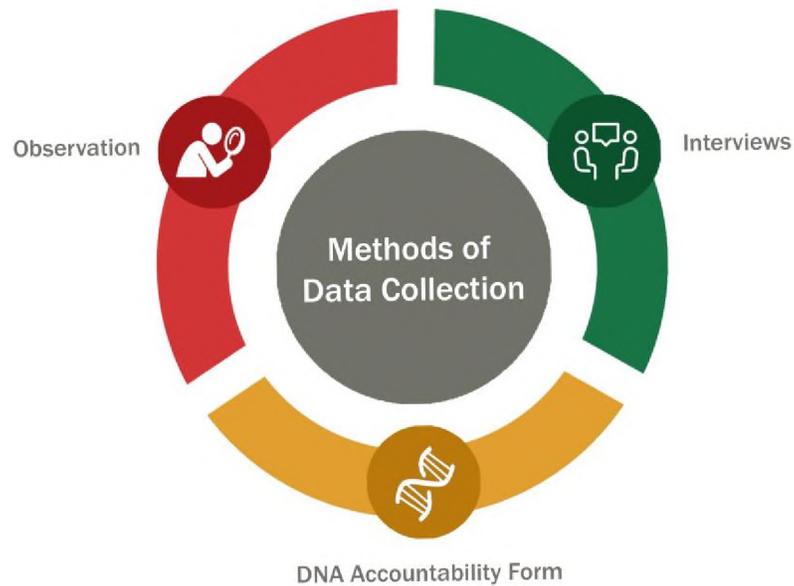
Every week, participants followed the BELLS model by reading and discussing key scripture, reflecting both personally and in groups, learning about specific issues of concern, and engaging in hands-on service. The participants were divided into two DNA groups. At the end of the week, each participant submitted their completed DNA Accountability Form (see Appendix B) to the WeChat platform for discussion.

Interviews and group discussions were audio recorded and reviewed by myself. Data from the DNA Accountability Forms and observations were also collected, which, when summarized, highlighted specific themes and values that arose. All collected information was coded using the in vivo coding method and analyzed afterward. By the end of the three-month research project, I found some helpful insights (See Appendix C for the data collection and analysis plan).

All the interviews, instructions, and discussions were carried out in Mandarin since some participants did not speak English well and Mandarin is the official church language at TRCCC.

### **Methodology and Methods**

The main methods of data collection used in this research project included interviews, personal journals from the DNA Accountability Forms, and participant observations during group gatherings (see Figure 5). Over the course of the project, I served as a facilitator rather than a lecturer to assist participants in an inquiry learning style. In this way, I posted questions instead of presenting answers and personal knowledge about the subject and worked with participants to identify and research issues and questions to develop new knowledge or solutions. For example, during the three gatherings, it was not just my monologue. Instead, each participant spent almost equal time sharing their ups and downs while practicing BELLS. Similarly, during discussions on the WeChat platform every week, there were no teachers or students at all. Instead, everyone was learning together.



**Figure 5: Methods of Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

Before the kickoff of this research project, I designed a series of interview questions. These questions were used to collect data. I scheduled these interviews with the seven participants well ahead of the meeting date and confirmed the time with them the day before each meeting. Due to the pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, except for one that was held on the lawn outside of Tyndale Seminary. As the researcher, I had already developed a trusting relationship with participants before the start of this research project. I also assured the participants that their names and salient details would be altered and used only with their approval for them to feel comfortable sharing intimate information with me.

During the interviews, I tried my best to avoid tainting the questions with my own perceptions, perspectives, interests, and agendas. For example, I tried to keep the questions clear and simple by not containing jargon or certain terms and

phrases that I wanted to confirm. Instead of leading the conversations, I followed them. Each interview began with general questions, asking the participants to describe their journey or experience. In this way, the participants were able to describe the situation from their own perspectives and in their own languages. These questions allowed participants to recount their faith journey in their own way. As the researcher, I recorded and took notes of the interviews so that I could start to form some initial, high-level ideas. Both the pre-project and post-project interviews enabled participants to express their perspectives in detail and tell the stories of their own experiences. As Martyn Denscombe points out, “When the researcher needs to gain insights into things such as people’s opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences, then interviews will almost certainly provide a more suitable method – a method that is attuned to the intricacy of the subject matter” (2014, 174).

### **Personal Journals**

Other than the pre- and post-project interviews and the group discussions in the three gatherings, I collected data through DNA Accountability Forms that each participant submitted every week. Participants were asked to submit their DNA Accountability Forms each week on the WeChat platform. One part of this form requested that they share their personal journal entries about their experience practicing BELLS. These personal accounts provided insight into aspects of their gains and struggles while practicing BELLS in a missional community setting. Having participants keep personal journals was a useful method to help learn about their thoughts and actions in context. I collected the

entries from each participant and then sorted them in chronological order.

(Appendix F shows some of my in vivo coding and analysis of personal journal entries.)

### **Observations**

During the in-person and online gatherings, I also collected data through participatory observations. I recorded what I saw or heard, including the participants' behaviour, actions, speech, questions, disagreement or absence of response, body language, voice inflection, and level of intensity immediately following the events. Tim Sensing, in his book *Qualitative Research*, points out that

Observation is a powerful way to check the consistency of what people subjectively report about themselves during interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. Additionally, observation gathers information about people's physical, social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, among others. By observing the interactions of the participants in the study, the researcher can understand more about their relationships, ideas, norms, habits, and practices. (Sensing 2011, 93)

During the gatherings, instead of observing as an outsider, I played two roles simultaneously: objective observer and subjective participant. As an objective observer, I facilitated the gatherings and was responsible for observing and recording the words and deeds of other participants during the project. As a subjective participant, I also practiced BELLS every week by myself, participated in a DNA group, and shared my gains and challenges with other DNA group members on WeChat. During my observation periods, I often had the opportunity to engage in conversation with people. These casual conversations provided me

with the opportunity to verify my observations and delve deeper into the meaning of events. Table 5 shows the source of data.

**Table 5: The Source of Data**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Description</b>
Pre-Project Interviews	Narratives of participants and their responses to interview questions, perspectives and understanding of the church, culture, gospel, and Christian mission, my interactions with participants as the benchmarks for future measurement. All the interviews were recorded.
Post-Project Interviews	A new set of data from the post-project interviews on the same questions asked during the pre-project interviews. All the interviews were recorded.
Participants' Personal Journal	Personal narratives, testimonies, reflections, and documented changes while practicing BELLS are recorded in the DNA Accountability Form and submitted on the WeChat platform weekly.
Participant Observation	Notes on what I saw or heard during the three-month research project that includes participants' behaviour, actions, speech, comments, questions, disagreement or absence of response, body language, voice inflection and level of intensity, emotional responses, and autoethnography with my own reaction to what I observed.

## **Phases and Timetable**

The project timeline, which occurred from August 2020 to March 2022, was provided as follows.

### **Phase I: Preparation**

- ❖ August 2020: REB approval. Approval was received via email from the Tyndale Ethics Board.
- ❖ June 2021: Recruiting participants. Identified and invited seven participants from TRCCC to join the research team. Provided them with basic information about the research project, such as a brief description of the BELLS model and DNA groups, a timeline, an explanation of what would be required of them, etc. Signed consent letter with participants.
- ❖ July 2021: Preparing interview questions. Designed pre- and post-project interview questions.
- ❖ August 2021: Project proposal approval. Received approval from Dr. Chapman on my project proposal.

### **Phase II: Implementation**

- ❖ August 2021 – November 2021: Weekly practice of BELLS. Participants submitted DNA Accountability Forms on the WeChat platform every week.
- ❖ September 4 – 6, 2021: Pre-project interviews were conducted with the seven participants.
- ❖ September 12, 2021: First gathering (in-person). Each participant introduced themselves, shared their understanding of the function of the

BELLS model and DNA group, and put forward constructive suggestions on how to practice BELLS.

- ❖ October 24, 2021: Second gathering (online). Each participant shared what he/she had learned so far and what the biggest challenges and gains of practicing BELLS were over the past several weeks.
- ❖ November 19 – 21, 2021: Post-project interviews were conducted with the seven participants.
- ❖ November 21, 2021: Third gathering (in-person). I explored recommendations and research outcomes with the participants. Project conclusion and celebration.

#### Phase III: Documentation

- ❖ November 15 – December 5, 2021: Data analysis and coding. Writing of Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.
- ❖ December 5, 2021 - February 2022: Writing Chapter 2, 3, and the final portfolio, getting advice and feedback from the research advisory board.
- ❖ March 2022: Portfolio presentation and hearing

### **Ethics in Ministry-Based Research**

Each of the participants was informed orally and in writing, in both English and Chinese, about the purpose of this research project. I shared my rationale for conducting the research and the research questions that framed my work with the participants. I had each participant sign a consent form (see Appendix D – Participation Consent Form) before the project took place. I

discussed with them the implications of their participation before I asked the participants to sign a consent form. I then gave them enough time to read the consent form and ask any questions before having them sign it. Considering that some of the participants did not speak English well, I provided them with the consent form in both English and Chinese. I also explained how the confidentiality and identity of the group would be protected when disseminating the results of the project.

Participants were allowed to withdraw during the three-month project without any consequence. No monetary incentives were offered. Participants were given the opportunity to process and discuss all the things asked of them. The research involved only adults of sound mind, and no one under the age of nineteen was a subject of the research.

When reporting the data, special care was taken to ensure anonymity. Data was kept confidential in locked filing cabinets or drawers or safeguarded with password protection. There was no divulging of any information that had no bearing on the research project. All forms used in gathering data for this project will be destroyed three years after the research is completed. Any data on the subjects, which has been collected for other purposes, will only be used if it can advance the research without compromising the anonymity of the subjects.

### **Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes**

This section begins with my findings through the analysis and coding of the data collected during the project. Then I will present my interpretation of the

data and my analysis of the outcomes of the project based on those interpretations (coded data is found in Appendix E and F).

### **Findings**

I collected the data from individual interviews, personal journals, and participants' observations. I compiled each interview into a complete transcript. Immediately after each gathering, I wrote field notes recording my observations about the characteristics of the participants, their styles of interacting with each other, and the content of their conversations. Observational data takes the form of descriptive words that need to be examined for patterns or meanings. I used in vivo coding technique to turn unstructured data, such as interview transcripts and field notes, into findings for analysis. The coding process helped me develop insights and ideas from the data. By qualitatively coding the data, I made my analysis more systematic and rigorous.

The method used for coding qualitative data varied depending on the research objectives and who conducted the research project. In general, it included how to read through the data, apply the codes to excerpts, group them according to themes, and interpret the data in order to get the final result. In this research project, I used in vivo coding as the method to derive codes from the participants' own words. Following are the two reasons why I chose in vivo as my coding method.

First, as a beginner in qualitative research, in vivo coding helped me gain a deeper understanding of the stories and ideas that the participants wanted to express and the true meaning behind these stories. As Johnny Saldana states, "in

vivo coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice ... by doing so researchers are more likely to capture the meaning inherent in people's experience" (Saldana 2016, 106).

Second, in vivo coding is also very useful for folksy or indigenous terms (Saldana 2016, 105). Since my data was derived from participants who speak Mandarin and come from Chinese cultures, it was sometimes difficult to infer the meaning accurately due to linguistic or cultural differences. In cases like this, in vivo coding is a safe and reliable method that can be used. For example, due to historical reasons, the term denomination usually translates into Chinese as 宗派, which is very negative in Chinese. However, almost all Chinese Christians know exactly what it means and have their own special interpretation of it. So, when the participants talked about 宗派, it was best for me, as a researcher who was collecting and analyzing data, to keep it as it was. Another example is that the second L in Michael Frost's BELLS represents learning about Christ. However, no Chinese Christian would say to learn Christ—this would be considered blasphemy to them. Instead, they would say 跟随基督, which literally means to follow Christ. As the researcher, it was important for me to understand both the meaning and context behind words or phrases that were used by the participants and to code their actual words while adhering to their original meaning.

## Findings from Interviews with Participants

The following are the findings from interviews with participants. I summarized the responses of each interview question and outlined the themes from coding.

*“Tell me about your faith journey”*

All participants shared how they had come to Jesus, what their life looked like before they accepted Jesus Christ, what happened after they accepted Christ, and where they currently were in their faith journey. Except for the two who grew up in a Christian family, the rest were first-generation Christians who had come from atheistic backgrounds. When they shared their experiences, they explained that accepting Christ was a big event in their lives.

Many of them recounted that some evangelistic believers played a significant role in their faith journey. In vivo codes such as “Bible,” “Christian fellowship,” “the story of TRCCC,” “Christmas party,” and “patient company” demonstrated the important roles evangelistic believers played and captured the key elements in their faith journeys. (Some of the examples are listed in Table 6.)

**Table 6: In Vivo Codes from the Interview Questions**

Comments	In Vivo Codes
“During my gloomy time, my Christian colleague gave me a <sup>1</sup> Bible”	<sup>1</sup> “Bible”
“On the first weekend of my arrival, my roommate took me to the <sup>2</sup> Christian fellowship”	<sup>2</sup> “Christian fellowship”

“When I knew nothing about Christianity, sister Fiona kept telling me <sup>3</sup> the story of TRCCC”	<sup>3</sup> “the story of TRCCC”
“Without his <sup>4</sup> patient company all the way, I might not have believed in the Lord to this day”	<sup>4</sup> “patient company”

One of the participants told his story of coming into faith in his hometown in China when he was a teenager. A group of Christians in his town volunteered to take care of his sick mom all day long. By their great testimony of faith, he accepted Jesus Christ. (I have listed my detailed in vivo coding in Appendix E.)

The outline derived from the coding reads as follows:

- I. “A bad year”
  - A. “My mom was very sick”
  - B. “Her disease was contagious”
- II. “I have several aunts”
  - A. “They were afraid of being infected”
  - B. “No one wanted to take care of my mom”
- III. “A group of Christians in my town”
  - A. “Volunteered to take care of my mom 24/7”
  - B. “They didn’t seem to worry about the highly contagious disease”
  - C. “They treated my mom as their own family member”
- IV. “In the pain of losing my mom”
  - A. “I accepted Jesus Christ”
  - B. “God’s blessing came to me”

This outline, taken from the answers to the first interview question, illustrates a theme—the important roles evangelistic believers have played in the participants’ faith journey. The answers to this interview question were not much different before and after the project.

*“What does being a disciple of Christ mean to you?”*

During the pre-project interview, when the participants were asked, “What does being a disciple of Christ mean to you?” the dominant theme was “follow the rule.” I derived the following phrases in the participants’ own words:

“Obeying the Ten Commandments, following what the Bible teaches.”  
“Following what pastors teach and reading the Bible and praying every day.”  
“Staying away from filthy and adulterous things and living a holy life.”  
“Attending church services on the weekly basis, giving tithes.”  
“Fearing God. Even when no one sees it, don’t do anything bad.”  
“Bringing friends to our church as pastors always encourage.”  
“Following the rules and being more like Him.”

When the participants were asked the same question in the post-project interview, three of the answers were similar to those in the pre-project interview. However, the answers of the other four participants changed a lot from the previous interview. For example, the following phrases were used by many participants:

“Following Jesus,”  
“Loving God and loving others, especially the unlovable,”  
“Serving others, being Jesus’ witness,”  
“Being the salt and light in the community,”  
“Following Jesus into the world and caring for the poor,”  
“Giving food to my neighbours.”

*“How do you usually share or demonstrate your faith with your friends?”*

In their pre-project interviews, most participants said they did not have the gift of evangelism. After three months of practicing BELLS, they gave very

different answers in their post-project interviews. Five out of seven mentioned missional living or BELLS as a way of demonstrating Christian faith. It was fascinating to hear many of them mention that the typical way of sharing their Christian faith with their friends was through sharing meals with them:

“Eating and chatting is a very effective way of sharing the gospel.”

“Eating is a big deal in Chinese culture. Eating with people is a good strategy of evangelism.”

*“What do you see as the biggest challenge for TRCCC? How does this affect you?”*

In the pre-project interviews, two participants believed that the biggest challenge for TRCCC was that the church did not have its own place for worship. The other two believed that the biggest challenge was that most of the brothers and sisters at TRCCC were not spiritually mature enough. Three others talked about the challenges of the younger generation of TRCCC not coming to church.

“Lack of Church building.”

“Church rental place is unavailable due to the pandemic.”

“Deacons are not mature enough.”

“No big difference spiritually between the TRCCC believers and non-believers.”

“Second generation of TRCCC stopped going to church.”

“Do not have a good youth program.”

“We may become a one-generation church.”

There are three categories that the in vivo codes above could be placed in 1) church facility, 2) spiritual maturity, and 3) TRCCC’s second generation.

The two participants who believed that the biggest challenge of TRCCC was not having their own church building in the pre-project interview changed their minds in the post-project interview. One of them stated that the church not

having its own facility was not the problem at all. Instead, 躺平 (a popular internet language meaning lying flatism) and not ministering to younger generations were much more serious issues. Another individual even suggested that asset-lightness could allow the church leadership team to focus on the gospel ministry and new initiatives instead of focusing on the management of the building. The other five participants remained unchanged in their answers. As a result, the category of church facility was changed to church ministry.

I specifically asked two of the participants why they no longer thought that the biggest challenge of TRCCC was not having their own church building. They told me that they still believed that this was an issue, especially since the Chinese church is a central point of gathering apart from our own home for the diaspora Chinese in Canada. Unfortunately, for so many years, the congregation has needed to rent different spaces. Now more and more churches have gone back to in-person worship. Because TRCCC does not have its own church facilities, and because the place TRCCC rented was still temporarily unavailable due to the pandemic, which negatively impacted the church's development. Yet they told me very honestly that, after three months of intensive BELLS training, they now think mostly about the mission and not the facility. With the end of intensive BELLS training and with the many inconveniences caused by not having our own church building during the pandemic, I wonder if their views will change back again.

## **Findings from Personal Journals**

During the three-month research project, participants were required to share their personal journal entries about their experiences of practicing BELLS with their own DNA groups. These personal accounts provided insights into aspects of their gains and struggles while practicing BELLS in a missional community setting. Personal journals served as a useful method to help learn about the participants' thoughts and actions in context. I collected the entries from each participant and then sorted them in chronological order.

In looking at the personal journal entries, one participant's perception of BELLS was persistently negative (See Appendix F for my line-by-line in vivo coding and analysis of this individual's personal journal entries). She thought that there was nothing wrong with an institutional church and that the BELLS model was "anti-congregational." She wrote in her journal that the BELLS model only told Christians to bless others and did not care much about the salvation of the individual. In the outcomes section of this chapter, I present a detailed analysis of what this individual's reaction to BELLS reveals.

Another participant was concerned that the three-month period was too short. Other than these two, the rest of the participants (including the researcher) all expressed positive sentiments about how BELLS had changed their perspectives on mission in their personal journal entries. One comment, in particular, expressed this: "BELLS is a game changer in my own spiritual journey." At least four of the participants mentioned that BELLS provided them

with a practical way to make their interactions with their spouse, family, colleagues, and friends the same outside of the church as in the church.

### **Findings from Participant Observations**

Observation is widely used in qualitative research. As Lynne McKechnie (2008, 573) states, observation “is one of the oldest and most fundamental research method approaches. This approach involves collecting data using one’s senses, especially looking and listening in a systematic and meaningful way.” Participant observation provided a wealth of descriptive information about the words and deeds of participants in a particular environment.

During the research project, participants were asked to submit a weekly DNA Accountability Form to the WeChat platform in order to share their experiences practicing BELLS with other group members. I observed these forms and found an interesting pattern. Participants who submitted their forms on time every week usually had many specific insights to share about their gains and struggles. Those who could not submit their forms on time or submitted them only once every two to three weeks usually filled out the form with abstract statements. If things like not submitting forms on time happened in the first couple of weeks, it was probably because I did not explain clearly how to practice BELLS. However, if one or two participants continued not submitting the forms on time when everyone else was clear about the requirements, there must have been another reason. Based on my understanding of each participant’s personality, family, work intensity, etc., I claimed that the frequency of

submitting their forms revealed how serious they were about practicing BELLS and how strong their missional awareness was.

I also observed that, in the three gatherings, after everyone shared how they practiced BELLS, participants usually had some informal conversations. As an observer, I found that on such occasions, people shared things that they would not have shared during the formal interviews. For example, in one private conversation, some people mentioned that when this research project first started, the BELLS model had not been explained to them clearly enough, so the participants were not able to practice it effectively. A few also commented that it was impossible to cultivate missional awareness and habits in three months.

### **Interpretations**

Of the seven participants, five were from non-Christian families, and two were from Christian families. When they were asked the first interview question, “Tell me about your faith journey,” the five from non-Christian families mentioned the important role evangelistic believers had played in their faith journey. For them, the people who could tell them about the gospel and lead them into the Christian faith were the people outside of their families, such as friends, classmates, colleagues, and community members. Because of this, they were particularly receptive to practicing BELLS in a missional community setting. Also, because the people who brought them to the Lord were not pastors but ordinary believers, it made them feel like there was no reason why they could not become those kinds of people themselves. This interpretation was supported by what I had observed from their words and deeds at the three gatherings and the

contents recorded in their weekly DNA Accountability Form. For example, at gatherings, they showed a keen interest in being the leaders of the missional communities. In their weekly DNA Forms, many mentioned the importance of witnessing God's grace to colleagues in their workplaces. In contrast, the one participant who was negative about BELLS came from a Christian family. This was a reminder that I might encounter different problems among different people while promoting the BELLS model in the future and that each person's faith background might affect their acceptance of the BELLS model.

In the answers to the second interview question, "What does being a disciple of Christ mean to you?" I saw that missional awareness of the participants increased, and most of their perspectives had shifted from inward to outward, from focusing on personal spiritual exercises to caring about how to live out a good testimony in the community. In addition, from participants' DNA Accountability Form, I also saw that four of the participants mentioned that BELLS was a game changer in their own lives. They believed that first and foremost practicing BELLS made their personal spiritual exercises more regular and their spiritual lives healthier. The first way that missional living benefited them was not in their mission activities but in bringing change to their own lives. This result was not what I expected when I designed my research questions.

In order to recognize the personality and strengths of the participants, before we started the project, everyone took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. One of the things that surprised me was that of the participants, all of the introverts expressed great interest in practicing BELLS. At the very beginning of

this research project, I thought it would be more difficult for introverts to accept the BELLS model than for extroverts. However, this was not the case. This phenomenon made me reflect on what the BELLS model was really talking about. As Frost states, BELLS contains five aspects: “engagement with neighbours, connection with each other, a deeper experience of God’s leading, a stronger understanding of the gospel, and a framework for identifying ourselves as missionaries” (2016, x). These five aspects have challenges and advantages for both extroverts and introverts.

In their pre-project interviews, when answering the question “How do you usually share or demonstrate your faith with your friends?” most participants said they did not have the gift of evangelism. Later, during the post-project interviews, their answers changed considerably. What made them change so much in just three months? One of the participants explained part of the reason in his DNA Accountability Form. He said that when he was asked about the ways of sharing the gospel, his first thought was Billy Graham and other famous evangelists, which was why his immediate answer was that he did not have the proper gifts. It was obvious, at least in the case of this participant, that he had misinterpreted the wording of the interview question. As I mentioned before, when I designed the interview questions, I tried not to use any jargon or technical terms. But are the terms “share” or “demonstrate faith” jargon? Perhaps I should revise the interview questions and make them simpler and clearer in the future.

Another interesting phenomenon was that most of the participants talked a lot about missional living during the post-project interviews. However, based on

my observation, they rarely talked about the topic of mission in their informal conversations during the gatherings. According to the data that I collected at the end of the project, most of the participants now believed that BELLS was a very good way to demonstrate their Christian faith. They no longer regarded evangelism as something that was done by a few people with special gifts in this area. BELLS convinced them that leading a missional community did not necessarily require the gift of evangelism. Rather, it needed evangelistic believers, and each believer should be an evangelistic believer. However, the data from my observations that I mentioned above also showed that missional living had not yet become the habit and rhythm of their daily lives. A three-month practice of BELLS was not long enough to accomplish this.

### **Outcomes**

As far as I know, no Chinese church has tried to use BELLS to cultivate missional disciples. Therefore, the launch of this research project marked a new attempt to practice BELLS in the context of Chinese churches. By revisiting my findings and interpretations, I summarized the outcomes of this research project as shown below.

First, the data I collected in this research project indicated that practicing BELLS helped increase most of the participants' missional awareness and passion for evangelizing their Chinese compatriots. It also helped them live out their belief in everyday life in a diaspora Chinese cultural context. As I described in Chapter 2, this research project aimed to address two problems encountered by TRCCC: the decline in attendance and the loss of younger members. And I

believe that the key to solving these two problems was finding an effective way to increase the congregation's missional awareness. In this sense, practicing BELLS had a positive effect on problem-solving. As a result, I concluded that this project suggested the research question set forth at the very beginning: Would a three-month long, hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community setting increase both participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a culturally appropriate way in a Chinese church context?

People may ask, why I choose BELLS among so many evangelistic ministry models. The reason I chose BELLS is not that I have already tried a bunch of different models and found none of them worked; instead, I happened to learn about the BELLS model from Michael Frost's book *Surprise the World* (2016) while I was mulling over the two problems facing TRCCC. I realized that this model fit my ecclesiology and missiology and thought it was worth trying. At first, I was not sure if this model was right for TRCCC, but the result of practicing BELLS confirmed that it was. Having said that, I do not believe that BELLS is the only effective model; simply put, it was timely for me and my context.

While this research project was underway, three of the participants jointly submitted a proposal to establish a missional community near the University of Toronto Scarborough. This proposal was immediately approved by the TRCCC deacon board, and this was a good example of the willingness to implement mission at the church level. Without the practice of this project, it's hard to imagine that a proposal like this would be passed so quickly by the deacon board

of the church. In early November 2021, TRCCC found a place at the junction of Ellesmere Road and Morningside Avenue in Scarborough, Ontario as a base to reach thousands of Mandarin-speaking international students in this area. I am hopeful that this experiment shows TRCCC brothers and sisters that instead of spending time worrying about whether or not our church will become a church of one generation, we should return to the basics of mission, which is backed by Jesus' divine command in Matthew 28:18-20.

Second, when adopting the BELLS model, it was critical that all these five seemingly easy-to-understand habits of fostering a missional lifestyle were understood through a more detailed explanation. In the first half of this research project, because I did not communicate and explain the BELLS model clearly to every participant, some participants were confused about what to do and why to do it. Another thing that made people confused was that they already had an inherent definition and understanding of the five elements of BELLS. For example, one of the participants thought BELLS did not care about the individual's salvation because the believer's role was to convert and not just bless. Another example was that some participants simply understood the word "learn" as referring to Bible study. During the second half of the research project, I made timely adjustments. By clearly defining the five aspects of BELLS, participants' misunderstandings about BELLS were eliminated. Therefore, the practice of BELLS must be carried out in a well-guided environment.

Third, the BELLS model in a missional community setting is a model, not the model of cultivating missional disciples. In this research project, I found that

the BELLS model can easily be misunderstood by others as advocating for an anti-congregational approach to church methodology or claiming that the congregational church will go away. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay point out insightfully in their book *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* that “the idea of the AND is that every church can find a balance of both scattering people out for mission while maintaining a biblical meaningful reason to gather together” (2010, 124). Over the past years of my church ministry, I realized that people, especially the younger generation, have become hungry for a different way to live out their Christian faith. They may be more willing to practice their spiritual life outside the institutional church. This phenomenon has produced and nurtured a new form of church that meets people where they already are. This new form is, however, not suitable for everyone, nor is it a replacement for the existing institutional church.

Fourth, some of the participants suggested that the three-month period was too short. As a researcher, I felt the length of the research project was doable yet challenging. I am hopeful that beyond the time frame of this project, I may continue to carry out this experiment at TRCCC. I might also introduce this practice to other diaspora Chinese churches in Canada.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

This portfolio was composed of three major sections. The first was my Personal Narrative and Ministry Context Assessment. In this section, I used a narrative approach to describe how my upbringing, education, and ministry experiences shaped me. I devoted a large portion to talking about how a specific political culture accompanied me as I grew up, how I went from being a determined atheist to becoming a Christian, and how my Christian faith has completely changed my worldview and entire values. This change of worldview included embracing a leadership philosophy that was counter-cultural to me, which I discussed in detail in the second major section: Philosophy of Christian Leadership.

In the second section, I argued that among so many different leadership theories, there are two main models of leadership; one based on power and control and another based on service known as servant leadership. I elaborated on what servant leadership really means and the importance of shifting from a self-centred leadership style based on power and control to servant leadership based on serving others. This leadership philosophy became the guideline in my church ministry and in my three-month practice of BELLS in a missional community setting, which I elaborated on in detail in the third major section: Field Ministry Project. In fact, the leadership framework of the missional community that I promoted is an application of servant leadership. Without this service-based leadership, the missional community is unlikely to survive.

The third major section was my field ministry project report, in which I described what I did and discovered through my three-month research project. This research project was conducted through a series of in-person gatherings, interviews, and practices of the BELLS model in a missional community format. Qualitative research data was collected through interviews, participatory observations, and personal journals. All data collected were coded using the in vivo coding method and analyzed afterward. The outcome of the research project showed that the practice of the BELLS model helped increase participants' missional awareness and passion for evangelizing their Chinese compatriots. It also helped them live out their belief in everyday life in a diaspora Chinese cultural context.

The DMin program at Tyndale gave me a great opportunity to systematically learn and reflect on my past ministry from the perspective of theology and leadership philosophy. It was a journey of my knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. As I look back, I believe that God has been speaking to me through both the success and failure of my research project so that I can be better prepared for future service. As Proverbs 16:9 says, "in their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." I had planned to fulfill the entire DMin program by completing the course contents and assignments as quickly as possible, but God taught me lessons more important than knowledge through extracurricular courses, and I believe these lessons will benefit me for a lifetime.

The following are the reflections that served as a conclusion of this research portfolio.

### **Reflection #1: Change Takes Time**

In their book *Our Iceberg is Melting*, John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber highlighted the principles of change management in a light-hearted animal fable. Among the eight principles they highlighted, the first one was “Creating a Sense of Urgency” (Kotter and Rathgeber 2017, 131) which explains how mobilization is nearly impossible unless the change is seen as urgent and in need of attention. I purchased seven copies of this book and gave them to the church leaders to help them see the need to act immediately. In fact, since 2014, I have been warning people that our congregation is encountering melting icebergs. When I repeatedly said that TRCCC might become a one-generation church, I was declaring that our iceberg was melting.

However, while cultivating a sense of urgency, I must also realize that change takes time. Shifting from an institutional Chinese church to a missional community requires a long-term strategy of communication, development, and support. Just presenting a biblical case to create change rarely succeeds in motivating people to join because they will not join until they understand how to benefit from it. As John Maxwell comments, “People will not change until they perceive that the advantage of changing outweighs the disadvantages of continuing with the way things are” (1993, 58).

During the three-month BELLS practice, I observed that real change is much slower than the changes that the participants actually reported. It is one thing to learn to say some missional-type words, but it is another thing to truly live a missional life. Establishing missional rhythms takes much longer than initially assumed. The three-month BELLS practice did increase participants' missional awareness, but it is not realistic to expect a person to form a missional habit in such a short period of time. Frost proposes that "a simple system of accountability needs to be put in place to ensure that you remain committed to these habits over a long period of time" (2016, 101). In the future, when I start another cohort to practice BELLS, I will be more realistic and not set the bar too high in a short period of time.

### **Reflection #2: Do Not Overemphasize the Importance of the Model Itself**

The three-month exploration of the BELLS model confirms that it is a great model that helps participants develop evangelism as a way of life rather than an activity or event. It makes the spread of the gospel very natural. However, no model is fully comprehensive or exhaustive. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the BELLS model is not suitable for everyone, and it must be practiced in a guided environment. While emphasizing the importance of a model, the context must be analyzed carefully, which includes the audience, culture, and tradition. It is also important to realize the reality of how much people can understand and accept the essence of this model in a short period of time.

For example, I assumed that younger people would not like a hierarchical leadership model. I also believed that this was one of the reasons they stopped

going to an institutional church. However, I rarely thought about why they did not like it. Specifically, and what I never expected, was what I learned from the DNA Accountability Forms that were submitted by some of the younger participants revealed that they looked forward to having a spiritual authority, or even clergy, leading them. By being overly obsessed with letting everyone adopt BELLS in a missional community setting, I had neglected the spiritual level and character of the participants. Undoubtedly, one consequence was that it did not help their spiritual growth much at all.

A model itself cannot bring about the improvement of a person's character. Models are useful, but "They are tools, sometimes vital tools, but they are only tools, nonetheless. And when the use of a tool blunts our ability to fulfill our mission and purpose in the world, it must be questioned and dealt with appropriately" (Roxburgh 2011, 190). What I should have emphasized is not just the model but, more importantly, the people. I should focus on facilitating the process of making passionate, maturing followers of Jesus Christ from here to the nations.

From a CAST (Complex Adaptive System Theory) perspective, the church is a complex adaptive social system. Sometimes, I confuse the difference between a complicated system and a complex system. Brenda Zimmerman et al. (2006, 9) have used parenting as an example. Parents may know that some rules contribute to the healthy growth of their children, but these rules do not guarantee that children will grow up in the direction their parents expect. When I promote a model, I should not overemphasize the importance of the model itself and thereby

neglect the spiritual level of the congregation. The model itself cannot guarantee the success of the church's development. My focus should always be on the people. For example, I realized that two of the seven participants in this research project believed that the institutional church could help them grow spiritually well. Therefore, it is not necessarily a good idea to convince them to practice BELLS in a missional community setting.

### **Reflection #3: Ensuring Clear Communication**

In the first half of our three-month practice of BELLS, there was a lack of clear communication between the researcher and the participants. This misunderstanding and information asymmetry were because, as a researcher, I simply regarded the resolution as the goal and ignored the process necessary to get to the goal—the process being regular communication and sharing. In a Chinese church setting, people usually do not talk openly or confront each other face-to-face. This passive approach often makes things worse, and it is one of the reasons why the Chinese sometimes do not deal with disagreement until it is too late.

I am often intoxicated with vision and mission and underestimate the importance of strategy. I often subconsciously draw an equal line between vision/mission and strategy. However, vision and mission answer the why and what parts, but only strategy answers the how, which is also critical. Until I am clear on the how—usually through clear communication—I will not be able to accomplish the mission.

For example, during the research project, I thought that every piece of the BELLS model would be self-evident and not require further explanation. This led some participants to mistakenly think that the second L, the Learn part in BELLS, was equivalent to Bible study. Another example of a lack of clear communication was that some of the participants misunderstood BELLS as only being about mission since eating and chatting with people were all considered missions. What else is not a mission? This kind of misunderstanding led the participants to believe that BELLS only promoted living rather than missional living. In the second half of the research project, I defined the five aspects of BELLS more clearly, and the participants' misunderstanding about BELLS was eliminated.

#### **Reflection #4: Cultivating Disciples and a New Generation of Church Leaders is Critical**

Matthew 28:19–20 indicates the central purpose for all believers: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Jesus]. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Those who are committed to the teachings of Jesus must realize that if they want to be disciples of Jesus, they need to make disciples. Making disciples is not a suggestion but the commission Jesus gave to everyone who follows him. Furthermore, making disciples means that those who are being discipled are also making disciples of Christ.

The real problem facing TRCCC is not simply that the younger generation is unwilling to go to church. The problem is that the congregation does not know how to make disciples. If what I am aiming for at TRCCC is exponential growth rather than growth by addition, then I must equip disciples “who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Based on my church ministry experiences, it is not hard to grow a church. Rather, it is hard to make disciples. I usually search for successful techniques to draw people to church, but the real battle is in discipleship. As Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini point out that we should “measure our success not by the numbers of people we attract but by our relating to and training a competent, godly core of leaders who will have significant ministries long after we have been forgotten” (2004, 71).

Whether or not the church can continue to grow depends on whether or not the church can develop new leaders from within. John Maxwell states, “There is no success without a successor” (1993, 11). Facing the challenges encountered over the past years, TRCCC has realized the importance of cultivating both disciples and leaders among the younger generation. Of the seven participants of this research project, three are in their early thirties, and two are in their early forties. They are not perfect, but they are leaders in the making to whom the church can pass the baton.

### **Reflection #5: The Focus of the Conversation**

It is obvious that my focus is on the church. What I cared most about was how TRCCC and other diaspora Mandarin-speaking Chinese churches in Canada

would be able to last for generations. Consequently, the main purpose of my ministry altered to also desire to make the church work by reaching unchurched people, getting them into the church, and turning an inward church into an outward church. In the whole process, the church remained the focus of attention. The church was the central stage for the gospel ministry. Although I never expressed this explicitly, I was convinced that the success of a church was measured by how many people the church leads to knowing Jesus, and knowing Jesus meant coming to church. However, as Alan J. Roxburgh points out, “this focus misses what is happening in the biblical narratives, and unless we turn away from this focus, we will not engage the people of our time and place – all the different cultures that now comprise our radically pluralistic society” (2011, 54).

If the reason I practiced BELLS in a missional community setting was simply because I did not like the practices of the existing institutional church, then this practice becomes “more like a teenage rebellion against accountability rather than a true kingdom witness” (Breen and Absalom 2015, 26). If all I attempted to do was just keep TRCCC from closing, then I was missing the point of the commission God had given, which was to embrace the *Missio Dei* in our neighbourhoods. I needed to realize that “church questions are a subset of these far more important questions” (Roxburgh 2011, 22). Instead of asking questions like how long TRCCC could survive, I should ask more important questions like what Jesus would do in our communities. How do the people of God join in with what God is doing right here and now? I need to develop new habits and attitudes

based on my relationship with the gospel and culture. I need to discover what God is already doing and become a part of it.

### **Next Steps**

It is impossible to determine the overall impact this project will have on TRCCC. However, this experiment has started exploring what relevant ministry should look like in a diaspora Chinese church context. Moving forward, I will further improve this hands-on inquiry learning of BELLS based on feedback from the participants and will implement it throughout the whole church of TRCCC. I will then promote the BELLS model in other diaspora Chinese churches across the GTA.

After three months of practicing BELLS, I have suggested that the BELLS model can be used to help increase participants' missional awareness and equip TRCCC to reach people with the gospel in a culturally appropriate way. If I had to do it over again, I would increase the duration of the project from three months to half a year and recommend that TRCCC make the month before dedicated to training for missional mobilization month. Also, I would recommend that the practice of BELLS must be carried out in a well-guided environment to avoid any misunderstanding. During the missional mobilization month, I would prepare for the training with sermon series, workshops, and testimonials from people who have participated in BELLS in the past and further challenge congregants to act by establishing missional communities in their neighbourhoods. I acknowledge that developing missional communities is not the same as holding evangelism

activities. It is also different from running church services on a weekly basis. I also acknowledge that cultivating missional rhythms and habits takes time. I do not have too much ministry experience in this regard, but I have the heart to serve the Lord. I am ready to set off with a strong sense of mission.

As I finished writing the first draft of this research project report in February 2022, I learned that a young sister who had participated in the research project had just started a running group. Every week, she would organize people to run ten kilometres together along Lake Ontario. I was curious to interview her again. I learned that the purpose of her setting up this running group was to attract those who like running and bring them together to start a missional community. She said that although it was winter and not the best season to start this new ministry, she could not wait until the spring to start it.

During the four months from March to July 2022, I was delighted to see that the seeds sown by practicing the BELLS model began to take root, sprout, and bear fruit. Most of the participants in my research project became leaders and active facilitators of the missional community. They have started gradually to build different missional communities where they live and in their circle of friends. These missional communities were networked by Wuxi church. Members of one missional community took advantage of Toronto's beautiful summer season and often got together for outdoor barbecues (See Figure 6). Members of another missional community gathered each week in a downtown condo building, where they ate, shared, and worshiped together (See Figure 7).



**Figure 6: 2022 Canada Day BBQ gathering in Centre Island in downtown**



**Figure 7: Gatherings in the lounge rooms in Aura Condo Building in downtown Toronto**

Some of the participants are still practicing the BELLS model. They insist on blessing different people, eating with those who do not know the Lord, and witnessing to them God's love. In the process of missional living, there are many wonderful testimonies. Two, in particular, stand out. There is a Chinese

international student studying in downtown Toronto who became part of a missional community because of a tulip tour to Ottawa organized by this missional community in May 2022. Since then, he has been participating in the missional community on a weekly basis and has been deeply attracted by the love shown by the members. In addition, there is another young interior designer who got to know the friends of a missional community through weekly running along the shore of Lake Ontario. Both of them have now been in the baptism class since June 2022. What can I say? God is good!

## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

Each participant took two rounds of interviews: a pre-project interview and a post-project interview. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the common language at TRCCC.

### **Pre-project Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me about your faith journey.
2. What does being a disciple of Christ mean to you?
3. How do you usually share or demonstrate your faith with your friends?
4. What do you see as the biggest challenge for TRCCC? How does this affect you?

### **Post-project Interview Questions:**

The same questions were asked during the pre-project interview.

## Appendix B: Gathering Schedule for Participants

For consistency, all three gatherings were set for Sundays (our church worship services are on Saturdays). Each meeting went from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm with a fifteen-minute break in between. Lunch was provided after the third gathering.

Phases	Dates
First Gathering (In-person)	September 12, 2021
Second Gathering (Online)	October 24, 2021
Third Gathering (In-person)	November 21, 2021

### I. First Gathering – September 12, 2021

In this gathering, everyone briefly introduced themselves, shared their understanding of the function of the BELLS model and DNA groups, and put forward constructive suggestions on how to practice BELLS. We used the *WeChat* app to post messages, thoughts of the day, or inspiring stories to motivate each person throughout the week. The *WeChat* app brought people together to learn, act, have meaningful conversations, and reflect and grow together. It allowed participants to share suggested actions and express in their own words what their transformations would look like.

Most of the contents in the following table are from Michael Frost's book *Surprise the World* (2016) unless specifically noted.

Practice	What	How
Bless (Generous)	Every week, bless three people, at least one of whom is not a church member.	<p>“To bless others is to build them up, to fill them with encouragement, and to support them in increasing their strength and prosperity” (Frost 2016, 30).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Words of affirmation – “Send them a note, write them an email, text them ... to communicate ‘I know. I care. I am with you. How can I help’” (Frost 2016, 32).</li> <li>2. Acts of Kindness – “Bless others by doing them a good turn this week such as cutting an elderly lady’s lawn, babysitting an exhausted couple’s kids, helping a neighbor move to their new place” (Frost 2016, 33).</li> <li>3. Gifts – “Show the recipient that he or she is known, cared for and valued” (Frost 2016, 33). Birthday gifts, food baskets, or anything else to express that the recipient has been thought of.</li> </ol> <p>A word of caution: “We are not being generous friends merely in order to convert them. We are called to bless in order to bless ... Giving gifts in order to get a return from someone (like bribing people to attend our churches) leaves a nasty taste in people’s mouths” (Frost 2016, 36).</p>
Eat (Hospitality)	Every week, eat with two people, at least one of whom is not a church member.	<p>Eating is a big deal in Chinese culture. Eating with people is not just an evangelical strategy, it is a way to follow Jesus.</p> <p>There is no need to add a lot of new activities to your busy schedule; just bring another person to your table. Your meal can be an elaborate dinner, breakfast, or even coffee and a donut. What you need to do is to share your stories, hopes, and fears. “We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God ... we would</p>

		<p>literally change the world by eating.” (Hirsch and Ford 2011, 203)</p> <p>A word of caution: “Don’t judge the lifestyles or eating habits of your host. See the opportunity as a gold mine for missional relationship building. Don’t lose sight of the good goal of conversion but follow Jesus’ model of communion first and see what comes from it” (Frost 2016, 55).</p>
Listen (Spirit-led)	At least once a week, have a period of dedicated time to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.	<p>a) “Set aside a designated time as a precious time alone, just between you and God. Block it out on your calendar ... You should find ways to avoid any intrusion. The quieter the room or surroundings, the more conducive to listening to the Holy Spirit” (Frost 2016, 62).</p> <p>b) Let God in. “Listening to the Holy Spirit can become a source of comfort, a source of great peace, and a way to find answers to present problems. Listening to God can be one of the highest forms of prayer” (Frost 2016, 65).</p> <p>c) Follow God’s promptings. “The Spirit might bring to your mind the name or the face of a person you are to bless or eat with ... The Spirit might convict you of sin or encourage you in your faithfulness” (Frost 2016, 66).</p> <p>A word of caution: “Don’t try to connect with God the Holy Spirit on the run. With whatever time you choose, let people know that that is your time of solitude” (Frost 2016, 62).</p>
Learn (Christlike)	Spend a period of time at least once a week learning about Christ.	<p>“We can’t die for others like Jesus did, but we can offer ourselves sacrificially in service of others” (Frost 2016, 73).</p> <p>“The church exists for nothing else but to draw people into Christ, to make them little Christs.</p>

		<p>If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time” (Lewis 1996, 171).</p> <p>a) “Study the Gospels. Read, re-read, and re-read again the four canonical Gospels ... You can cultivate a habit of constantly reconnecting with Jesus through the words of the Scripture” (Frost 2016, 78).</p> <p>b) Read about Jesus. “Developing a collection of reading material – including chapters from preferred books, articles, and blogs – to help reinforce the learning of Christ throughout the congregation” (Frost 2016, 79).</p> <p>A word of caution: “While the story of Jesus is indeed the key to history, to emphasize the Gospels over the rest of the New Testament is to forget that Jesus is Lord over all of history ... you should also continue with whatever other regular Bible reading habit you currently have” (Frost 2016, 76-77).</p>
Sent (missional)	Consider yourself as a sent missionary.	<p>Why journal?</p> <p>“What our mind is thinking, and our heart is feeling becomes tangible: ink on paper” (Broyles 1999, 10).</p> <p>Journaling is helpful in the following ways (Frost 2016, 94-96):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Processing events</li> <li>- Making sense of God’s work</li> <li>- Keeping a record of insights</li> <li>- Asking important questions</li> <li>- Identifying ourselves differently</li> </ul> <p>A word of caution: “All believers should see themselves as missionaries. This doesn’t mean every believer is a gifted evangelist. But it does mean that all believers should be habitually evangelistic” (Frost 2016, 27).</p>

We practiced BELLS in the form of DNA groups. A DNA (Discipleship, Nurture, Accountability) group is “a micro group of three people that meets weekly to hold each member accountable to the habits, as well as encouraging and nurturing each other and helping each other learn from their experience of living out the habits” (Frost 2016, 101).

The purpose of DNA groups is to fulfill the following goals:

- ❖ Discipleship: Through BELLS this week, you will train each other based on your missional experience.
- ❖ Nurture: When you cannot accomplish the five practices because you are busy or weak, the DNA group will encourage and support you.
- ❖ Accountability: DNA group members provide accountability for each other: “Knowing that your friends are checking in on you should provide some impetus to continue with the practices” (Frost 2016, 103).

The following is the DNA Accountability Form provided by Frost (2016, 105-107):

BLESS: Whom did I bless this week?

1)

2)

3)

What questions, issues, or learning arose this week?

1)

2)

3)

EAT: with whom did I eat this week?

1)

2)

3)

What questions, issues, or learning arose from this practice this week?

1)

2)

3)

LISTEN: What did I hear from the Holy Spirit this week?

1)

2)

3)

LEARN: What did I learn or re-learn about Jesus Christ this week?

1)

2)

3)

SENT: Share two or three journal entries about how you alerted others to the reign of God.

1)

2)

3)

## **II. Second Gathering – October 24, 2021**

In this gathering, participants got together to share their first month of practicing BELLS based on the following three rhythms of a missional community life proposed by Terence Schilstra, who is a missional community leader serving in downtown Thorold, Ontario, and a Tyndale alumnus (Schilstra 2021, 48; author's emphasis):

1. We *grow out* together, serving our community.
2. We *grow in* our relationship with each other.
3. We *grow up* in our relationship with God.

## **III. Third Gathering – November 21, 2021**

The purpose of this meeting was to celebrate all that God had done in and among the people when they were practicing BELLS over the past three months. I recommended the following schedule:

- 1) Welcome and worship (20 minutes).
- 2) Video of the missional community in action (3-5 minutes).
- 3) Two testimonies from the participants (get them to prepare in advance what they are going to say) (10 minutes each).
- 4) Conclusion (10 minutes).
- 5) Free conversations with drinks and snacks (40 minutes).
- 6) Lunch will be provided at noon.

### **Appendix C: Data Collection and Analysis Plan**

From August 2021 to November 2021, in order to complete this research project more accurately, I collected data from three different sources. This data was gathered by using qualitative research methods that include participant interviews, participatory observations, and personal journals. Data was then coded and analyzed from different points of view. The following table consists of the methods I used to collect the data.

<b>Method</b>	<b>Data Collected</b>	<b>When collected</b>
Pre- and Post-project Interviews	Narratives of participants and their responses to interview questions; perspectives and understanding of the church, culture, gospel, and Christian mission; my interaction with participants; and my initial high-level ideas during the interviews. All the content of the interviews will be recorded.	Pre-project interviews from September 4 - 6, 2021.  Post-project interviews from November 19 - 21, 2021.
Participatory Observation	Notes on what I see or hear during the three-month research project, including participants' behaviour, actions, speech, comments, questions, disagreement or absence of response, body language, voice inflection and level of intensity, emotional responses, and autoethnography with my own reaction to what I observe.	Over a three-month period starting from September 1, 2021.
Personal Journal	Personal narratives, testimonies, documented changes in ministry, and tracked changes in research progress and reflections.	Over a three-month period starting from September 1, 2021.

Once I collect a substantial amount of raw data, as a beginner in qualitative research, I choose to use in vivo coding to analyze the data.

- 1) For the data I collected from participant interviews, all the audiotaped interviews were transcribed word-for-word and examined. I then read the interviews over again to gain a more extensive understanding. After that, I compared and analyzed each participant's pre- and post-project interviews carefully to try and find the differences and improvements. I used different coloured markers to categorize similar comments from the participants. In order to group concepts into core categories, I used the memoing method, which allowed me to elaborate on concepts and themes derived from the data collected. For a category to be considered core, that category must be frequent in the data. When all this is done, a realization may occur regarding whether a three-month hands-on inquiry learning initiative could bring positive impacts and increase both a participant's spiritual growth as well as church growth.
- 2) For the data I collected through participatory observation, I reread the notes repeatedly to recall my exchanges with participants. The verbal responses, comments, and questions by the participants were highlighted in the notes. Then, I would look for themes and patterns. Different coloured markers were used to categorize similar comments from the participants. This coding grouped similar comments and brought them together to help understand if the six participants' lives have changed.

3) For the data I collected from the personal journals of both myself and the seven participants, I read them several times, looked for themes and patterns, and grouped them into categories. Different coloured markers were used to categorize similar comments from the participants.

## **Appendix D: Participation Consent Form**

**Research Title:** Contextualizing and Testing the BELLS Model in a Missional Community in Canadian Diaspora Chinese Churches

**Researcher:** Gary Chen, DMin Candidate, Tyndale University, Doctor of Ministry Program.

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Mark Chapman, Tyndale University.

**Research Question:** *Would a three-month long, hands-on inquiry learning of the BELLS model in a missional community setting increase both participants' missional awareness and the church's willingness to reach people with the gospel in a culturally appropriate way in a Chinese church context?*

### **Invitation to Participate**

I was invited to be a part of this research project. Participants in this research will be asked to:

1. Fully participate in the experiment from September to November 2021.
2. Complete a pre-project and a post-project interview at the beginning and end of a three-month long research project. Each interview will take 45 - 60 minutes and will either take place in person or online due to the pandemic.
3. Attend three gatherings, onsite or online, on September 12, October 24, and November 21, 2021.
4. Maintain a weekly reflection journal or take notes on their experimental experiences.

**Benefits, Confidentiality, and Risk.**

Although there are no guaranteed benefits, participants may find that participating in this research is a very meaningful thing and well worth doing. The researcher has guaranteed that all data collected during the entire research process will remain anonymous. No personal disclosure is required to participate in this research. My name will not be directly recorded in any interviews or collected data. Only the researcher and other participants in this study will know my name. Participation in this project is carried out on a completely voluntary basis. There will be no penalty for refusing to participate at any time. I understand that before submitting this project in its final form, I will have the opportunity to read the whole written project. I understand that the results of this research project will be used in the Tyndale University Doctor of Ministry program, and these research results may be used in other research projects or published books.

This research has been submitted to the Ethics REB Committee of Tyndale University for review and has been approved by this committee. Should you have any questions regarding the ethics in this research project, please feel free to contact the REB Committee of Tyndale University at reb@tyndale.ca.

I have read the above statements and consent to participate in this research. I have not waived any legal rights.

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: An Example of My In Vivo Coding the Interview Data

“...and that was <sup>1</sup> a bad year,  
<sup>2</sup> my mom was very sick.  
<sup>3</sup> Her disease was contagious, and she was admitted to the local hospital. As you know, hospitals in China require family members to accompany and take care of the patients during their hospitalization.  
<sup>4</sup> I have several aunts. They have time, but because  
<sup>5</sup> they were afraid of being infected,  
<sup>6</sup> no one wanted to take care of my mom in the hospital. At that time, by chance,  
<sup>7</sup> a group of Christians in my town heard the news. Soon they split into several shifts spontaneously and  
<sup>8</sup> volunteered to take care of my mom 24/7. While taking care of my mom in the hospital,  
<sup>9</sup> they didn’t seem to worry much about the highly contagious disease my mom was suffering from. On the contrary,  
<sup>10</sup> they treated my mom as their own family member. By their great testimony of faith,  
<sup>11</sup> I accepted Jesus Christ.  
<sup>12</sup> God’s blessing came to me  
<sup>13</sup> in the pain of losing my mom.”

I listed in vivo codes into categories, and the outline reads as follows:

- V. “A bad year”
  - C. “My mom was very sick”
  - D. “Her disease was contagious”
- VI. “I have several aunts”
  - C. “They were afraid of being infected”
  - D. “No one wanted to take care of my mom”
- VII. “A group of Christians in my town”
  - D. “Volunteered to take care of my mom 24/7”
  - E. “They didn’t seem to worry about the highly contagious disease”

F. "They treated my mom as their own family member"

VIII. "In the pain of losing my mom"

C. "I accepted Jesus Christ"

D. "God's blessing came to me"

## Appendix F: An Example of My In Vivo Coding on Personal Journal Data

"...there is <sup>1</sup> nothing wrong with an institutional church. <sup>1</sup> **“nothing wrong”**

If there is no institutional church, I would not have the <sup>2</sup> platform to serve the Lord, nor would I have the opportunity to bless others. <sup>2</sup> **“platform”**

It sounds to me that BELLS is <sup>3</sup> “anti-congregational”. <sup>3</sup> **“anti-congregational”**

BELLS tells us that we just need to bless others. This model <sup>4</sup> does not care much about the individual’s salvation.” <sup>4</sup> **“individual’s salvation”**

But for me, outside the <sup>5</sup> loving family of the church, I really don’t know what else I can do. <sup>5</sup> **“loving family”**

I am not against trying new models of ministry. But it is <sup>6</sup> hard for me to fill in the DNA Accountability Form every week, because I have not much to write on it. <sup>6</sup> **“hard”**

I prefer the traditional approach of <sup>7</sup> reading the Scripture and persisting in spiritual practice on a daily basis, <sup>7</sup> **“reading the scripture and persisting in spiritual practice”**

I enjoy the <sup>8</sup> fellowships with brothers and sisters in the church, <sup>8</sup> **“fellowship”**

but if you tell me that I have to try the new way of blessing those I don’t know on a weekly basis, <sup>9</sup> it’s really not my style.” <sup>9</sup> **“not my style”**

The outline of categories for my In Vivo code set reads like the following:

I. “Institutional church”

- A. “Nothing wrong”
- B. “Platform”
- C. “A loving family”
- II. “BELLS”
  - A. “Anti-congregation”
  - B. “Doesn’t care about the individual’s salvation”
- III. “Traditional approach”
  - A. “Reading the scripture and persisting in spiritual practice”
  - B. “Fellowships”
- IV. “New way”
  - A. “Hard”
  - B. “It’s not my style”

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