Fuller Seminary Report

Called to Lives of Meaning & Purpose

The “Innovation for Vocation” project at Fuller has likely taken a very different turn as compared to projects in other seminaries of the CLMP cohort. COVID came at a particularly strange time for us. We had completed work with one set of congregations and were just about to work with another group when the world started sheltering in place.

On Thursday March 12th, 2020, we were scheduled to gather many congregations from the UMC Southern California annual conference for an innovation summit – which was to be the beginning of our next phase. The congregations had done good work online to prepare for the summit. And, on Thursday morning, I confirmed with the congregations and found that they were still planning to attend. But by noon, just a few hours later, half the congregations had cancelled as they decided to suspend in-person worship services for the first time that weekend -- and by 1pm the bishop had cancelled the innovation summit. We have continued to work with the bishop to figure out how to re-start the engagement with the congregations. But he keeps postponing as the pandemic endures.

There is another reason our school’s experience has likely been different from other seminary’s. A significant part of our seminary’s project involved producing a book, *The Innovative Church* – which was published in September.

We spent the summer creating blog posts and podcasts on innovation. We produced 18 blog posts and partnered with Luther Seminary to do a thirteen-part blog series on the pandemic called *Pivot*. Since the book was published, there have also been a number of podcast interviews and webinars.

All this is to say that we have done work for congregations since the pandemic began, but not with congregations. We have stories of congregations doing innovative work, but we cannot claim that such work comes as a direct result of the innovation summits we have hosted. They are more likely to come from the books, blogs, webinars, and podcasts we created. In light of that, let me tell two stories.

1. I continue to meet with a pastor from a separate innovation project (one of the Young Adult Innovation congregations) and he said something I have continually repeated. He describes how our people live in the midst of “four crises”: the heath crisis, the economic crisis, the race crisis, and the political crisis. And, together the four crises wash over us like waves. Any one crisis would be manageable, but together they give the sense that we cannot get our heads above water. Indeed, we are talking about helping his congregation create a podcast called “The Four Crises.” The first step in that direction is that the staff of his church is reading *The Innovative Church* and then, when we meet the first week of December, we will talk about how to use a podcast to, in the words of the book, “make spiritual sense of the longings and losses of the young adults entrusted to their care.”
2. The Christian practices of lament and vocation have become inter-twined in this season. Most leaders had, until recently, seen vocation and lament as unrelated. But this wilderness season has helped them understand what our project means when we say that “vocation is not about your passions or your plans; it is about the people God entrusts to your care.” And, as they pay attention to their people, the find themselves turning to lament in the midst of just about every activity that is related to their vocation.