

**PRACTICUM: VINEYARD CENTRAL COMMUNITY CHURCH**

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Spring 2004

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## **Practicum Reflection**

On January 4, 2004 we moved into the Brownhouse. It was a rainy, dreary, and cold day, especially considering we had recently moved from sunny Southern California. We had never been to the Brownhouse and had not been in Norwood for over two years. More than that, we had never actually met the seven other people with whom we would be living. We had seen some pictures online and read various blogs of people in the community, but we really had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. Sarah, my wife, had had one phone conversation with Tracy Rains regarding furniture and what we would need to bring. I had had one phone conversation with Kevin Rains about my practicum and living in the Brownhouse for a couple months while I look for a full-time job. I think we exchanged a few emails and an “instant messaging” session. That was it. We were moving on faith.

I can still feel the sense of anxiety and eager hopefulness as we drove down Ivanhoe and then turned left on to Mills Avenue. I can still see St. Elizabeth’s elegant towers piercing the grey sky. I can still hear the “clank, clink, clank” of the doorbell and the strangely welcoming bark of three black dogs. But most of all, I can still feel the welcoming embrace of warm hospitality as we entered the doors. I can still feel it because it has never left, nor have we, for that matter! As we walked in I was struck immediately by the old, rich woodwork, the look of an ancient bookstore mixed with a English tavern.

Kevin appeared at the door, he was taller than I expected, with a much deeper voice. It is amazing the kind of images of people we cast in our minds when only “knowing” them through blogs, emails, IM, and such. There instantly materialized a cacophony of people who did not mind the rain and eagerly helped move our belongings

into our second floor rooms. They had been sorting books from the library, which if nothing else, told me that I was home!

So began our life at the Brownhouse and in the community of home churches called Vineyard Central (VC for short). Little did we know that we would be here for more than two months, at the time of this writing we have committed to staying here for one year. We knew even less how much we would come to love and respect the inhabitants of this house and friends across the network. We are still uncertain of our future, but stability has slowly returned to our lives. In these past five months I have learned a great deal. Most of my learning has been by praxis rather than books, as any good practicum should be. My education has been in the form of Saturday morning breakfasts with Kevin, trips to the Pub with the guys, IM conversations at work, chats over many meals with a wide array of persons, leading a house church, facilitating *Via Crucis*, and literally hundreds of other ways. This practicum began as an exploration into urban, cross-cultural ministry; it has evolved into so much more. In this paper I will focus on three learnings that I experienced during this practicum with Vineyard Central. I am quite certain that I could not have anticipated these learnings prior to coming here, but it seems that these are timely and instructive for where God is leading me.

### ***Learning One: Via Crucis***

The first learning that I experienced was *Via Crucis*. At some point during the first months that we were here, the idea put forth to do some kind of experiential worship event for Easter. This idea evolved into *Via Crucis :: Immersion*. “Via Crucis” means way of the cross and it was an experiential, multi-sensory worship event. The advertising for the event read,

Via Crucis is a pilgrimage. A journey into the heart of God. It is an immersion in to the suffering of Jesus and a discovery of our own brokenness. It is Christ's passion. Walk the path. Follow. Come

experience. Come partake. Come discover. You are God's beloved. You are God's beloved. You are God's beloved ([www.viacrucis.info](http://www.viacrucis.info)).

The event was further described as,

As we enter the 14 Stations of the Cross on Good Friday we will cross a threshold into another realm. As we walk into the sanctuary we will be transported into a space and time where the sufferings of Christ and our own pain co-exist. We become immersed in Christ, in each step he took, each fall, each encounter with a person on the Via Crucis - the way of the cross. Our prayer is that we would be flooded by the Spirit as sacred space and time are created. And that as we leave we would be drenched in an overwhelming sense of both who Christ is and our cross that we are to bear ([www.viacrucis.info](http://www.viacrucis.info), "Learn More").

I had the privilege of organizing *Via Crucis*. I really do mean that it was a privilege. This was the most cooperative, collaborative, experiential, de-centered, creative event with which I have ever been associated. We only had one meeting with most of the participants in attendance. This was the most shared leadership experiment I have ever tried. The event itself was de-centered with no central performance, show, or sermon and the planning of the event took on the same feel. It helps that VC has a plethora of extremely talented artists and designers. We did lots of brainstorming and experimenting. To say that it was "outside" the box, would be an understatement.

*Via Crucis* was attended by over 150 people, some from the neighborhood and few Hispanics. The event was created by 70 or more volunteers. No one was paid. We received much positive feedback and we will likely do it again next year. The beauty, and the real learning, for me, in addition to the artistry and spiritual insight, was how the event was organized. I have organized many events in my life, mostly within a local church. They have always required prodding and reminding. There were several who sought me out in order to be involved. *Via Crucis* was a testament to the resources and ability of the body of Christ when it truly comes together in a common call and mission. I look forward to many more *Via Crucis*-like events and leadership in the years to come. One aspect of *Via Crucis* which is telling of the whole is the way in which we functioned

in regard to the scripture and meaning of the stations. We did not have a centralized “doctrine-checker” to assure that we were consistent and systematic in our theology. Not that we were unconcerned with Truth being transmitted, rather we trusted each other, the process, and most of all the Spirit. What was amazing was how themes emerged through the different stations. Justice was the predominant theme. Several persons created stations that direct or indirectly addressed the pain and injustice in the world. What is remarkable is that these persons did not confer before hand. It was obvious that the Spirit was at work in us. We did lots of listening.

### ***Learning Two: De-Centralization***

The second learning has to do with the network and structure of Vineyard Central and the lived reality of being the church in an urban, fragmented society. Like *Via Crucis*, Vineyard Central places a high value on de-centralization. VC was birthed out of Cincinnati Vineyard (Springdale) in 1992. Dave Nixon was the founding pastor and the church began meeting a community center in Norwood, Ohio.

People began coming and seemed to enjoy it. By the end of the first year we had about 100 people, enthusiastic and enjoying things. But I felt a lot of internal frustration.... It was obvious to me that we needed to do a better job of enfolding people into “families” (Cutting Edge interview 2001: 4).

In due course, the building they were meeting in was condemned and they were forced to make drastic decisions. They clearly felt the Lord’s leading into meeting in homes and so began the journey that VC is still on. Several house churches were formed and they began exploring church life in smaller settings.

Eventually, VC would come to inhabit, and then purchase, St. Elizabeth’s. This large stone church building was a Roman Catholic parish, the first in Norwood, and was constructed in 1903. The diocese was selling the church building, the parish house, and the convent where several nuns lived. VC would buy the campus from the diocese and

begin to meet in the St. Elizabeth's as a gathered community of house churches. Initially, these "AllGroups" as they are known, were weekly events. But as the Spirit continued to lead the community discerned that they should become more de-centralized.

Kevin Rains, who transitioned into the Senior Pastor role after Dave Nixon (and has continued tweaking his role ever since), wrote an "E-pistle", a congregational email sent in January 2002. In it he discusses the continued transition of VC from local church to de-centralized network of home churches.

The point [of our vision] is experiencing and sharing an abundant life together. It's living the adventure of co-working with God to see his kingdom more fully expressed on earth; that means in our neighborhoods, homes, workplace and even ourselves.... We exist to plant, support and link home churches and networks of home churches. ... A home church is a small, God-centered, missional community of seekers and followers of Christ. I want to especially emphasize that word "missional." These home churches exist to partner with Christ's mission in the world. Home churches come together primarily to encourage and equip their members through mutual love and the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12-14) but they are sent from each meeting with the mandate to be salt and light in their everyday lives at work, home and neighborhoods. This means we're constantly seeking ways to further God's purposes in the world 7 days a week. The meetings, the coming together weekly, prepares us for that mission (2002: web).

This captures well the driving force behind Vineyard Central. They are unabashedly missional. But this has been a challenging road. The pressure is to conform to a centralized structure. The main impetus for remaining de-centered is to facilitate a greater degree of missional engagement in the world. The community found the assumed demands of running an institution too constricting to authentically carry out its call.

Wilbert Shenk affirms the same in *Write the Vision: the Church Renewed*. "The integrity of the church in the West is under siege because of the extent to which institutionalism has overtaken the church" (1995: 73). The program-oriented church becomes a "veritable supermarket of specialized services to meet the whims and demands of a consumer society" (ibid). A second reason that institutionalism is so damaging is the

vastly disproportionate amount of money and resources spent on maintaining and perpetuating the institution rather than caring for others (ibid: 74ff).

Vineyard Central has, by God's grace, intentionally tried to distance itself from this heavy-handed institutionalism that stifles the Spirit and retards (if not out and out kills) mission. It has attempted, and to a large part succeeded, to do this by way of creating a multitude of small gatherings of believers, fully functioning churches, that continue to be connected as a network. This seems an appropriate and sustainable structural form for this community. In our fragmented and disparate society choosing to build a community of faith in small, but connected ways is admirable.

### ***Learning Three: My Earnest Hope***

The third learning is more related to what I did not learn. My earnest hope and desire was to enter into a community of believers that was consciously (and unconsciously) cross the divide of race, class, economic position, and the like. This seems clearly to be part of the essence of Vineyard Central. But the migration across these divides has proven to be more challenging than I could have known. I referred to this third learning as lacking. It is lacking not because I or the community are apathetic or uncaring, far it. Rather, the divisions between sub-cultures in Norwood seem to be particularly deep and difficult. VC is fully committed to living incarnationally in the neighborhood and working to restore and renew it. From what I observed the people who call VC home are deeply caring and desire to connect with persons in the neighborhood, but they (nor I) want to do it artificially or inauthentically.

There are (at least) two barriers that need to be addressed for VC to authentically engage West Norwood in mission. Both of these were confrontation points for me as I sought to initiate this missional calling. I mean to say that these were issues of contention *within me*. I did not, nor presently possess the fixes to these problems. I do

believe, though, that these barriers can and must be overcome if VC is to have a future in this place. Location must matter. Otherwise, Vineyard Central is no different from the myriad of suburban churches that took flight from the urban core in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will only appear different externally, instead of fleeing the city to the promised land of suburbia, it will cloister itself into a homogenous unit of postmodern artist, musicians, and disenfranchised “mega-churchers”. This, I am convinced, is not God’s desire for VC. But it is a temptation that must be addressed and faced. The lifeblood of the church must be found in its embrace of its true nature. That nature is inherently missional, for we serve a missionary God and are called to be a missionary people (Bosch 1995: 32).

### **First Barrier: Fragmentation**

This in mind, the first barrier to an engaging mission to the neighborhood is the fragmentation of contemporary lives. This is a reality for both those in VC and in the neighborhood. The reality of this fragmentation occurred to me during our Memorial Day Block Party that our house church hosted. We pulled together and got a table full of food, complete with incredible tamales from the “Tamale Lady”. We had “corn-hole”, a locally popular game similar to horseshoes, but with beanbags and boards with holes, and four-square. We had a good turn-out and a wonderful time of fellowship and meeting a few of the folks on the street. It was a very good event for us a small and burgeoning community of faith, one that seemed to solidify and deepen relationships. The fragmentation insight occurred to me as I was walking down the street during the party. I went to several nearby homes to see if anyone was home, partly to invite them, partly to ask to borrow their basketball goal. No one was home. This being Memorial Day, that was not unexpected. People gather with family and friends at various locations, naturally leaving their homes vacant. However, I was struck by the fact that we as a society are always going places. It is difficult to get to know your neighbors if your neighbors are

rarely home! We live in a mobile society. We are led to believe that this is an intensely good thing. Cell phones, PDAs, laptops, and WI-FI (all gadgets which I have) keep us in motion and artificially connected, but not really in touch. Jobs that require us to be gone from home more than we are at home make it challenging, if not impossible, to build deeply personal relationships with those people next-door.

I can raise this question, one that I am infected by as well, but I do not know how to answer it. Perhaps we should just accept the reality and work to build meaningful relationship at those locations (work or school) where we spend most of our time. This is not a satisfying alternative, though. Those other places have agendas that run counter to long personal conversations and life-transforming encounters with the Holy Spirit. I'm not saying that there is not value in work-place evangelism (in the best sense of the term) or lunch-break Bible study, but can this really be the best the so-called Christian community can hope for in our world today? I hope not. How can we truly live in our neighborhoods (and for that matter work in our workplaces) in such a way that smells of the gospel? What disciplines should we undertake? From which technologies should we abstain?

### **Second Barrier: Common Space**

This leads to the second barrier, the issue of common space, both indoor and outdoor. One of the challenges of living in the mid-west is the winter. Not just because we moved here from California, but from mid-November till early April the streets are practically barren. There seems to be very little local, indoor common space where people from the neighborhood can mix and mingle.

The problem is not instantly solved by warmer weather. Though people are out of their homes more, there is not outdoor common space that is convenient, safe, and

comfortable for all people. Zygmunt Bauman addresses this pervasive crisis of space (and time) in *Liquid Modernity*.

The ability to live with differences, let alone to enjoy such living and to benefit from it, does not come easily and certainly not under its own impetus. This ability is an art which, like all arts, requires study and exercise” (2000: 106).

As the People of God in this place we must learn this art. We are not here for ourselves. We are God’s reconciling ambassadors of the Kingdom. Again, there are no easy answers. This is a systemic and societal issue, one not fixed with clever programs and catchy “mission statements”. One ray of hope in this area may be Ray Oldenburg’s concept of a “third place” (1999: *xvii*). “These are informal public gathering places. These places serve community best to the extent that they are inclusive and local” (*ibid*, emphasis in original). Perhaps efforts directed to the creation of such places in the neighborhood will reap benefits of which we know not. Our fragmentation as a neighborhood could be significantly diminished if there were places where rich and poor, young and old, Hispanic, blue-collar, and “cubicle jockey” could mix and mingle and share a drink.

### **Blog and Journal**

In addition to the formal reflections shared in the previous section, I thought it beneficial to include some selections from my blog and journal. Most of these entries, or posts, are found by accessing <http://www.aaronklinefelter.com> and going to the referenced blog, date, and post title.

For the uninitiated, a “blog” is a fairly recent innovation on the internet. It is the shortened form of “web-log” and is essentially an online journal. The entries are arranged with the most recent posts displayed at the top of the page. For this practicum I began a specific practicum blog called “An Experiment in Orthopraxis: a practicum”

(located at <http://www.aaronklinefelter.com/Practicum>). I continued to maintain my regular blog as well. However, as I expected, there was so much natural overlap that eventually I migrated to using my regular blog exclusively. Here I wrote reflections relating to Vineyard Central, ministry in this urban context, as well as various and sundry thoughts, web-links, and the occasional gushing of a new father. To locate a post in its entirety (and to access active links and view pictures), I have referenced each of the following selections with the blog in which it was posted, the date it was posted, and the title of the post. There have a few occasions when I thought it inappropriate or inconvenient (no web access) to post my thoughts to the web. These I have saved for personal use, like a traditional journal, but as there is connection with my practicum at Vineyard Central I will share selections of these as well. Following each selection I have offered a brief, and current, reflection. It has been helpful to see these posts in retrospect and to reflect on the journey on which God has brought us. It should also be noted that these selections have not been edited for grammar or punctuation.

### *Selections and Reflections*

“So, what's up with this practicum? Well, I'm a Fuller Theological Seminary student working on a Masters of Arts in Cross-cultural studies concentrating on contemporary culture/postmodernity. As such I am doing my practicum in Norwood, Ohio with the good folks at Vineyard Central. I'll be exploring urban ministry, community living (in an urban setting), cross-cultural ministry, house churching, worship, and the like. My wife, 3 month old daughter, and I have recently moved from Pasadena, CA to Norwood and are living in the Brownhouse, one of the community houses connected with VC. My practicum will technically be from January through mid June, but we plan to be remain in Norwood and make this our home long-term.” (Orthopraxis Blog: January 19, 2004: It is Beginning...)

Now that I've come to the end of this time, I can say that this is pretty much what happened. We are still living in the Brownhouse, though our daughter is 7.5 months old, and we're still exploring urban cross-cultural ministry. Though what has changed is that

we came as guests, virtually unknown and unknowing, we have been transmuted and adopted into the family that is Vineyard Central. The Brownhouse has become our home and its inhabitants trusted friends and partners in the Kingdom. My words can hardly do this justice. To see my daughter's face light up when Zoe comes into the room or to hear my wife laugh at some joke that Elizabeth made – these are the real indicators of where God has brought us.

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Norwood is an interesting place.... It's kind of like the "Nazareth" of Cincinnati. It would not surprise me at all to hear a Cincinnati ask, "Can anything good come out of Norwood?". What makes Norwood so "other"? I'm not entirely sure, but here's a hypothesis. I think Norwood's status as a less than desirable place - one that is perceived to have more crime and shady characters - has more to do with class than race, ethnicity, or heritage. Though these other factors certainly play in. Norwood seems like a town for the second best, for the undesirables, for the marginal.

From what I've heard and read this class-ism goes back to Norwood's history. "Immigrant" workers from Appalachia came up from Kentucky for industrial work in Norwood and from the beginning they were perceived as second class citizens. Currently there is a rapidly growing Hispanic population in Norwood - again perceived as second class citizens.

Here's an example: I was at the Norwood library yesterday. Generally this is a nice (though small) library. On a shelf near the door they had a collection of tapes and CDs for learning languages. Most were dedicated to English as a Second Language and TOEFFEL (sp?), while only ONE was for learning Spanish (and it was for infants - which I promptly checked out and we're listening to it in the car with Cloe Anna). On the one hand, providing these resources (as well as other brochures and such in Spanish) is a great service to the growing Hispanic community. On the other hand, one could read it as an unspoken expectation that to be accepted in this new community you (the newly arrived Hispanic) must become like us first, before we will accept you. Are we willing to change (ie. learn Spanish) to welcome the stranger into our midst? (Orthopraxis Blog: January 21, 2004: Thinking about Norwood)

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The class-ism of Norwood still rings true, though racism is certainly present as well. I have seen some movement on the part of VC to address these issues, but there continues

– for myself included – to be a struggle with not knowing how to bridge that gap. It feels like we need mentors in this area, but I am lost to know where to find them.

[Kevin and I] see this next year (?) as tilling work. The metaphor that comes to mind for me is conception. It is internal work, knitting together in the womb. We will see evidence of it poking out as it matures, but it may not come to fruition (delivery) for awhile. That is NOT to say that we will be inwardly focused. That is NOT what I'm saying. I do NOT believe the we must get all our "ducks in a row" as a church or community BEFORE we can be missional or engage the neighborhood. I DO believe that there is a season of coalescence where the work (missional and communal, inward and outward) is somewhat undercover. Where the parts of the missional community are coming together. It's a formative stage. I think we are here for such a time as this. It will take us a while to become truly part of this community and this neighborhood. I don't want to come in as the expert (I'm not) or the naive seminary student (I am) and try to "fix" stuff, people, or whatever. I want to grow into this community, this neighborhood, this life. That will take time. But part of that growing is engaging. Trying things out, making mistakes, and hopefully doing some good. (Orthopraxis Blog: January 25, 2004: Idea Factory)

This has held to be true. These last six months have been full of much dialogue and growth. I only now (in the last few weeks) have sensed a transitional time where we as a community are beginning to come together to explore what God is birthing us into. Most importantly for me (and Sarah and Cloanna) has been the enfolding love and embrace of this new community which we can now call home. Beyond that, and for VC, I sense a beginning of a new season of life. A soon to be breaking forth of God's dream and desire for us.

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When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,**

**because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.**

**He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."**

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Luke 4.16-20, nrsv

This passage really bugs me. It gets me deep down in my gut. What gets me about it is that I'm one of those guys in the synagogue. The one with my jaw sorta dropped to the floor with my eyes looking bewilderingly at this man that just turned my world upside-down.

But what gets me even more is the strange fact that this same guy is calling for me to participate in this releasing, bringing, proclaiming, reconciling work. This REALLY bugs me. Frankly, I like my middle class, white, masters-level, techno-savy, evangelical, family-friendly, pg-13 world. I don't really want to be involved with the poor, the dirty, the uneducated, the liberal, the ultra-conservative, the nationalist, .... well, I just don't want to deal much with **otherness**.

It is so much more simple when my life is filled with like minded fellows. I don't really like being stretched outside my comfort zone. What is more, I live in a world that doesn't much care for otherness either. But yet, this Jesus keeps pricking my mind about this.

How can I honestly, authentically, engage the neighborhood?

Lately there's talk of a (re)starting a cyber-cafe deal. But would we be just -serving ourselves and our like-mindedness? Is it possible to be authentically who we are as a community, but authentically engaging the neighborhood missionally? This REALLY bothers me. Are we just widening the divide between rich/poor, techno/no tech, Vineyard Centralite/local Norwoodian? Isn't the kingdom about bridging those gaps. Can't God's good news build us into a community of diversity? Must we pick a "demographic"? If Jesus picked any demographic it was the marginalized.

What if we picked the marginalized? What if in our marginalization we could find common ground? What if the artist who feels left out of the traditional church and the local union worker and the immigrant mother and the disheveled teenager could find a common language to speak? What if the margins are where God has wanted us to be all along? Maybe we'll learn if we keep our eyes "fixed on him". (Orthopraxis Blog: February 11, 2004: The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him)

This is still a struggle for me. This passage still gets at me in all the right ways. Unfortunately, I still don't have satisfactory answers. As I type this I hear yelling in the background. Across the street, perhaps, domestic violence is a very real possibility. I still don't know how to bridge these gaps. Perhaps that is even the wrong way to think of it.

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The reality is that we live in a world that requires structure, but we also live in a reality that functions relationally. VC, perhaps more (better) than any other church I've ever been aware of, is honest enough to deal with that tension. It has wise and godly leadership, not hierarchy - but guides and fellow explorers. It, almost unconsciously perhaps, is aware of the fact that health does not equal explained, understood, or "nailed-down".

What does all this mean? I'm not sure. I wouldn't be surprised if there was no such thing as "Vineyard Central" in a few years. "It" may or may not have a name. Maybe there will be lots of little missional/communal churches that are tied together through purely relational connections. No formal organizational network. Maybe that's a good thing, maybe not. There will be more fluid opportunities for sounding calls for missional endeavors. I don't know. I'm just glad to be a part of it. (Orthopraxis Blog: February 20, 2004: Reflections)

This tension is still around. If anything it is even more pronounced now. As mentioned previously, VC seems to be a period of transition. There is a tangible stress between those relational connections and the structures (or lack of structures) in the network. This has been brought to the fore by the church building (St. Elizabeth's) being condemned. We will just have to wait and see where this all takes us, but from what I can tell, there will be much prayer, waiting, and discernment ahead – not to mention a few changes.

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God, what do you have for me here? What are you doing in this place? How do I fit? What about the job/income - how does that fit with vocation, church, mission? I imagine that I need to be patient. I suspect that all will be revealed in time. I'm pretty confident that God is at work even now preparing, forming, and orchestrating - whether I can see it or not. It's just frustrating to still (after 2 years of this in seminary) feeling like I'm in a liminal state.... (Orthopraxis Blog: February 21, 2004: Vocation)

I am still right there! I was asking these very questions today. Still without a permanent job (I'm temping at P&G) and still wondering what God is up to!

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There is something about the history - the collective story of VC, that resonates with me. I'm not trying to sound mystical or whatever, but its story as a community is somewhat similar to the my story as a person. A story where Church of the Saviour, Henri Nouwen, St. Patrick, and Lectio Divina are discoveries along the way. These were not the things that I grew up with, rather I grew into them or they grew into me. I think that is part of the reason I feel so "at home" with VC. Despite not quite knowing where or how I'll fit or what my role is here yet - I can resonate with the vision, the direction that VC is going.

And the road goes ever on.... (Orthopraxis Blog: February 22, 2004: Vineyard Central History)

Still true. Still resonating. Still waiting.

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Busy couple days. Tuesday got a call to do some temp work at Procter & Gamble. So Weds-Friday and all next week I'll be scanning in articles, documents, images, and the like. Creating folders, files, and pdfs of all of it. I appreciate the work and its cool to see the "inside" of P&G. But it is not "extrovert" work - today I didn't talk to anyone till 3:30 PM (and I started at 8:00 AM)! Wow, I'm glad it is only temp. (Aaron's Blog: February 26, 2004: P&G)

Ha! I'm still there.

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I don't like traditional churches, I don't like mega/seeker-sensitive churches, I don't like the "Christian Right" or the "Moral Majority" (whatever that is!), I don't like Liberalism or "whatever-feels-good-it-must-be-OK-cause-we-don't-want-to-offend-anyone" - but yet I consistently see God working in these very structures. And as much as I don't like it, I respect (even if I don't sound like it - I really do) my sisters and brothers in these churches. And yet, if I am to be faithful to a Kingdom Reality in my life and ministry I must believe that there is a better way. There must be a way to be a Subversive Community living on the fringe of the culture, living by Kingdom principles, making foreys (sp?) into the fray to offer a cup of cold water to the thirsty, a home-cooked meal to the stranger, and a bed to the wanderer. There must be a way to follow a Relational God RELATIONALLY - both as a person and as a community. There must be a way to FORCE, DEMAND, and INSIST

that structure and form flow out of the rythm of the People of God gathered together. To not allow structure or form to dominate, but to submit to the Holy Spirit alive and active in our midst. There must be a way to PURSUE JESUS TOGETHER! (Aaron's Blog: March 3, 2004: Check out this conversation)

This was a bit of a rant. It was precipitated by an interaction with someone who is somewhat bitter. I still hope we can find more common ground in the church in Cincinnati, but I suspect it will look very different than anything we have right now.

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First off - it occurred to me yesterday that I need to stop blogging for Lent. I know, I know Lent is half over, and this is not some lame attempt to have my cake and eat it too by only forgoing the blog for half of the time, rather I think it's the case of me just being a little slow on the introspection/reflection side of things. It just simply did not occur to me that my computer time (which tends to be mostly blogging time) was getting in the way of my relationship with my wife and possibly God. Obviously, I'm not saying that blogging is bad (I'm doing it right now and will again after Easter), but for this brief season I need to step away from the blog! I find that it is too easily addictive and consuming, I need to refresh and reconnect.

That said, I do want to conclude the post from below about why the "emerging church" (EC) people like Catholic/Ancient/Liturgical stuff. Steve, who happens to go to church in Norwood (small world indeed!), commented below that the EC is eclectic and borrows Catholic stuff cause of its effectiveness. I think there is definitely truth to that.

I also think that there are a couple other factors involved (and probably a lot more that I'm not thinking of). One, being as a society we have grown up with a severe disconnect from history. Part of the Enlightenment project was a keen sense of progress and of leaving the past behind. Jung talks about the ideal type for "Modern Man[Woman]" as being always in the present, fully individualized (isolated) - the true autonomous, rational self. Our "heritage" of this sad state is that we have lost our connection to the past. Reclaiming our Catholic roots helps us reconnect. Sure part of it may be a vicarious history, but as the body of Christ/People of God it is still our family history.

Two, I also wonder if part of our penchant for liturgical stuff is drawn out as part of our overstimulization from consumerism. Many have grown up within a church that has practically prostituted itself in front of an unbelieving world in order to be noticed, taken seriously, or attended. But 1) it doesn't work, 2) it's sick, 3) it wears on you. Doing the morning daily

office from Phyllis Tickle is nice because it is not about finding something that fits ME, that serves ME, that feels good for ME. It is rather something that forms me. I adjust to it. I submit to the liturgy as a formative function of drawing me ever closer to Christ and Christ-likeness. Obviously this can be perverted and can be the next "spiritual commodity" or fad that comes along.

I'm certain there are other reasons too - not least of which may be that this is just where the Spirit is leading the church - but for now (and until Easter) I will close. (Aaron's Blog, March 18, 2004: The Season of Lent | And Things Catholic/Ancient/Liturgical)

This is still a conversation that I'd like to explore more. It would be nice to get a group of pastors, theologians, etc.. together and brainstorm in this area.

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I'm back. It was good to take a blogging hiatus for Lent. It helped me re-focus and re-connect with flesh-n-blood relations.

Easter weekend was incredible. There are barely adequate words to describe the experience. Via Crucis was amazing. It was so fun to do together. It was the most collaborative and creative worship experience I have ever had the privilege of participating in. My main role was that of connector. I just help folks hook up. If all I ever do at VC is serve as "Resident Connector", I will have a very fulfilling and wonderful ministry! (Aaron's Blog: April 12, 2004, Easter and Celtic/Appalachain Spirituality)

See above. I hope I can continue to learn and grow in that role of "Resident Connector".

Kevin's a really good connector and I continue learned a lot from him.

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In House Church last night we read and discussed Acts 13 - specifically relating to Paul's recounting of God's story to those gathered in the synagogue. The key point we emphasized was - we, as Christ-followers, are about finding ourselves in God's story, rather than asking God to enter into our story. It is by finding our place within God's story that our stories take on new and deeper meaning. Our story becomes part of THE story of creation and redemption and is a good news story to the world.

With that in mind it is important to hear each other's stories of how we find ourselves in God's narrative. So we are writing our spiritual autobiographies and will be sharing them within small groups of 3-4 folk next week. Also, we will collect these when we're finished and compile

them into a House Church memory book. (Aaron's Blog: April 28, 2004: God's Story | Our Story)

“Story” has been something I have been interested in exploring more for a long time. During May I did a bit of web reading on digital storytelling. Very interesting and useful stuff! Kevin and I are planning on trying our hand at it soon.

I have discovered that most of my posts for May are links to other things that have titles like “stuff to think about”. It seems that I had lots of interesting interactions with a wide variety of material, but 1) it was “fleshed out” in a post worth mentioning and 2) it contains links that would not, of course, “work” in hard copy form. Feel free to access my blog archives for May to check out these links on topics such as digital storytelling, chaos as an aid to learning, chaos as a social control in traffic and a metaphor for church, NT Wright, John Wesley, small vs. big church, and others.

## **Multimedia**

### ***DVD: Practicum Pictures and Video***

I have included a DVD of video from *Via Crucis* and pictures from the Brownhouse, the Convent, a spontaneous cookout with neighbors and housemates, House Church, a neighborhood Block Party, Easter AllGroup, *Via Crucis*, and St. Elizabeth’s church building. There are two videos; the first is a very rough walk through of the fourteen stations. It was recorded for documentation, not to actually experience the stations. The second video is a bit more experimental. I attempted to use a low-light filter on the camera and it looks pretty cool, most of the time, but may be annoying as well. I offer both of these, and the slideshow of pictures, as a way to see beyond my paper and witness a bit of what I’ve done these past 5 months.

### ***CD-ROM: Picture Files and Via Crucis Webs***

The second disc is a CD-ROM that contains the same pictures as on the DVD, but as computer files for more flexible browsing (not to mention higher resolution). The CD also contains two webs that were used for *Via Crucis*. One web was used for promoting the event to the community. Interestingly, while most “hits” (instances when the site was accessed) were local, the site was viewed by persons in Canada, New Zealand, Spain, India, and Uruguay, just to name a few. The second web was a team-space site where persons we who created *Via Crucis* could get updates and information.

A very special thanks to Eric Falstrom, a member of Identity House Church (part of Vineyard Central), an artist, creator of station fourteen in *Via Crucis*, and friend. Eric designed and printed the DVD/CD-ROM case inserts and labels.

**\*\* The DVD has a purple back and the CD-ROM has a silver back \*\***

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