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The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community

By Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, Dwight J. Friesen



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2015 Christianity Today Award of Merit (The Church/Pastoral Leadership)

2014 Readers' Choice Awards Honorable Mention

2014 Best Books About the Church from Byron Borger, Hearts and Minds Bookstore

"When . . . faith communities begin connecting together, in and for the neighborhood, they learn to depend on God for strength to love, forgive and show grace like never before. . . . The gospel becomes so much more tangible and compelling when the local church is actually a part of the community, connected to the struggles of the people, and even the land itself."

Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen have seen?in cities, suburbs and small towns all over North America?how powerful the gospel can be when it takes root in the context of a place, at the intersection of geography, demography, economy and culture. This is not a new idea?the concept of a parish is as old as Paul's letters to the various communities of the ancient church. But in an age of dislocation and disengagement, the notion of a church that knows its place and gives itself to where it finds itself is like a breath of fresh air, like a sign of new life.

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- Sales Rank: #266691 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-05-04
- Released on: 2014-05-04
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"The authors explore how the limitations of staying rooted in a particular place actually provide opportunities for transformation and mission. This is a counterintuitive notion for churches that have bought into the mobile and transient values of our culture." (David Swanson, Christianity Today 2015 Book Awards, January/February 2015)

"Faithfulness needs to encompass more than worship to include the mundane activities of everyday life, according to *The New Parish*. In prophetic tones the authors suggest that if the church cannot be present and involved in its neighborhood, it has lost its way. These theologically trained authors all propose a new parish. Follow Jesus into your neighbourhood with other followers of Jesus. This means 'taking your bodies, your locations and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them.' If a church is in, and for, the parish, everything changes, and might result in what they call 'slow church.'... This book would be an excellent resource for small group study." (Henry Neufeld, Canadian Mennonite Magazine, September 10, 2014)

"Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen have seen . . . how powerful the gospel can be when it takes root in the context of a place, at the intersection of geography, economy and culture. This is not a new idea, the concept of a parish is as old as Paul's letters to the various communities of the ancient church. But in an age of dislocation and disengagement, the notion of a church that knows its place and gives itself to where it finds itself is like a breath of fresh air, like a sign of new life." (Light Magazine Canada, June/July 2014)

"As someone who is doing church as parish, I have found this book a very helpful guide in practically answering what a church could look like as it is lived in community. What I also appreciate is the authors do not gloss over the challenges presented and the hard work involved in developing a new parish. They acknowledge the journey is complex, the transition difficult, and experienced guides are few. This is a resource that will definitely be a textbook for those wanting to embrace a localized view of church in years to come." (Dave Harder, Mennonite Brethren Herald, May 2014)

"The authors offer fresh insights into the fragmentation of Western Christianity and explain why moving from megachurches to neighborhood churches is impacting the spread of the gospel." (CBA Retailers + Resources, April 2014)

"What would it look like if God's reign were to be more fully realized in your neighborhood? In *The New Parish*, Tim, Paul and Dwight team up to answer this question in concrete ways. With a rich theology of place and practice, they guide us in how to have a humble posture and be a faithful presence in the neighborhood. This is a must-read!" (JR Woodward, national director of the V3 Church Planting Movement, author of Creating a Missional Culture)

"Quietly, beneath the purview of the dominant social systems, a revolution is taking place. The church is returning to the local. In *The New Parish*, three subversives plot the church's simple way back into the neighborhood. The result is flourishing, renewal of the Spirit, indeed the gospel taking on flesh! This book is your invitation to the revolution!" (David Fitch, Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology, Northern Seminary, and author of Prodigal Christianity)

"In *The New Parish*, Paul, Tim and Dwight offer a theologically rich vision of church life intertwined with the places we inhabit. In stark contrast to the displacement and fragmentation that dominates our age, this important book calls us to slow down, become rooted, and experience a taste of the abundance and healing that God intends for all creation. Church leaders take heed, the new parish is, without question, the church of the future!" (C. Christopher Smith, coauthor of Slow Church and editor of the Englewood Review of Books)

"*The New Parish* offers a vision for Christian community that honors place amidst fragmentation. This book will inspire a new generation of Christian leaders who will answer the yearnings of all of us for authentic community." (Tremper Longman III, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California)

"In a world of increasing mobility, fragmenting relationships and a loss of any real sense of covenant, we need learn again to attend to the various people and places where God has located us. This book is a much-needed antidote to the endemic alienation of our time. Missionary grow home!" (Alan Hirsch, author, activist, dreamer)

"In a society addicted to the next technique, a thought-provoking and insightful book, *The New Parish*, provides a refreshing solution. God has a sense of place, and when followers of Jesus share life together and put down roots in a specific location, they become something new, something that has the power to transform and energize that community. God is at work in neighborhoods, and the church does well to pay attention." (Felicity Dale, author of An Army of Ordinary People and coauthor of Small Is Big!)

Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are on the leading edge of a massively important return to place-based ministry. I have been an admirer of their frontline work in this area for years and am now excited to see their platform grow through this book. If the missional church movement hopes to still be around for the next generation, it is going to have to keep the question of place front and center. *The New Parish* does just that while continuing to push this discussion in challenging and fruitful directions." (Eric O. Jacobsen, author of The Space Between)

"At last a candid, thoughtful, insightful book that provides a practical framework for doing church in the city. *The New Parish* offers a much-needed roadmap for regrounding the church in the soil of community?the key to recovering its transformative power in our urbanizing society." (Bob Lupton, founder and president of FCS Urban Ministries)

"*The New Parish* is a gift to church leaders like me. Though the authors challenge the most fundamental understandings of the church's mission and its presence in the neighborhood, they do so as practitioners deeply invested in its flourishing. This book sets out a challenging agenda for the local church, but with such encouragement and hope that one is left in no doubt that the challenge is within reach. In fact, it's right outside our front doors." (Simon Carey Holt, pastor, Collins Street Baptist Church, Melbourne, Australia)

"Paul, Tim and Dwight each live the reality they describe. I know they've paid high prices for taking a journey born out of biblical imagination and profound instincts for the practice of gospel life in North America. The path they describe is not and will not be popular. It sounds sexy and seems full of romance, but, as they well know, this is another kind of journey?without glamor, romance or individualistic heroism?focused on the agency of God and the disorienting, disturbing, disrupting work of the Spirit. We are being invited to refound the church for the sake of the healing of neighborhoods and communities in the name of Jesus. Read this book and ask how you can practice life in the 'parish.'" (Alan J. Roxburgh, The Missional Network)

"Something's up in neighborhoods right across this country. Kids raised in the generica of American suburbs

are becoming adults who yearn deeply for a sense of place, for belonging, for community. *The New Parish* is a passionate call for churches to join in the beautiful work of placemaking, not only as a response to this yearning but as a core expression of the mission of God in our world." (Michael Frost, author of Road to Missional and Incarnate)

"*The New Parish is*, hands down, one of the most sensible and simultaneously exhilarating books I have read in a long time. Rich in specific details and concrete examples of a new old way, it will serve its readers as both instructor and encourager. The underlying, foundational concepts here, together with the central theme of localization, make for prophetic reportage, and the result is as exciting as it is rife with hope." (Phyllis Tickle, author of The Age of the Spirit)

"Here is a must-read book for those who are looking for creative ways to join with others in becoming a lifegiving presence in your neighborhood in these uncertain times. We urge you to use this book as a study guide in your congregation in reimagining how to become a source of compassion and hope in your parish." (Christine and Tom Sine, Mustard Seed Associates, www.msaimagine.org)

"*The New Parish* is a needed admonition on what the church must become if she is to rise to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The authors provide fresh applications of ancient truths, offer sober reflection with a pastoral touch and create a viable framework for fruitful engagement. I would recommend this book for all who are serious about what the church and her faithfulness in the twenty-first century can look like." (David Hillis, president, Leadership Foundations)

"If you cut Paul, Tim and Dwight, they bleed parish. The hope and integrity of the twenty-first-century Christian church may require that the rest of us learn to do the same." (Tony Kriz, author of Neighbors and Wise Men)

"This is a must-read book for those who know deep down in their bones that the life of following Jesus is meant to be anything other than a weekly jaunt to a building referred to as a church. Rather than a mere critique, this compelling, winsome and wise book is an incendiary love letter that invites us to develop the eyes, heart and imagination to follow what the Spirit is already doing to foster reconciliation, justice and care in our neighborhoods. Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are potters whose artistry has required them to immerse themselves in all that is broken, dirty and beautiful about the church and envision a new parish life that offers us all a taste of the banquet of reconciling love. Come, taste and see." (Dan B. Allender, professor of counseling psychology and founding president, The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology)

"This book articulates the answer to a question many of us have been asking: What might it look like to do ministry in a real way in the neighborhoods in which we live and work? It is a wonderful combination of practical insight and fresh vision. We will be using this book as a catalyst for our own missional work and as a resource to pass on to others who are also eager to engage their neighborhoods in practical ways in the name of Christ." (Leanne and Dallas Friesen, pastors of Mount Hamilton Baptist Church)

"Local. Global. Presence. Linking. Rooting. Parish. Commons. Integration. These words will radiate with meaning when you finish this important, needed, comprehensive and truly worthwhile book. I would wish it upon every seminarian, church leader, church member and church dropout. *The New Parish* is one of the most important books on the church, Christian identity and mission that I've read in a decade." (Brian D. McLaren, author of Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?)

"*The New Parish* offers a rich, thoughtful exploration of the characteristics and processes of ministry that is deeply rooted in faithful presence in local neighborhoods. This book is an important reflection on how to

overcome one of the biggest threats to the vitality of ministry in the Global North: disembodied practice that doesn't recognize or collaborate with the active presence of the Holy Spirit incarnate in our communities. I particularly recommend *The New Parish* for denominational leaders and church planters. It will give you critically important advice for leading the church into the future." (Alexia Salvatierra, coauthor of Faith-Rooted Organizing)

"As our vehicles and gadgets get faster and faster, people are hungry for a place to belong and a people who know them. What a gift the notion of the parish is for our time. And what a joy to know this collective that's figuring out how to breath life into this ancient notion in our time." (Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, author of Strangers at My Door)

"*The New Parish* is the faith-based version of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Not only do the authors make a compelling case for getting out of the sanctuary and into the neighborhood, but they provide the inspiration and advice to make it possible. This book is full of inspiring stories and practical lessons to help Christians connect with their neighborhoods and, in the process, connect more deeply with one another and their faith." (Jim Diers, Seattle's former director of the Department of Neighborhoods and author of Neighbor Power)

"A bold, refreshing exploration of how to be the church in the twenty-first century. Rooted in experience, theological reflection and ecclesial study, this book invites us to express church in a way that commits to a people and a place, making possible real transformational change of persons, communities and systems of degradation and injustice. A practical guide for any group of people committed to relevant church expressions, *The New Parish* will encourage and inspire you to continue the slow and patient work of nurturing the body of Christ in our broken but hope-filled neighborhoods." (Phileena Heuertz, author of Pilgrimage of a Soul and cofounder of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism)

"What is so significant about this book is that its content is the direct fruit of a Spirit-led convergence between friends. Dwight, Tim and Paul's profound reflections are rooted in the relational journey they have been on for meaning, connectedness and a way of being that bears evidence of 'thy kingdom come' in their own respective contexts. Together they offer us a taste of what it looks like when the church becomes a faithful presence in a given time and place. Those who have experienced the kinds of things they talk about through their stories will find affirmation. Those who still yearn for it will find reason to keep hope alive. The book exudes the patient and passionate commitment to praxis that the authors live out in their neighborhoods. We are grateful for their collective contribution to the kingdom community." (Tom and Dee Yaccino, Del Camino Connection)

"Across North America and around the world, churches are moving into the neighborhood, faithfully rooting themselves there and connecting with neighbors to weave a fabric of care in their communities. *The New Parish* is the handbook for that movement. Paul, Tim and Dwight have been mentors in my own journey into place. It's likely that my copy of their wise, inspiring and even essential book will never make it on to my bookshelf; I'll keep it close at hand and return to it again and again." (John Pattison, coauthor of Slow Church and managing editor of CONSPIRE Magazine)

"Journeying with these three brothers through the various iterations of Western Christianity into the 'new parish' reminds me of the traveling school of the prophets in ancient Israel--except they are walking with me in my hood. Sparks, Soerens and Friesen are giving us new eyes to see and convening a new space for what is emerging in our context by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In *The New Parish* we are being invited to participate more fully and faithfully into this Spirit-led, ancient-future social technology of the kingdom of God. Are you in place?" (Anthony Smith, core team, Transform Network, and pastor/comissioner, Mission House)

"What makes this book so refreshing is that it is *not* another program for church renewal and growth. Instead, it is a call, a guide, and a toolkit written by three colaborers engaged on the frontier of the twenty-firstcentury Christian community. In contrast to a church blown by the fragmenting winds of capitalist creative destruction, consumerism and individualism, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen offer us a hopeful alternative vision. This is a church that abides in fragile dependence on the Spirit and sees in the bricks, mortar and faces of its neighborhood the real substance of the kingdom of God. Even more, they present us with practical suggestions on how those of us seeking to feel our way forward in this time of transformation can begin to cultivate such formative, missional and deeply relational communities." (Dan Rhodes, editor-inchief for The Other Journal and coauthor of Free for All)

"All paths to the future of the church must pass through this book." (Leonard Sweet, professor, Drew University, George Fox University, and author of The Well-Played Life)

"Everyone wants 'tweaks'--slight adjustments that will finally be the silver bullet, costing very little and doing little to challenge our prevailing ideas and ideals of ministry. They don't exist! What is needed for the church today are wild ideas that line up with the story of Scripture. In *The New Parish*, we finally have a group of friends telling their stories and giving us something radical to consider: behaving as Jesus would in our neighborhoods. This book will blow some circuits, but seriously, aren't you tired of reading the same stuff in different packages? Read at your own risk." (Hugh Halter, author of Flesh and The Tangible Kingdom)

"Teeming with fresh ideas and rich energy for the future of the church. The authors fully recognize the sorry state of much of the church in our culture, but insist, in most imaginative ways, that another way of church is possible. It is all about relationship, listening, communicating and caring in bodily, concrete ways. *The New Parish* reveals why such a practice is deeply grounded in the gospel and how this is contrary to so many current church strategies. This is hands-on missional ecclesiology in its most generative mode." (Walter Brueggemann, author of Journey to the Common Good and Sabbath as Resistance)

"The traditional idea of a parish is just what this book is reclaiming--'churches rooted in the neighborhood.' The idea and reality of a parish used to be geographical. Those called to lead the parish did not organize for the purpose of drawing people to a specific theology or affinity or program. Done well, those called to lead 'read' their neighborhood and responded. They did not wish for 'other people,' they thanked God for the people in their neighborhood, put down roots, built relationships and incarnated the body of Christ. This book is an attempt to reclaim that traditional understanding in a new day for a new generation. It is much needed, and I am so thankful for it." (The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel, VIII Bishop of Olympia)

"Time and space are honored in this book. The neighborhood is honored in this book. The kingdom of God is proclaimed in ways that are ancient and new. Sparks, Friesen and Soerens are not wild-eyed dreamers, but make no mistake, they have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. What these creative pastors understand is that there is, in fact, a new parish. It calls for deep local practice fueled by incarnational presence, solidarity and collaboration with the Spirit in the neighborhood. Much of theological education seems to miss that point. Warning: Don't read this book unless you care about the ministry of the church in the next decade." (Keith R. Anderson, president at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology)

"Strong communities, strongly rooted in place, are the future: for food, for energy, but also for our spiritual life. This is a powerful account of a necessary future." (Bill McKibben, author of Wandering Home)

"This book introduces a way of understanding the local church grounded in appreciation for where and when

God has placed it. . . . Church leaders who get that they need to learn to see and listen first of all?to God and to their parish context?will cultivate practices of discernment for themselves and the communities they lead. In this way they will 'spark the communal imagination toward Spirit-led action in the parish' and?as the stories in the book demonstrate?plant seeds for ministry that will bear much fruit." (Aileen Van Ginkel, Faith Today, November/December 2015)

"We are accustomed, as the authors here argue, to 'living above place': leading individualized lives within a fragmented, globalized economy. Real gospel transformation has to start in our neighborhoods, as people root themselves?their spirits, emotions, and bodies?in a particular place. *The New Parish* shows how believers can come together, both within the church and beyond, for the good of their communities. If you aren't jazzed about what God is doing in your neighborhood after reading this book, it might be time to move." (D. L. Mayfield, Christianity Today, September 2015)

About the Author

Paul Sparks is a Parish Organizer and Social Entrepreneur. His place-based expertise and trusted friendship in neighborhoods across North America make him an indispensable consultant to faith communities, academic institutions, and community organizations. Paul speaks for strong resilient relationships within the parish, and brave collaborative links across places. Paul is the co-founder of Local Life: Coalition for Livable Communities, the Parish Collective: Rooted and Linked for Parish Renewal, and Urban Landscaping: Rapid Placeshaking Collaborations. He is also an instructor for the *Leadership in the New Parish* at the Seattle School of Psychology and Theology and is the co-founder of the Inhabit Conference. Paul lives in an urban neighborhood at the heart of Downtown Tacoma, Washington with his co-conspiring wife Elizabeth. They pastor a growing faith community comprised of friends, artists and entrepreneurs seeking a common life together with their neighbors.

Tim Soerens is a pastor, social entrepreneur, and co-founding director of the Parish Collective. As codirector of the Parish Collective he convenes ministry leaders, teaches, and consults with organizations seeking human flourishing in particular neighborhoods while also working collaboratively across the city. He is also the co-founding producer of the Inhabit Conference and the new "Leadership in the New Parish" certificate program at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. As social entrepreneur, Tim is a founding adviser to the Hub-Seattle, an innovative co-working space for change makers in both non-profit and business sectors. He earned a BA in Rhetorical Sciences from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Masters of Divinity from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. He lives in the Wallingford neighborhood of Seattle with his wife Maria-Jose and their son.

Dwight J. Friesen (DMin, George Fox University) has over a dozen years of missional pastoral experience and is currently Associate Professor of Practical Theology at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. He is passionate about peace-making, interfaith and missional-ecumenical conversation, and about communally and personally embodying the Gospel of Jesus Christ in local contexts. In 1996, Dwight pioneered an emerging network of simple churches in Seattle called "Quest-A Christ Commons." He has served as a guest lecturer and spiritual director around the country and is a co-founder of the Inhabit Conference. As a speaker and consultant for churches, denominations and mission agencies, he speaks internationally on issues of contextual ministry, postmodern culture, social systems and missional Christianity. He also served for a number of years on the Faith & Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. Dwight, his wife Lynette, and their son are active members of the Lake Hills neighborhood of Bellevue, Washington.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christian Robbins:

The book untitled The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains your ex idea with easy approach. The language is very simple to implement all the people, so do not really worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was compiled by famous author. The author provides you in the new age of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open up their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice learn.

David Briggs:

In this period of time globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make you to definitely understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of references to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher which print many kinds of book. The actual book that recommended to your account is The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community this guide consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The words styles that writer value to explain it is easy to understand. The writer made some investigation when he makes this book. This is why this book appropriate all of you.

Gary Spengler:

In this particular era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability to do something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple solution to have that. What you must do is just spending your time not very much but quite enough to have a look at some books. One of the books in the top list in your reading list is actually The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community. This book that is certainly qualified as The Hungry Inclines can get you closer in turning into precious person. By looking up and review this e-book you can get many advantages.

Christopher Hardnett:

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