

The Missional Wisdom Foundation experiments with and teaches about alternative Christian community. The Epworth Project, which is the name of our residential intentional community project, was one of the very first experiments we tried. Beginning in 2008, residential intentional community and missional micro-churches were the first ways that the MWF began to experience Christian community outside of the traditional church.

We have administered 12 different communities in the DFW area. We have purchased homes, rented apartments and renovated old parsonages. We have had communities that failed, ones that lived through their lifecycle and closed, and communities that continue to thrive.

The Epworth Project houses are both experiments and educational experiences. They have allowed us to experience a variety of ownership structures, resident combinations and administrative approaches, which has in turn allowed us to share that knowledge with others who are interested in forming communities themselves. Our communities are intended to be transitional rather than permanent, providing learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students as well as for adults who are interested in residential community. Our communities have been informally connected to student populations from SMU Perkins School of Theology, TCU, Baylor and UT Arlington. Our typical resident stays in community 2-4 years.

Over time, we have developed a fairly stringent application process. Interested people must complete a lengthy written application, write an essay, consent to background checks and participate in interviews with MWF staff and the residents of the house. This process has arisen because we found that many people have a very idealized perception of Christian community and are not really prepared for the fact that sharing living space is sometimes difficult, and often calls for patience and flexibility. We have also found that some people seek out Christian community to provide themselves with a family environment that was missing from their previous life. A deeply needy individual may find it difficult to fully participate in healthy Christian community.

The members of our houses agree to be bound by a common rule of life that has been developed by Epworth residents over several years. The rule of life is based on the United Methodist baptismal covenant, which calls for commitments around prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. The rule provides a connection among the houses and establishes expectations for the daily lives of the residents.

Each house has a "house steward" who is a resident responsible for administering the organizational logistics of living together. The MWF has a full-time pastor on staff in the role of Abbot to the Epworth Project who is responsible for nurturing the spiritual lives of the residents and coordinating the physical details of administration of the houses. The MWF makes spiritual direction available to residents who request it.

Each house chooses its own mission in concert with the motion of the Holy Spirit in their individual neighborhoods and communities. Epworth Project houses serve the homeless, the refugee, the elderly, the lonely, and the differently abled, each as they are led by the Spirit.

Each house maintains a practice of daily prayer, with the forms of prayer changing to reflect the desires of the current residents. Each house also maintains a stance of hospitality, which usually manifests itself as a weekly community meal that is open to the neighborhood.

The objective of the Epworth Project is to provide the opportunity for people who are forming their identities as Christian leaders to experience residential life steeped in prayer and hospitality. The communities shape the individual residents, who then move on to take their experiences into the world. Some graduates form intentional residential communities themselves, while others bring the mindset of Christian community into their own non-residential ministries. The Epworth Project opens new avenues of individual and community commitment to missional life, seeking to live in the world following the example of Jesus.