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Abstract

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH AN OFF-SITE, SECOND WORSHIP SERVICE

by

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The problem addressed in this dissertation is the problem of church growth in small communities. The resources available for a medium-sized church in a small town many times are limited. The problems which face a church and pastor in light of this unique situation demand unique solutions. The unique solution offered by God to St. John's United Methodist Church, Stamford, Texas, along with its pastor, Phil McClendon, was an off-site, second worship service named Vision Fellowship.

This dissertation details the initial vision of God to St. John's and the resultant work that established the church growth ministry. It also reveals the methods of evaluation used to critique and refine the ministry. Statistical analysis of growth and interviews of people in the original church, St. John's, along with interviews of Vision Fellowship attenders were used to gather information to determine the success of the ministry for church growth. Suggestions for change in the ministry and the implications it holds for other churches in this situation are given.

The findings of this study indicate that innovative off-site ministries such as Vision Fellowship hold much promise for church growth both numerically and spiritually. Substantial obstacles do present themselves in the midst of the ministry. Lay involvement is tremendously important along with a willingness on both the pastor's and founding church's part to "pay the price"

for growth. Adequate staffing of the medium-size church is also very beneficial. The results of this particular attempt were rewarding in the numerical growth obtained (although not exceptional) and especially in the spiritual growth gained by both St. John's and Vision Fellowship attenders.

A major implication revealed through the study concerns the need for any church growth strategy to be guided by God's vision for the church and community. Success of the vision-birtherd ministry should be measured in part in light of adherence to the vision.

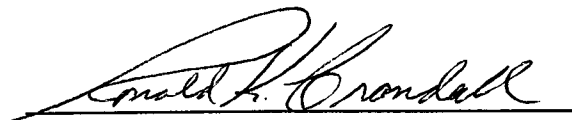
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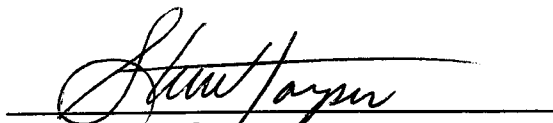
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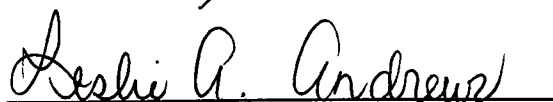
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Phil McClendon

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CHAPTER 1

Understanding the Problem

The problem simply put is growth. St. John's United Methodist Church, Stamford, Texas, is not unlike many United Methodist Churches of the Northwest Texas Annual Conference. It struggles to grow. It is, in many ways, the typical "middle sized church" described by Lyle E. Schaller in his book, The Middle Sized Church: Problems and Prescriptions. The paradoxes of needs versus resources which Schaller outlines in chapter one of his book describes St. John's (11-13). The comparison of Schaller's list to St. John's is remarkable. The need for added full-time staff to help with the ministry but also the limited financial resources to maintain the staff presents a problem. The need for a full scale evangelism program to off set natural attrition, yet the lack of human and financial resources to maintain it also presents a problem. The need for a good, long term pastorate to insure growth but the small size of the church inhibiting the retention of a pastor again has been a problem in the past. The need for an expanded youth ministry because of the size of the church yet the inevitable thwarting of the fulfillment of this need because of limited resources, again due to size, is a problem. The phrase Schaller has coined that truly fits is that St. John's is an "awkward size" (Middle Sized 99).

St John's active membership is about 230 persons. Wagner states,

Active members are those whose names belong on the church roll. They may not be there every Sunday, but they attend at least occasionally, they make some financial contribution to the church, they regard the church as "my church," they expect that their young children will also become members, and they look to the church for rites of passage such as weddings and funerals (Leading 56).

Wagner believes there is a natural resistance to growth at this size. He names this phenomenon the "200 barrier" (Leading 56). This barrier creates tremendous difficulty for growth for many of the reasons alluded to by Schaller and stated above. The problem is, that in order to grow, St. John's position demands expansion of the ministry but with limited financial and human resources.

St. John's is also described by Lyle Schaller in his book, 44 Questions for Church Planters. He says, "the vast majority of new congregations in the United States reach their peak in size during the first two or three decades of their existence and then remain on a plateau in size or begin to shrink in numbers" (23). St. John's was established in 1900, the same year the city of Stamford was chartered. It is the only United Methodist Church in the community. As Schaller generalizes, it grew rapidly peaking at a membership of 1086 in 1947. From that time, it declined steadily (except in times of an exceptional pastor's tenure) reaching 316 in 1989. The worship attendance also showed the same decline. Although yearly average attendance figures were not kept officially in 1947, unofficial figures show an average Sunday attendance of 705. That figure declined to 100 for the year 1984. Therefore, St. John's has shown many older church patterns.

Another characteristic of the church which hinders growth is its architecture. It is a magnificent three story Gothic structure complete with 100 foot bell tower. It was built in 1910 to accommodate its membership plus the students of now closed (since 1920) Stamford College, a Methodist institution. The outward appearance, along with its inward beauty, including a 500 seat

sanctuary, paneled with rich walnut, replete with German art stained glass windows, stained glass lighted sanctuary dome, and its 1923 Estee pipe organ, has created a now false yet effective perception for most "unchurched" people in Stamford, that St. John's is too rich for them. Simply put the structure itself has added a barrier to growth.

Another factor to be taken into account that hinders growth in St. John's is the environment to which St. John's seeks to minister. Stamford's population is 3,817. Therefore, many of the problems that hinder growth in any small town church effect St. John's as well. Peter Surrey in his book The Small Town Church, reveals some of these universal problems. Surrey throughout his book essentially points out three main attributes of small town churches that are applicable in St. John's situation. First, many small towns have a closed social structure that is difficult for outsiders to penetrate (21). Second, many small town communities and churches are resistant to change (31). Third, many small town churches view pastors with tolerance not trust (35). Stamford, and thus St. John's show these characteristics in varying degrees of influence. The community of Stamford exhibits each of these qualities; even though experiencing beneficial change. Factors for this change will be discussed later. St. John's also has experienced many of these difficulties and is somewhat further into the process of beneficial change than the community. Factors for this change will also be discussed later.

A tight social structure is still evidenced in Stamford. The old power people seek to maintain control of the economy and social structure as well as the political structure. Although this is the case, there is evidence a change

here is being caused by the deaths of many of the elite power brokers of the community. Their deaths coupled with the fact that their children have moved to other larger communities has left a void in the social structure that is being filled by the "new comers." St. John's has also experienced this breakdown in the closed social structure. The reasons are two fold. First, the exit of the established power base and the influx of new people, describes St. John's as well as the larger community. Second, a vital Christian renewal has taken place in the lives of many members of the church through the Emmaus movement of the United Methodist Church. This renewal movement is based on a three day short course in Christianity which is filled with educational and meaningful worship experiences along with creative follow up activities. It has created a tremendous impact in the St. John's congregation. The Christian love taught and experienced on the Walk to Emmaus has broken down the social barriers between new and old in the congregation. The result has been an acceptance of new persons and a warm and inviting congregation.

Actually, the Emmaus movement has facilitated the break down of the closed social structure of the community as well. Around 200 people from the Stamford area have attended the Walk. Over 100 people are members of various churches in the community besides St. John's. Every denomination in the community is represented in this number. As with the membership of St. John's, the Christian love that is taught and experienced on the Walk has broken down social barriers between the churches in the community. This creates a spirit of cooperation in the community which helps facilitate ministry to the unchurched of Stamford.

Stamford is also a community resistant to change. The population in Stamford, as is the case in many small rural towns, is quickly growing older. This, coupled with the conservative tendencies of small West Texas towns, makes change a threatening concept to most people. The need for stability and security is paramount in the minds of many of Stamford's citizens. Of course this is a generalization and there are many violations of this rule that can be witnessed in Stamford. It does seem, also, that in the past three to five years, the residual resistance to change has been declining. This in part has to do with necessity. If the community is to survive then change is inevitable. And, as stated above, the death of many of the old line power people of Stamford has created a vacuum of leadership that is being filled with younger, more change oriented persons. These people, seeing the need for change and having the energy to accomplish it, have begun to break the cycle of stagnation. Although Stamford must still be viewed as resistant to change, there is positive movement taking place. This new openness to change indicates God's preparation of the community for the gospel of Jesus to be proclaimed. With this in mind, the need for a proper strategy to present the gospel becomes urgent.

The situation in St. John's concerning change has taken a slightly different course. The church was far ahead of the community concerning the aging process. In 1985 as the church was considering a pastoral change, the average age of worship attenders was around 65 years. A statement made by one of the older leaders of the church to his wife on a Sunday morning brings home the gravity of the situation. He said, "Janie Lou, something has to

change. In twenty years we won't have a church." She lovingly questioned his assertion to which he replied, "Just look, in twenty years everybody in here will be dead." At that point in time the sheer weight of necessity dictated a change in the status quo. The lay leadership of the church realized this fact. The church not only tolerated change but actually desired change which resulted in a change in pastor and a change in direction of St. John's.

The third attribute of small town churches that Surrey mentions is that they often view their pastor with tolerance not trust (35). Although this was the case in some respects, for the most part St. John's has been trusting of the pastor. There was some mistrust at the beginning of the current pastorate due to bad experiences with former pastors. Because the church was ready for a change and the change had quick success, trust was kindled fairly quickly. As an example of the early success the attendance figures for the first year jumped to 120 from 100 and within three years had reached 141. The key factor in this growth was the desire for change. This desire for change was a factor for the rapid growth of the pastoral trust level. This desire created an atmosphere where new ideas and programs were not viewed with suspicion but openness. The trust factor has also increased with the length of tenure of the present pastor, which is nine years.

The situation within the community was different however. Some in the community viewed any pastor of a different congregation other than their own with suspicion. During the early success of the present pastor, this suspicion was intensified with a feeling of competition. St. John's became successful and was perceived as a threat to existing successful ministries of

other churches. The mistrust was in part alleviated by tenure and by the Emmaus movement which stressed cooperation between local churches and increased commitment and involvement of laity in their own local church. As these principles of the Emmaus movement began to be realized, the competitive threat began to wane and the trust level began to increase in the community.

Besides the general attributes of the small town, there are specific factors relating to Stamford which cause difficulties for growth. The community is in a state of decline. The population of Stamford has dropped from 4,552 in 1980 to 3,817 in 1990. The total loss is 735 or 16% of the population. Many factors play roles in this decline. One of the most important is the economic recession of the area. Stamford's economy depends on farming (mostly cotton), ranching, oil, and retail business. Each of these components of the economy has been depressed for some time and has seen a major decline in the past ten years. Jeff Robertson, assistant branch manager for the Production Credit Association of Stamford (an agricultural lender), agrees with this assessment of the economic situation in the agricultural area. Mike Sloan, president of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce, concurs with this assertion as it relates to the retail sector of the economy. The result of this erosion in the economic base is the loss of jobs and therefore the commensurate loss of population. This factor intensifies the problem of growth for St. John's because the loss of population diminishes the numbers of prospective members.

Beyond the obvious problem of population loss, more subtle problems are created by the economic recession of the area. First, the recession directly

effects the amount of giving to the church. Although the giving has increased over the past ten years, the increase is 3.1% per year and thus equals the inflation rate for the same time period. In other words, the useable financial resources have remained the same. This leaves little room for an increase in programming for growth. Second, the prolonged length of the recession has created an atmosphere of despair in the residents. Their self esteem as a community is poor which creates a downward spiral. The despair creates negative feelings toward the community and hinders growth possibilities. This, in turn, creates despair and the spiral continues. Gary Decker, past branch manager of the Stamford PCA and now investment representative for Edward D. Jones Investments of Stamford, asserts there is a sense of helplessness caused by the economy. Some resulting conditions from this situation are alcohol usage (including the youth population), complacency, and a general negative attitude concerning any new endeavor, be it economic, cultural, or spiritual in nature. This depressed environment is a two-edged sword. On one hand it creates a population resistant to growth, but on the other it creates a need for spiritual enrichment for the community. The key in this scenario is to find effective ways to break through the despair that hinders growth and meet the need of despair with the hope of Jesus Christ.

Stamford is also church rich. The community, situated in the Bible belt, contains nine Baptist churches, three Lutheran churches, and one each of African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Four Square, United Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, and United Methodist. Two rural United Methodist churches, and one more Baptist church located

near by also draw from the Stamford population. New Covenant Baptist Church which at the present time ministers mainly to the black population of Stamford, is the only one to be established in the last decade. Stamford's church rich atmosphere provides fuel for Christian leaders in the community to shy away from any "new" church starts. Another factor in the resistance to new churches is that many of the nine Baptist churches in town have been the result of church strife which splinters off in new congregations. This fact creates the perception of anger and division in association with new churches and creates resistance. The startling fact in this church rich community is approximately 1500 unchurched persons still reside in the community of Stamford. This figure is based on the approximate number of active members, 2,250, as defined by Wagner (Leading 56), in all Stamford churches subtracted from the population of Stamford, 3,817. To approximate the number of active members each church was asked to estimate their active members.

These characteristics of the community of Stamford and St. John's United Methodist Church provide the background for this project/dissertation. They are by no means exhaustive but they reflect a limited, yet appropriate, context to understand the problem addressed in this local situation.

As stated earlier the problem in St. John's United Methodist Church is one of growth. Fleshed out, the main question to be answered is how does a church with the characteristics mentioned above, located in a community experiencing decline and recession, create and maintain effective church growth? Through theological reflection, prayer, and the receiving of God's vision for growth, the people of St. John's have launched a ministry to address

this problem. The ministry is a second, off-site, worship service held on Sunday morning called Vision Fellowship.

Vision Fellowship is appropriately named being the product of a vision for ministry given to the pastoral leadership of St. John's and through them to the people of St. John's. One must understand that this ministry is not simply another program attempted to correct a problem. The entire vision for ministry was given by God to St. John's. George Barna in his book, The Power of Vision, How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry, states, "In evaluating churches that are growing and healthy as compared to those who are stagnant or in decline, one of the key distinctions that emerges is the existence of true vision for ministry" (12). Vision Fellowship is a result of this "true vision for ministry" given by God to the people of St. John's.

Background to the Project

Vision Fellowship must be understood in the context of the entire vision. The vision is a result of many factors that culminated in the fall of 1992. Phil McClendon, the writer of this dissertation and the present pastor, has been pastor since June of 1985. This was the year of the pastoral change cited above. The change itself was the result of a desire for a different direction for the church. He is the youngest pastor ever to serve the church and the first graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary to serve St. John's. Since Asbury is noted for more conservative theology than most United Methodist seminaries, there was a fundamental difference in emphasis brought to the ministry. The difference included a view that the Bible was the inspired word of God, inerrant in all matters of faith and practice. Also, a new emphasis on personal

salvation and developing a personal relationship with Jesus became central. He demanded a higher commitment level of the laity than had been required in recent history. He also believed his ministry was to equip people for ministry. The strong spiritual gifts brought to the ministry included preaching, teaching, and evangelism. He also brought an ability to easily relate to people. These differences were readily accepted by the people of St. John's. The reasons for this easy acceptance have been stated previously. Simply put, the church was ready for change. Because of this readiness they encouraged the successes and overlooked the failures of the beginning years of his pastorate. The first three years (1985-1987) saw a steady increase in worship attendance and interest in the church. In this period of time the average age of the attenders at St. John's dropped from sixty-five (the figure given to him by the cabinet upon his appointment to the church) to age forty-eight (determined from information gathered from attendance registration of Sunday morning worship). The increase resulted, in part, from a concerted effort by the Council on Ministries to target children, youth and young adult populations. The next four years of ministry were plateau years as far as statistics were concerned. These years saw an average attendance of 135 in 1988, 135 in 1989, 135 in 1990, and 136 in 1991.

Of course, statistics do not tell the entire story of a church's growth. Important changes were in process spiritually as well. Many of those changes had to do with the personal pilgrimage of the pastor which found parallels in the life of the congregation of St. John's. In 1987-88, two important events transformed his life and ministry. The first was a prayer experience where he was humbled by God, and his motivation for ministry was redirected. The

second was that the pastor along with a layman of the church attended a Walk to Emmaus. Jesus, through the Emmaus movement, has dramatically changed the spiritual dynamics of St. John's.

As a result of these two experiences in the pastor's life, St. John's began to be a church vitally interested in prayer and spiritual renewal. Over eighty persons from St. John's have attended a Walk to Emmaus and the number is continuing to grow. The stated purpose of the Walk is to train and equip leadership for the local congregation. One result of the Emmaus movement is that a new breed of Christian leader has been created in St. John's. Many people from every age range have either found or rekindled a true commitment to Jesus Christ through the Walk to Emmaus. This commitment has resulted in visionary leadership and a willingness to take an active role in the ministry of the kingdom of God conducted through St. John's. Because of this, opportunities for ministry have to be created for the laity so that the call can be answered. One opportunity came through the Bethel Bible Series, an intensive program of Bible study. This program is designed to train teachers from the laity of the church so that they can teach the congregation. The two year teacher training finished in the spring of 1992. Twelve persons finished the two year course and were discipled in the Word of God and ready to teach others. One of the main concepts of this training is the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12. This covenant is characterized with the concept "blessed to be a blessing." This served to reinforce the laity's call to ministry.

Another vital factor in preparation for the vision was that in a bold move of faith the church decided to add a full time associate pastor in the area

of youth and young adults. David Skinner was hired in September of 1992 and he along with his wife Gena have been a tremendous asset to the church.

David truly has a heart for God and ministry and his addition to the church staff allowed for the expansion needed for God's vision to be implemented.

Briefly stated, the factors necessary for the receiving of God's vision were in place in the fall of 1992. Those factors were:

1. The church was open to change;
2. The church dedicated itself to prayer;
3. The church desired to grow;
4. The church had experienced renewal;
5. Lay leadership had emerged in the church;
6. The senior pastor had experienced renewal of his faith;
7. The senior pastor had seven years tenure and was trusted;
8. An excellent associate pastor had been added.

These factors, along with the community factors listed earlier, set the stage for the coming of God's vision.

The preparation for receiving the vision defies separation from its actual reception. The entire process blends together to form a whole. As Barna points out, the vision is often given first to the leadership of the church (30). St.

John's was no exception. Through a deep desire to see the kingdom of God break forth in Stamford, Texas, the pastor began to receive parts of the vision. It seemed as if God had orchestrated the entire situation and all of the pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fall into place. The preparation of the laity and the addition of an associate pastor signaled the time for the impartation of the

vision. The vision was articulated in the fall of 1992 through a sermon series entitled the "Mission of St. John's." Through the preparation of this series God imparted the vision. One prior sermon entitled "The Ministry of St. John's" preached in early July of 1992 dealt with the need for the laity to be in ministry and to prepare themselves for the ministry. The mission series then put flesh on the exact direction God desired for St. John's to travel.

The vision centered around five ministries: (1) prayer, (2) evangelism, (3) discipleship, (4) encouragement, and (5) spiritual warfare. Each of these areas were the topic of a sermon in the mission series. During the preaching of the series the final piece of the puzzle was added that launched the idea of Vision Fellowship. In previous years the Council on Ministries of the church had tentatively accepted the idea of a second worship service at St. John's to provide an alternative time and style of worship. The idea met limited resistance in the congregation as a whole because the sanctuary was only half full and a new service might drain some of the existing attenders out of the regular service. The time never seemed appropriate for launching this idea. During a time of sharing with David Skinner, the new associate pastor, about the vision, he supplied the answer to a specific need in the evangelism area and also the second worship service. He commented that another site for the worship service might allow the people of the community to respond more easily to the invitation to worship. Thus, the idea of Vision Fellowship was born. The other four areas of ministry were needed if this evangelism effort was to be successful. Definitely needed was the undergirding of prayer, and also opportunities for discipleship. The pastoral care emphasis of the

encouragement area would be valuable. The fifth part of the vision is "spiritual warfare." This phrase can have many meanings. In the context of St. John's and Vision Fellowship, it represents ministries that are intentional in directly combating the "spiritual forces of evil," spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 6:12. The people of St. John's had become aware of this spiritual battle and were willing to seek ways to impact the battle for the kingdom of God. This area of the vision contained three main ministries to be developed: (1) prayer, (2) deliverance ministries, and (3) healing ministries. The healing element of the warfare ministries would be necessary if unchurched people who had lived in the brokenness of the world were to become whole in body, soul, and spirit. It seemed that although the vision given by God was a comprehensive one for ministry for St. John's, the focal point would become Vision Fellowship.

In order to facilitate the communication and implementation of the vision, a ministry team was established with a person in charge of each area plus the two pastors on the team. The ministry team is an attempt to streamline the decision making process and add a place for lay leadership to serve. Also, the more lay participation in the vision the better it will be communicated and "owned" by the congregation. The selection of the ministry team was done through prayer by the two pastors. The persons chosen had shown gifts and interests in the specific area given to them. They were charged with the responsibility of prayer, vision, and administration of their respective area. The ministry team concept along with the leadership chosen was then presented to the annual charge conference of the church for acceptance and both were accepted. As a part of the team training, the team

attended a John Maxwell lay leadership seminar. At this time they were challenged to become active in the ministry of the church and given resources to aid in their personal ministry for the church.

The vision had been communicated to and accepted by the leadership of the church. The next step was to communicate the vision in such a way that the entire church would accept the vision. The previously mentioned charge conference was instrumental in this process. At the charge conference the vision was shared as well as the vehicles for its implementation and it all received hearty approval. The entire church had also heard the vision proclaimed through the sermon series, "The Mission of St. John's." This helped in the acceptance of the vision. The ministry team began work on fleshing out the specific ministries of each area. The mission statement and the outline below reveals their labor and also provided the basis for the ministries that needed to be developed. This mission statement and outline were also foundational in many of the instruments used to communicate the vision to the church.

St. John's people have received a vision from God and we seek to follow that vision for ministry. The vision defines our mission in five ways. We believe in the ministry of intercessory prayer. St. John's people are committed to the ministry of evangelism (sharing the love of Jesus with others so that they might receive Him and His love). We believe in discipleship (helping others to strengthen their relationships to Jesus). We encourage others through caring activities & personal concern. And the people of St. John's realize we are fighting a spiritual battle against real spiritual forces. We seek to help all who have been injured in the midst of the battle.

I. Prayer: St. John's Intercessors

A. St. John's Intercessors (Prayer chain and covenant prayer group)

B. Sunday 9:00 a.m. Prayer Group

C. Men's Prayer Breakfast

II. Evangelism: St. John's Witnesses

A. Visitation Teams

B. Worship Team for Alternative Service, 9:30 a.m. Sunday; Anthony's Building

C. Witness Team (further training in leading people to Christ)

III. Discipleship: St. John's Teachers

A. Bethel Leadership Training

B. Teaching Sunday School

C. Sponsoring Young Couples Home Group

D. Sponsors for Youth Groups

E. Leader's and Musicians for Children's Choirs

F. New Member Sponsors (1 on 1 discipleship for new members)

G. UMW or Busy Bees

H. Adult Choir

IV. Encouragement: St. John's Shepherds

A. Shut-in Communion

B. Light-Bite Meal (Wednesday)

C. Christmas Dinner

D. Visitation of Membership

1. Hospital

2. Shut-in

E. Funeral Meals

F. Altar Counselors

G. Love Bank (Put on a list so that you can meet the needs of the underprivileged in Stamford on a 1 on 1 basis)

V. Warfare: St. John's Directors

A. Counseling Team

B. Deliverance Team

This outline brought together the previously existing ministries with the ones that needed to be developed so that the entire congregation could grasp the vision. In many ways, the outline helped communicate the vision.

To involve the laity in ministry was an important concept of the vision. In order to do this, a Covenant Sunday was held during morning worship of December 13, 1992. This Sunday was a time where the people of St. John's covenanted with the church to be involved in those ministries outlined above. The choices were encouraged to be entered into through prayer. The covenant process and Sunday were announced from the pulpit, through the newsletter (see Appendix 1), and through a personal letter and covenant form sent to each member of St. John's (see Appendix 2). The congregation responded well on Covenant Sunday and this was evidence that the vision had truly been communicated. By the beginning of 1993 the entire vision had been accepted by St. John's. The time to focus on one of the top priorities, Vision Fellowship, now arrived.

Vision Fellowship became a top priority because it was a tangible expression of the entire vision for ministry. Each area of ministry represented in the vision had a useful purpose needed for the success of Vision Fellowship.

It also created a way to truly fulfill the great commission mandated in Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus says,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
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.

Two other benefits of Vision Fellowship were, as stated above, it would provide an opportunity for lay involvement in ministry and provide a possible solution to the problem of how to create and maintain church growth in a small town church in the midst of a declining community.

The launching of Vision Fellowship was a two fold opportunity. First, and foremost, it was an opportunity to reach a group of people in Stamford who were yet unreached. Because of some of the factors listed earlier, including the intimidation caused by the church edifice, the ministry team felt many people were not comfortable in responding to invitations to come. Others were not interested in the "established churches" of the community for various reasons. Therefore, Vision Fellowship was an alternative for these people. The second opportunity that Vision offered was a place for many people of St. John's to be in ministry. Many preparations had to be concluded before the first service could begin and these preparations offered many opportunities for the people of St. John's to actively participate in the ministry of Vision Fellowship.

The ministry team set a first service date of Sunday, March 7, 1993. They felt that 9:30 a.m. would be a beneficial time for the service in two respects. First, it was early enough to allow people to have a full Sunday for other

activities if they needed the time, yet it was not too early for the late risers who might want to attend. Second, it was during the Sunday school hour of St. John's so that the existing congregation would not be as tempted to attend the service and thus be absent from the regular worship at St. John's.

The ministry team outlined specific objectives that needed to be met before the first service could be launched effectively:

1. A suitable location must be found for Vision Fellowship services.
2. A phone survey of Stamford needed to be developed and conducted to find interested people.
3. A packet of information on St. John's and Vision Fellowship needed to be developed and sent to interested parties.
4. The opening needed to be advertised by word of mouth, in the local newspapers, through the church newsletter, and on the local marquee sign.
5. A ministry team to conduct praise and worship and do the teaching needed to be secured and trained.
6. The meeting place must be prepared for the opening.
7. Greeters needed to be recruited for the first six weeks so that the atmosphere of Vision Fellowship would be warm and inviting.

Within the next three months each of these objectives had been met. One benefit of meeting these objectives was that over fifty St. John's people took part in the ministry of Vision Fellowship in these preparatory stages. The following paragraphs detail the accomplishment of each of these objectives.

Objective one was to obtain a suitable location for Vision Fellowship services. This objective was realized by the benevolence of a committed

member of St. John's. Nordie Bayouth, a dentist in the community, also owns some rental property in Stamford. One prime location is located on the city square, by which most of the traffic of the community passes. The building, with 11,250 square feet of open space, two years previously had housed the Anthony's Department Store. When the idea of Vision Fellowship was communicated to the congregation, Dr. Bayouth offered the use of the building rent-free. Any modifications needed to the inside of the building were authorized at church expense and the utilities paid by St. John's. God truly provided a perfect location.

The second objective was to develop and conduct a phone survey of Stamford to determine the interest. The phone survey was developed by Phil McClendon, pastor, and David Skinner, associate pastor (see Appendix 3). The intent of the survey was simply to ascertain who would be interested in Vision Fellowship and to secure enough information from the interested parties to send them material concerning St. John's and Vision Fellowship. The survey was conducted in February. Approximately twenty volunteers handled the phones to do the survey. The information was then entered into a data base program so that it could be used as needed. The survey contacted 392 families of which 100 stated they were not attending any church. The survey results also showed 73 families expressed an interest in the new service.

The third objective was to develop and distribute a packet of information regarding St. John's and Vision Fellowship to people who had shown an interest in the service through the phone survey or otherwise. A packet of information was developed by the ministry team (see Appendix 4) and sent to

each interested party with a letter of invitation to Vision Fellowship the week prior to opening Sunday. The compilation of the packets was done by twenty volunteers from the church, which gave an additional group an opportunity to be involved in the ministry.

The fourth objective, to advertise by word of mouth, in the local newspapers, church newsletters, and on the city marquee was also successfully accomplished. John Martin, ministry team member in charge of evangelism, placed articles in the Stamford paper and also the Abilene, Texas newspaper (see Appendixes 5 and 6). The pastor, Phil McClendon prepared the newsletter articles (see Appendix 7) and secured the marquee sign for the advertisement of Vision Fellowship.

The fifth objective was to secure and train a ministry team for the services at Vision Fellowship. The desire was to offer an alternative to the traditional worship service offered by St. John's. The ministry team felt that a contemporary style of worship that might appeal to the unchurched, baby boomer generation would be advantageous. This service would have no ritual, have a time for fellowship and refreshments, include contemporary praise and worship music, and focus on a relationship with Jesus in the teaching time. The teaching was determined to be shared among a team of teachers to appeal to a wide range of people. With these wishes in mind the worship team was recruited. A full band including instrumentalists on the keyboard, guitar, bass guitar, and drums were enlisted. Also, two worship leaders, one male and one female, were recruited to lead the choruses along with substitutes for the bass guitar, drums, and guitar. All of these people came

from the ranks of the present St. John's membership except for the male worship leader who was a Lutheran and asked to be a part of the team. The teaching was to be shared between the pastor and associate pastor along with an Hispanic layman from a neighboring town, Victor Peña. He was recruited to appeal to the Hispanic population of Stamford.

The sixth objective was to prepare the meeting place for the opening service. As stated earlier the building used for Vision Fellowship had been vacant for two years. Much work needed to be done in order to prepare it for services. Signs were made for the windows so that people could easily locate the building. The large open space needed to be partitioned off so that a service could be conducted in a comfortable, cozy place. The partitioning was also necessary to create the proper acoustics for the music team. The utilities had to be turned on and each appliance checked. The place badly needed a general cleaning and minor maintenance performed. A sound system was secured and installed and chairs were purchased and moved in for seating. Two work days were scheduled in which the work was accomplished by approximately twenty-five volunteers from St. Johns.

The seventh and last objective was to secure greeters for the service to provide a warm and inviting atmosphere. In order to accomplish this objective a Sunday school class was recruited. This class was intergenerational and was familiar with many of the praise and worship choruses. They, along with the worship team, provided the greeters. The Mary-Martha Sunday school class, made up mostly of older widows, added to the atmosphere by providing homemade refreshments for the fellowship time. This again gave more

opportunity for St. John's people to be involved in the ministry of Vision Fellowship.

With the meeting of these objectives, Vision Fellowship prepared for its first Sunday, March 7, 1993.

Purpose

As stated earlier the problem to be addressed in St. John's United Methodist Church was one of growth. Fleshed out, the main question to be answered was how does a middle-sized church with the characteristics mentioned above, located in a community which is experiencing prolonged recession and decline, create and maintain church growth? The purpose of this project is to study one proposed solution to the problem of growth, a second, off-site worship service, Vision Fellowship, to see if church growth was created and maintained through its implementation.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create numerical growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?
2. In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?
3. How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?
4. Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through existing programs of St. John's?
5. Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what will contribute to the integration?

Definition of Terms

1. Church Growth: Making Christian disciples (winning and teaching) of the unchurched or nominally churched and integrating them into the life of a local congregation.
2. Vision: a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to his chosen servants and based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances (Barna 28).
3. Vision Fellowship: The second off-site worship service started by St. John's United Methodist Church in response to God's vision.
4. Unchurched: persons whose names do not belong on the church roll. They may have their name on a church roll but they do not attend, even occasionally. They do not make any financial contribution to a church. They have no personal ownership of a church, and they do not look to a church for rites of passage such as weddings and funerals. (Leading 56).

Methodology

This project studied and evaluated the implementation of Vision Fellowship as a church growth instrument. Statistical analysis was done over a one year period, March, 1993 through February, 1994, to determine both the amount and type of numerical growth. The figures for growth were taken from attendance figures for both Vision Fellowship and St. John's morning worship. This information partially provided the answers to research question one, concerning numerical growth. Next, interviews with both Vision Fellowship and St. John's attenders were conducted in the month of March 1994 to determine spiritual growth and the degree of integration between the

two entities. Ten randomly selected Vision attenders were selected for formal interviews and divided into two groups. Five were church attenders and five were unchurched. The interviews with the five church attenders who also attended Vision Fellowship helped answer research questions one, two, and five. The interviews with the five unchurched attenders of Vision Fellowship helped answer research questions two, three, four, and five. A second category of interviews, five unchurched persons who dropped out of Vision Fellowship, were selected by the pastor for informal interviews to determine why they had dropped out. These interviews helped answer research question three.

Ten St. John's members were randomly selected for interviews to determine the effect of Vision Fellowship on St. John's. The specific research questions answered by these interviews were questions two, and five.

Data from the experience and perspective of the pastor completed the study. All of this information was examined to answer the above research questions as stated and draw conclusions. Changes in Vision Fellowship were suggested for immediate implementation, and mistakes and successes noted for adaptation in future situations or by other churches.

Other Considerations

The scope of this study was narrowed to the community of Stamford and St. John's United Methodist Church. As stated earlier, Stamford is a small town in the midst of recession and decline. St. John's United Methodist Church is a middle-sized church that is bumping up against the "200 barrier" (Leading 26). The study was conducted entirely within these confines. The

concept of Vision Fellowship could be applicable on a wider scale to any middle-sized church that desires to grow in the midst of a stagnant or declining community.

The theological foundations for this study are found in the New Testament principles of evangelism and growth. The following passages and commentary will illuminate these principles and convey the imperative nature of these principles for the church.

1. Matthew 4:17-23

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. 23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

This passage shows two important aspects about Jesus and evangelism. It shows that Jesus himself was very interested in evangelism. He preaches a message of repentance and entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He calls Peter, Andrew, James and John to be a part of the kingdom and in his invitation encourages them to become evangelists themselves with the words, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." The two principles clearly illuminated here are that Jesus was involved in evangelism and called his disciples to be involved as well.

2. Matthew 9:37-38

37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

This passage again points out that evangelism is important in the mind of Jesus. In his teaching to his disciples he brings out two observations. First, the harvest is plentiful. In other words there is a need for evangelism because there are many who do not know Jesus and thus are not a part of the kingdom of God. Second, and more distressingly, the workers are few. Few are actively involved in the harvest operation. Jesus is not satisfied with this and he commands the disciples to ask God for harvesters. Concerning this passage Peter Wagner has developed the "harvest principle." In his book Leading Your Church to Grow, he states, "But while God ripens the harvest, He does not *reap* the harvest. He expects us to be His agents in reaping" (19). Jesus is interested in growth, and he calls each of his disciples to carry that interest as well.

3. Matthew 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

One of the most often cited passages for evangelism and church growth in the Bible is Matthew 28:18-20. The message is clear as Jesus teaches his disciples immediately before the Ascension about the responsibility to go and make disciples of all nations. The command, "go," is clearly articulated. One cannot sit and wait for people to come to Christ, but must actively go to others

with the message. What is the purpose of this going? Jesus commands us to make disciples. He then defines making disciples as a two-fold process. First, it is to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes the entry point into the kingdom. This conversion language denotes an acceptance of Christ and his lifestyle and the rejection of the world and its lifestyle. Evangelism as "disciplemaking" does not stop at the moment of conversion. Jesus continues to say that the disciples must teach the new converts to obey everything he has commanded them. In other words they must make disciples of them not just converts. Evangelism for Jesus was more than what many mean by the word today. Evangelism aimed at both conversion *and* discipleship. Jesus left no other possibility open in this passage or by his example.

4. Luke 9:1-6

1 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,
 2 and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 He told them: "Take nothing for the journey--no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. 4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. 5 If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." 6 So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

Jesus in this passage is sending out the twelve to preach the gospel. He highlights the importance of evangelism in this passage by the fact that he sends his disciples out to evangelize. Jesus' business was preaching the kingdom of God and he sent his disciples to preach it as well. This sending out was a part of his ministry of evangelism. With this in mind, it is important

that we not relegate evangelism to only a clergy activity.

5. Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus again states the importance of evangelism as he calls his disciples to be his witnesses. They must always witness to the fact that Jesus is the way to salvation and the hope of the world. In this passage he defines their power for evangelism as the Holy Spirit. He outlines the scope of their evangelism. First, it is Jerusalem, their immediate surroundings. The scope is then widened to include an area, Judea, then a foreign region, Samaria, and then to the end of the world. Through this teaching Jesus shows three evangelism principles: the priority of evangelism, the power for evangelism, and the scope of evangelism.

6. Acts 22:12-15

12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. 14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.'"

This passage in the book of Acts serves to point out that the early church was very interested in evangelism as well. Saul (later changed to Paul) was not one of the original disciples of Jesus. In the process of his conversion he was called to be a witness for Jesus. As can be seen from the rest of Paul's life, he was probably the greatest witness of all time as he traveled throughout the

Roman empire. Evangelism truly was a priority for Paul.

These passages, found in the New Testament, are only a portion of the scriptures which inform and help shape a theology of evangelism. They inform the church with important principles on evangelism that must be considered when undertaking any evangelism opportunity. These principles are (1) evangelism is commanded of Jesus' disciples by his example and his teaching; (2) the need for evangelism is ever present as there are always people who do not know Jesus; (3) evangelism is more than just making converts; it is making disciples and expanding the church. These principles are the theological foundations for this project. Vision Fellowship was created in response to a vision from God that commanded St. John's to evangelize regardless of the circumstances of church or community. Its creation met the need for evangelism for the 1,500 unchurched people in Stamford that have not been won in conventional ways. Its creation intended to provided a port of entry for people to come in contact with the discipling programs already in place at St. John's, such as Bethel Bibles Series and the Walk to Emmaus. The command is clear. The response is Vision Fellowship.

The following chapters of this dissertation build on the context presented in this first chapter. Chapter 2 entitled "A Review of Literature," is a review of the literature that informed the vision given to St. John's and specifically Vision Fellowship. Chapter 3 entitled "The Design of the Study," details the specifics of the methodology used in the study of Vision Fellowship. Chapter 4 entitled "Findings of the Study," organizes and reports the results of the study, and Chapter 5 entitled, "Summary and Conclusions," evaluates and interprets

the data gathered and offers any adaptations that might be of help to St. John's and others who find this study helpful.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

As the vision for the ministry began to unfold for St. John's United Methodist Church, important literary resources informed the process from beginning realization through implementation and on to evaluation. The review of these resources is divided into four sections. The first section examines the subject of vision. The second section deals with basic church growth principles. The third section of the chapter deals with the small town and middle-sized church. The fourth section explores the literature of new church starts. Resources from these four areas were chosen because of these four unique aspects of Vision Fellowship.

Since the original idea was attributed to God's vision for the church, one must understand the process of receiving a vision. The real meaning of the vision must not be lost because of a poor understanding of this vehicle of God's will. Especially helpful is the book, The Power of Vision, How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry by George Barna. This work is one of the most complete treatments of the subject of vision for ministry. Sections of other books are applicable to this review as well. These books are Leaders, The Strategies for Taking Charge, by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus; Future Edge, by Joel Arthur Baker; and Power to Follow, Grace to Lead, by David L. McKenna.

With the stated problem of growth being the reason for Vision Fellowship, basic church growth principles become imperative. There has been much written concerning church growth. The resources chosen for review and

use in this project are Understanding Church Growth by Donald McGavran, and Leading Your Church to Growth by Peter Wagner. Although there are many excellent resources in this area, these were chosen because of their importance to the overall church growth movement as well as their value to this specific project.

The third area for study deals with the small town and the middle-sized church. The small town, middle-sized church has unique problems and opportunities. St. John's United Methodist Church and Stamford fit very well into these categories. Therefore, this section of review becomes one of the most important to Vision Fellowship. The resources chosen for this section are The Small Town Church by Peter Surrey, and The Middle-Sized Church by Lyle Schaller.

The fourth area of review, church planting, is one that may not seem appropriate to this project. However, since Vision Fellowship is an off-site, second worship service, there are many similarities to a new church start; and because this approach is unusual with no literature dealing with it specifically, the information on new church starts is very important to the success of Vision Fellowship. Books used for research in this area are Church Planting for a Greater Harvest, by Peter Wagner, Planting Churches Cross-Culturally by David J. Hesselgrave, Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century by Charles L. Chaney, and 44 Questions for Church Planters by Lyle Schaller.

Because semi-structured interviews were needed in the data gathering process, a book on interviewing is needed for the evaluation of Vision Fellowship. The book chosen to help develop the interview strategy is

Interviewing, Principles and Practices, by Charles J. Stewart and William B. Cash, Jr. This book covers many different types of interviews and the appropriate uses of these interviews. It also helped in understanding the interview process and analyzing the data collected.

Vision

A most important concept to be understood for the success of Vision Fellowship was the concept of "vision." Since the plan for growth was given as the result of a vision, to understand this much used but little understood concept became imperative. George Barna in his book, The Power of Vision, How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry, offers one of the best resources on this subject. The entire work is excellent. The components of receiving a vision from God for ministry are stated in Barna's own words: "First, you must know yourself. Second, you must know the ministry environment in which you reside. Third, you must know God intimately. Fourth, you must gain objective wisdom related to your search" (79). Each of these components were accomplished either before or as the vision was being given for Vision Fellowship. The wisdom offered by Barna, extremely useful for Vision Fellowship, is that true vision for ministry comes from God. Although God may use human means to transmit and share the vision, he is the ultimate source. The entire process that launched Vision Fellowship was premised on the fact that God wanted it to happen. An assurance of this idea can only come when a church knows itself, knows the ministry environment, knows God, and gains objective wisdom concerning the vision. Because the people of St. John's recognized this idea as a vision

from God, they were willing to take the steps necessary to launch Vision Fellowship. Barna also reveals the character of God's vision. He reveals the important aspects of the character of vision as change-orienting, challenging, empowering, being long-term, being customized, being detailed, being people-oriented, and revealing of a promising future. Each of these characteristics fit the vision for ministry received by St. John's. Another very important discussion concerning the subject of vision centers around "vision killers." Barna insists there are some very dangerous enemies to vision within the church. The list of the most prominent "vision killers" contains tradition, fear, stereotypes, complacency, fatigue, and short-term thinking (122-129). When these enemies are not adequately addressed, a true vision that is accepted by a church can be quenched. St. John's needed to combat the "vision killers" and remain steadfast to the vision received from God.

Another important work that informs an understanding of the concept of vision is Leaders, The Strategies for Taking Charge, by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus. They define vision as "a mental image of a possible and desirable future state of the organization" (89). Bennis and Nanus go on to articulate that a vision must take into consideration the past, present, and future of the organization (97). The various contexts of all three time frames must be considered if the vision is to be effective. Also, for a vision to be effective it usually springs forth from the leader of the organization who is able to select, synthesize, and effectively communicate that vision to the rest of the organization (101). These principles of vision were followed in Vision Fellowship's beginning and implementation. The leadership of St. John's had

carefully examined their past. They were very aware of the present circumstances, and they were committed to following God's vision for the future. As stated in the background section of Chapter 1, the vision came to the leadership of St. John's, who then refined and focused the vision and finally communicated the vision in such a way that it could be accepted.

Another book from the secular viewpoint that gives some helpful understanding about the concept of vision is Joel Arthur Barker's Future Edge. Although the language of vision is not specifically used, Barker alludes to vision through his understanding of "paradigm shift." He defines a paradigm shift as, "a change to a new game, a new set of rules" (37). In the process of the paradigm shift there must be one who envisions the new game. According to Barker, this person is the "paradigm shifter" (56). In other words the paradigm shifter is the one who receives the vision and begins the process of realizing it. Two important aspects of the paradigm shift useful for Vision Fellowship were: (1) at times, change (a paradigm shift) is necessary for success (28); and (2) a change to a new paradigm causes some people to be threatened (69). Vision Fellowship was a change from an old pattern which made these aspects of paradigm shifts applicable.

Another book that deals with the concept of vision is Power to Follow, Grace to Lead, by David L. McKenna. As does Barna, McKenna deals not only with the substance of the vision but he correctly identifies the source of the vision for a Christian. In the secular works just cited, the source of the vision seems to be the context, situation, and circumstances that surround a person. McKenna states that the source of vision is Jesus (87). He also states the

importance of the sharpening the vision in process (85). These two principles concerning vision were very important to the success of Vision Fellowship. The vision that motivates the ministry had to be from Jesus and that vision had to be continually sharpened and refocused as the ministry proceeded. A key ingredient to any understanding of vision is the spiritual quality of the concept. In Christian endeavors one cannot be satisfied with the secular idea of the source of vision, rather, that source must be God. If it is not, then the work attempted is outside the will of God and is less productive for the kingdom of God. In the worst case scenario, the idea becomes counter-productive to the kingdom of God.

Each of these works was important because of the visionary nature of the ministry of Vision Fellowship. The principles concerning vision, change, and leadership found within these works and alluded to above needed to be in place if the ministry was to be effective for the kingdom of God. Because the source of the vision was Jesus, an assurance of God's blessing and a confidence for the entire church to proceed with this ministry was given. In other words, not only was there a general biblical commission to "go and make disciples," but also a specific communication from God to the people of St. John's to grow. God, not only gave the directive but also provided the vehicle, Vision Fellowship, to accomplish the directive.

Church Growth

Because the essence of this project was in the church growth area, a correct understanding of church growth was necessary for Vision Fellowship to be successful. There has been much debate, especially with the advent of the

organized church growth movement, charging church growth people with an over emphasis on numbers. It seems that many see a contrast between growth numerically and growth spiritually. This concern is valid, but the belief that numerical growth and spiritual growth are mutually exclusive is not. Church growth experts such as Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner make this clear in their writings. McGavran in his book, Understanding Church Growth, deals with this misconception as well as offering many usable principles to aid in church growth. McGavran writes from a missions perspective and uses his experience in various cultures to glean important cross-cultural concepts that provide a foundation for a correct understanding of church growth. His main emphasis is to promote aggressive and informed mission activity in the world. With this as his focus someone might question the application of the main principles of this book to a local situation such as Vision Fellowship. Two of its assertions validate its use for the local situation. First, the theological understanding outlined in the book is true whether the target of the application is local or foreign. Second, there were some cross-cultural aspects to ministry to be attempted at Vision Fellowship. The very idea of an off-site, alternative worship service implied the need for ministries to reach a different population. With this in mind some of the more applicable concepts from McGavran's book follow.

In the theological section of his book McGavran argues very convincingly that numerical growth is a biblical mandate. He says at the beginning of Chapter 3, "In spite of all, the thesis of this chapter is that--for the welfare of the world, for the good of mankind--according to the Bible, one task

is paramount. Today's supreme task is effective multiplication of churches in the receptive societies of the earth" (49). This principle applied to Vision Fellowship supported the need for an off-site worship service in Stamford because of the 1500 unchurched people in Stamford who were not being reached by established churches. A "new" ministry was needed in order to reach these people. These people had either not heard the message of the gospel communicated clearly for them or they had some type of negative experience with organized religion. In either case, Vision Fellowship was to provide an entry point into the kingdom. It offered another opportunity for people to hear the gospel. It also offered a new form of organized religion. Many of the trappings of the established church were intentionally omitted so that some of the obstacles to the kingdom in the unchurched person's mind were removed.

A second principle that was very useful from McGavran is that, "revival bears a close relationship to church growth" (163). For the purpose of this discussion, revival is defined as a movement of the Holy Spirit which brings about a renewal of New Testament Christianity (164). He goes on to state that the exact nature of the relationship between revival and church growth is hard to describe. In some places revival happens without numerical growth, and in other places numerical growth happens without revival. In the final analysis, however, McGavran clarifies seven different ways that revival is related to church growth. Five ways that relate to Vision Fellowship are summarized below:

1. Revival brings numerical growth when Christians are in contact with non-Christians of the same homogeneous unit and use spiritual power to witness.

2. Revival is more likely to lead to growth in an already growing congregation rather than a socially involved stagnant church.

3. A revival movement is more productive for growth if individual members are vitally interested in church growth and know who the receptive people are; if members carry on an ongoing program of growth over the years; and if programs and policies are developed with discernment of what the Holy Spirit has already used to provide growth in the area.

4. A revival movement has more chance of great growth if focused on the receptive persons of their own population; if leaders from within the group are discovered and trained; and if all the people are educated and trained biblically.

5. A revival movement also leads to great growth when church growth and knowledge are seen as important (McGavran 179-180).

The principle of revival and church growth informed the Vision Fellowship model. The Emmaus movement created a revival in the midst of St. John's. It would be helpful for growth if this revival could be exported to Vision Fellowship and allow indigenous growth to take place in that context. An additional need was to convince the membership of Vision Fellowship themselves to be involved in witnessing and church growth. They had unchurched contacts; and when they saw growth as their responsibility and priority, they had more influence on those contacts than anyone else.

Peter Wagner, a long time professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, also delineates many church growth principles applicable to Vision Fellowship. In his book, Leading Your Church to Growth, he explores the partnership between the pastor and people of a congregation which leads to growth. This book was valuable on two fronts in the Vision Fellowship model. First, there were principles that related to the existing congregation of St. John's as they prepared to launch Vision Fellowship for growth. Second, the relationship between the new members gathered at Vision Fellowship and the pastor was illuminated through the principles of Wagner's book.

Some of the principles that were very beneficial to St. John's as well as Vision Fellowship are the following. Wagner feels a very important component to growth is a pastor who is a possibility thinker and who can mobilize the church for growth. This component is of paramount importance to the successful, growing church (35). His book focuses on this component of church growth. He looks at this need from the perspective of the pastor and then from the perspective of the congregation. Attributes of the pastor that contribute to growth are:

1. The pastor must assume responsibility for growth (46).
2. The pastor must be willing to work hard (50).
3. The pastor must be to share the ministry with other staff and laity (55).
4. The pastor must be willing to have members that the pastor is not personally involved with in a pastoral sense (58).

5. The pastor must revise non-growth theology in himself and congregation (61).

The laity of the church must also pay the price for growth. Here is the price a congregation must pay:

1. They must agree to follow leadership interested in growth (63).
2. The congregation must spend the money needed for growth (64).
3. They must change their fellowship groups and patterns (65).
4. They must allow different people into the leadership of the church, including new lay-people and pastors (67).

An important principle is that long pastorates are essential for church growth. Wagner states, "Study after study has reinforced the positive correlation between ministerial longevity and church growth" (69).

In his studies Wagner has found some interesting correlations between pastoral leadership styles and effective growth in churches. Wagner asserts that church growth potential increases in direct proportion to the leadership of the pastor versus the leadership of the congregation. Pastoral roles that exemplify the pastor as leader are: leader, visionary, goal setter, and chairperson of the board. Pastoral roles that allow the congregation to be leader are: administrator, implementer, enabler, and member of the board (101).

Wagner states, "the more the pastor can devote time and energy to being a *leader*, rather than an *administrator*, the more growth potential" (101). This concept is shown graphically in figure 1 (101).

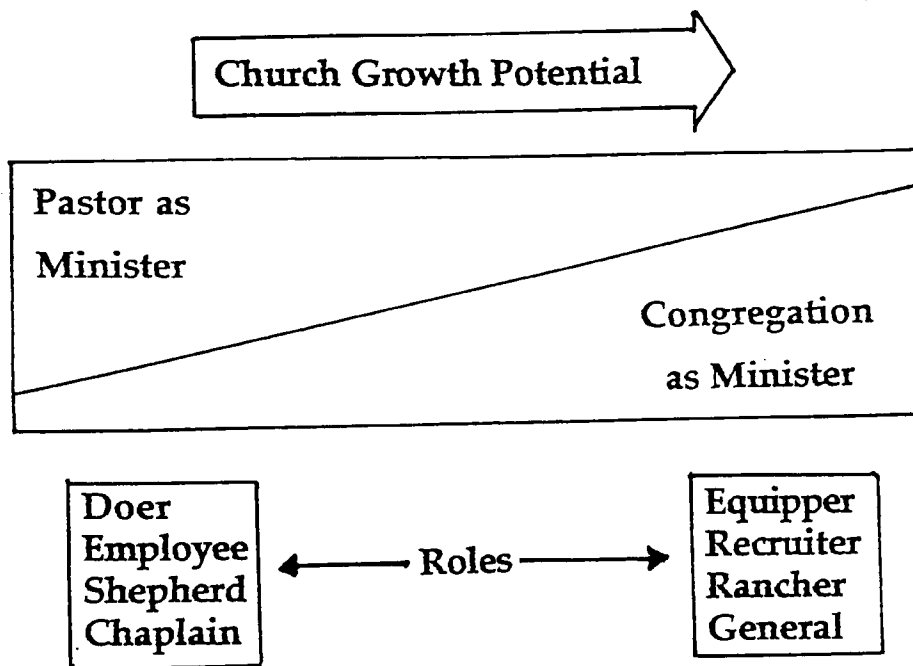


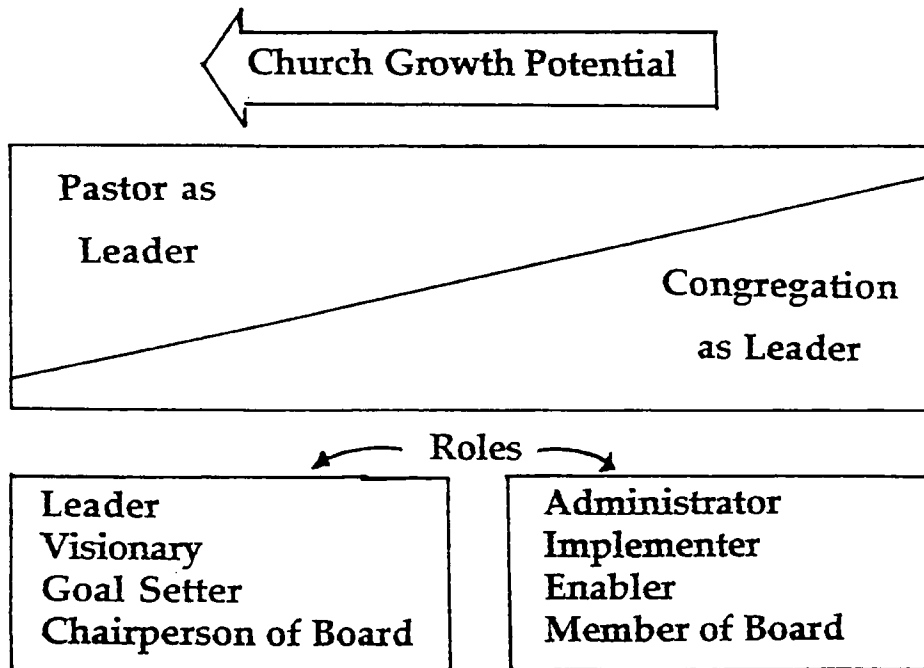
Figure 1

Pastoral Leadership Roles

Another interesting comparison is that as the congregation decides to become more involved in ministry, taking that responsibility from the pastor, more church growth potential is created. Pastoral roles that demonstrate this condition of a congregation are, the pastor as minister: doer, employee, shepherd, chaplain. Pastoral roles that show the congregation has chosen ministry are: equipper, recruiter, rancher, general. Wagner explains,

The church growth potential . . . where the pastor is expected to do the ministry of the church, is exceedingly low around and past the 200 barrier. It can work in small churches, but the church will find it has a ceiling on growth. Growth potential increases . . . where the pastor actually does less and less of the ministry of the church. This does not mean the ministry is neglected. It means that the people in the congregation decide to become ministers through the use of their spiritual gifts. (134-135)

This concept is also shown vividly in graph form in Figure 2 (134).



Pastoral Ministry Roles

There must be a balance between the pastor and the congregation. For effective church growth to take place, the pastor must have strong leadership qualities and the congregation must have strong ministry qualities.

Wagner gives many more principles that were valuable for Vision Fellowship. Those listed above, undergirded the foundation for the ministry of Vision Fellowship. The congregation and the pastor had to be willing to pay the price for growth. Also, for this new ministry to create growth, the pastoral leadership had to be strong in the "leadership" areas mentioned by Wagner and the congregation had to take up the tasks of ministry. As related in Chapter 1, this balance was beginning to be struck at St. John's. The entire vision which allowed the laity to become actively involved in ministry was in process.

Small Town and Middle Sized Church

The next area for review dealt with the small town church and the middle sized church. This was the context for the creation of Vision Fellowship. A true understanding of these two factors had to be gained for the successful implementation of the ministry.

The resource used to explore the principles of the middle sized church was The Middle Sized Church, Problems and Prescriptions, by Lyle E. Schaller. This resource has already been quoted in Chapter 1. The problems outlined in Chapter 1 and supported by Schaller deal with the paradoxes of the middle sized church which Schaller terms "awkward" (99). These paradoxes can be summed up by realizing these churches have ministry and program needs that must be met in order to grow but they also have limited resources, both financial and human, to use in meeting the needs. Schaller explores these paradoxes and offers solutions in his book.

Schaller asserts, "the laity tend to underestimate the size, resources, and potential of the congregation to which they belong" (90). The solution is for the laity to "act their size" (91). Before effective growth can happen the church's ability to grow must be realized. St. John's understood this concept and made the necessary changes in order to grow. This concept is not unlike the ones listed above by Wagner when he states that people must be willing to pay the price. For reasons enumerated in Chapter 1, St. John's was acting its size in many respects. The concept that St. John's had the ability to grow was one that had to be constantly scrutinized if growth was to continue.

Several characteristics of small town churches as described by Peter

Surrey's The Small Town Church were explored in Chapter 1. The book is written in allegorical style and many of the principles of the small town church are expressed in fictional vignettes based on true life experiences. As stated in Chapter 1 there were three main characteristics of small town churches that fit the St. John's situation. First, many small towns have a closed social structure that is difficult for outsiders to penetrate (21). Second, many small town communities and churches are resistant to change (31). Third, many small town churches view pastors with tolerance not trust (35). This understanding and the actual state of St. John's in relation to these characteristics was vital to the success of the vision. As stated and supported in Chapter 1, St. John's had dealt with each one.

The ministry situation to which Vision Fellowship belongs was definitely the small town, middle sized church. One great advantage for Vision Fellowship was that those trying to establish the ministry were aware of the characteristics and solutions to the problems caused by these characteristics. The very fact that Vision Fellowship was attempted was evidence that many of the problems were addressed.

Church Planting

The fourth area for review, church planting, may seem inappropriate for an off-site, second worship service. The reason this genre was chosen was that many of the principles of launching and maintaining Vision Fellowship were new church principles. The most obvious difference was that, at least in the beginning, Vision Fellowship was identified as a part of St. John's. The advantages and disadvantages of this relationship were explored and are

reported in the research section of this paper. To explore the relationship of Vision Fellowship with a new church start, four books were chosen.

The first book chosen, 44 Questions for Church Planters, by Lyle E. Schaller, has already been mentioned in Chapter 1. Each of these books on church planting give arguments for new churches in the beginning sections of the book. Schaller's book is no different. Chapter 1 is entitled "Why Start New Churches?" In this chapter, he persuasively argues for church planting. Using convincing statistical information, Schaller proves that new churches grow the kingdom of God much faster than existing churches (27). Another reason for planting new churches that Schaller lists is the provision of a different opportunity for worship, especially concerning the style of worship (28). He makes a very interesting observation as he states,

Scores of new missions have declared the secret of their success in reaching the unchurched is a result of a different approach to ministry. They contend that a worship service designed for already committed believers seldom will be meaningful to those with no background in the Christian faith. This generalization applies to the design of that worship experience, the choice of hymns, the content of the sermon, the place of instrumental music, the reading of Scripture, the announcements, the proclamation of the faith, the prayers, and the benediction. Dozens even go so far as to offer every week one worship experience for the unchurched and new believers and another and a substantially different worship service designed for believers. This approach to ministry contrasts sharply with at least a few long-established churches that assume one worship service on Sunday morning can be a meaningful experience for both believers, regardless of the stage of their religious pilgrimage, and for the curious non-believers. (28-29)

This contention served as a foundational element in the approach of Vision Fellowship. The need to provide an alternative place and style of worship to reach the unchurched was a main ingredient to the vision that

established Vision Fellowship.

Another chapter that greatly informed Vision Fellowship from 44 Questions for Church Planters is entitled "The Multi-Site Option" (56). This was exactly what Vision Fellowship provided for St. John's. Schaller states,

They have chosen to be multi-site congregations. This usually means that the congregation continues as one legal corporation with one governing board, one staff, one budget, one building fund, and one membership roll, but with two (or more) worship services on Sunday morning, two Sunday schools, and occasionally, two sets of trustees. (56)

As one can easily understand, Vision Fellowship took on some of these characteristics. The difference was that most of these multi-site congregations were established for a different purpose than Vision Fellowship. Usually, the reasons deal with community or local church demographics. Either the church is located in a transitional neighborhood or there is not enough room for expansion at the present site. Vision Fellowship, however, was specifically for growth.

Schaller goes on to reveal four outcomes of the multi-site strategy. Most often the new site congregation separates and becomes an entity of its own. A second outcome is that those of the old location see the value of the new site and become a part of the new location church, closing the old location church. A third option is to exist as two congregations of the same church with no specific objective to unite or to separate. Schaller comments that this seldom happens. A fourth outcome is "to design and perpetuate" the multi-site congregational church permanently (56-57).

This fourth outcome was and continues to be the objective of Vision

Fellowship. Part of the original vision was to begin something new and at the same time have the benefits of an established congregation for moral, financial, spiritual, and material support.

Another important resource in the area of church planting is Church Planting for a Greater Harvest, by C. Peter Wagner. In the beginning of the book Wagner argues convincingly for new churches. Much information in the book dealt directly with Vision Fellowship. One of the essentials for church planting for Wagner is prayer (46). He shares four aspects of prayer that are important for the success of a new church start:

1. The leaders themselves should improve their own prayer life.
2. They must develop the habit of group or corporate prayer.
3. They must enlist personal intercessors for the church planter and other leaders.
4. They must be aware of spiritual warfare (46-50).

The original vision establishing Vision Fellowship incorporated many of these elements in the ministry of St. John's. Prayer was deemed one of the main ministries in the beginning. Another main ministry for St. John's coming through the vision was warfare. The reality of a spiritual battle and how to combat the "spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places," as Paul says in Ephesians 6: 12, needed to be understood. Prayer for receptive hearts and counseling and deliverance ministries for the purpose of ministering to those wounded in and by the world had to be in place. This was imperative in regards to the target population of Vision Fellowship, the unchurched. Wagner's assertion confirms the great importance of these two ministry areas.

Another principle that was very beneficial for the purposes of Vision Fellowship is found in the chapter entitled "Twelve Good Ways to Plant a Church" (59). The seventh way Wagner calls, "the multi-campus model." This model is much like the multi-site church that Schaller mentions in 44 Questions for Church Planters. He cites examples that deal mainly with large churches in metropolitan areas. The dynamics were much different in a small town situation. The potential for growth was not as great in Stamford; however, because of the unchurched, the need was still great for the St. John's situation. Wagner does not fully endorse this method of church planting because of the lack of research data on it. He still holds it up as a viable model to attempt.

Wagner in the final part of the book deals with the pragmatic strategies on how to actually start a new church. One need is to develop a core group for the church. There are many ways to secure this core. The three methods mentioned by Wagner and used at Vision Fellowship are hiving off, advertising, and telemarketing (98, 107-108). Hiving off is using some persons from a previous congregation to establish a core group (98). Advertising is done through the local media outlets, making the information on the new church available to the public (107). Telemarketing is done by telephoning the community to invite unchurched or interested persons to become part of the church (108). Each one of these areas meet with success. The success of these three strategies was determined in relation to the specific context of Vision Fellowship as each of these areas were used to help establish Vision Fellowship. Many other pragmatic considerations are discussed by Wagner and

were valuable to the ministry.

Another resource in church planting that played a somewhat minor role in the informational resourcing of Vision Fellowship is Charles L. Chaney's Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century. Chaney deals with the larger role of the general church in church planting. Vision Fellowship was a local initiative and not involved with a general church strategy. The only connection with the general church was through reporting and moral support. Some information from Chaney's book that provided some insight to Vision Fellowship comes in the form of the preparation of the church for a new church start. Chaney says six steps are necessary to prepare a local congregation to start a new church. First, the congregation must actualize their mission philosophy (83). In other words, the church must put into practice their professed philosophy on missions. Second, the local church must be aware of the social, cultural, and geographic limitations in a new church start. Some barriers may not be able to be crossed easily, if at all (83). A church must defeat "local-church myopia," a tendency to not look beyond the local congregation to the "fields white unto harvest" (84). Chaney says that one must also be honest about small church efficiency. He states that small churches are much more efficient for evangelism than large churches (84). Fifth, was the need to develop a congregational strategy for planting new churches (85). This concept was not applicable to Vision Fellowship. Sixth, cultivate the spirit of winning. Chaney says, "A church that expects great things from God can attempt great things for God" (86).

The final book to be reviewed is David J. Hesselgrave's Planting Churches Cross-Culturally, A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions. This book is an excellent resource on the theology and theory of new church planting. Two areas were vital for use concerning Vision Fellowship. First, Hesselgrave makes a strong appeal for cross-cultural church planting. Using Ralph Winters's categories he divides the world's population into four categories. These four categories are "active Christians" with a worldwide population of approximately 219 million. "Inactive Christians" (uncommitted, in name only) numbering around 1,000 million. Most evangelism is done in this area. "Culturally near non-Christians" number about 500 million and are non-Christians with minimal cultural barriers. The last category is "culturally distant non-Christians." Barriers must be crossed linguistically, socially, economically or culturally in order to evangelize these peoples effectively (36-37). Since Vision Fellowship was located in a small town, this designation may seem unimportant. The fact was, however, that a part of the unchurched in Stamford fit in the third category. A large population of unchurched Black and Hispanic people needed to be reached through Vision Fellowship. One effort to reach this segment of the unchurched population was to bring Victor Peña into the preaching rotation. Although difficult to cross these barriers, Hesselgrave points out the great need.

Another very important understanding of the theological foundations for evangelism and new church planting is given throughout the book's pages. Hesselgrave develops his book around the example of Paul in the book of Acts, which he calls "The Pauline Cycle." The major components are as follows:

- 1) Missionaries Commissioned--Acts 13:1-4; 15:39, 40.
- 2) Audience Contacted--Acts 13:14-16; 14:1; 16:13-15.
- 3) Gospel Communicated--Acts 13:17ff.; 16:31.
- 4) Hearers Converted--Acts 13:48; 16:14, 15.
- 5) Believers Congregated--Acts 13:43.
- 6) Faith Confirmed--Acts 14:21, 22; 15:41.
- 7) Leadership Consecrated--Acts 14:23.
- 8) Believers Commended--Acts 14:23; 16:40.
- 9) Relationships Continued--Acts 15:36; 18:23.
- 10) Sending Churches Convened--Acts 14:26, 27; 15:1-4 (Hesselgrave 58).

This cycle is described in greater detail through the rest of the book. It can best be communicated and understood through the above pictorial graph that is a combination of ten graphs Hesselgrave presents through the entire book (see Figure 3).

"The Pauline Cycle" gave a biblical and theological foundation for the establishment of Vision Fellowship. Since Vision Fellowship's goal was to evangelize and create church growth in a stagnant situation, the example of the successful methods of the apostle Paul were very confirming of the strategy. The ministry sought to take people through each of the ten steps of the cycle so that the great commission could be fulfilled. As can be seen, if all ten steps were completed, the command to make disciples would have been reached.

Conclusion

This literature review has brought forth a wealth of principles that were valuable for the implementation and success of Vision Fellowship. To provide a more concise and readily accessible listing of these principles a summary follows. The order of these principles is not prioritized, merely grouped with like principles.

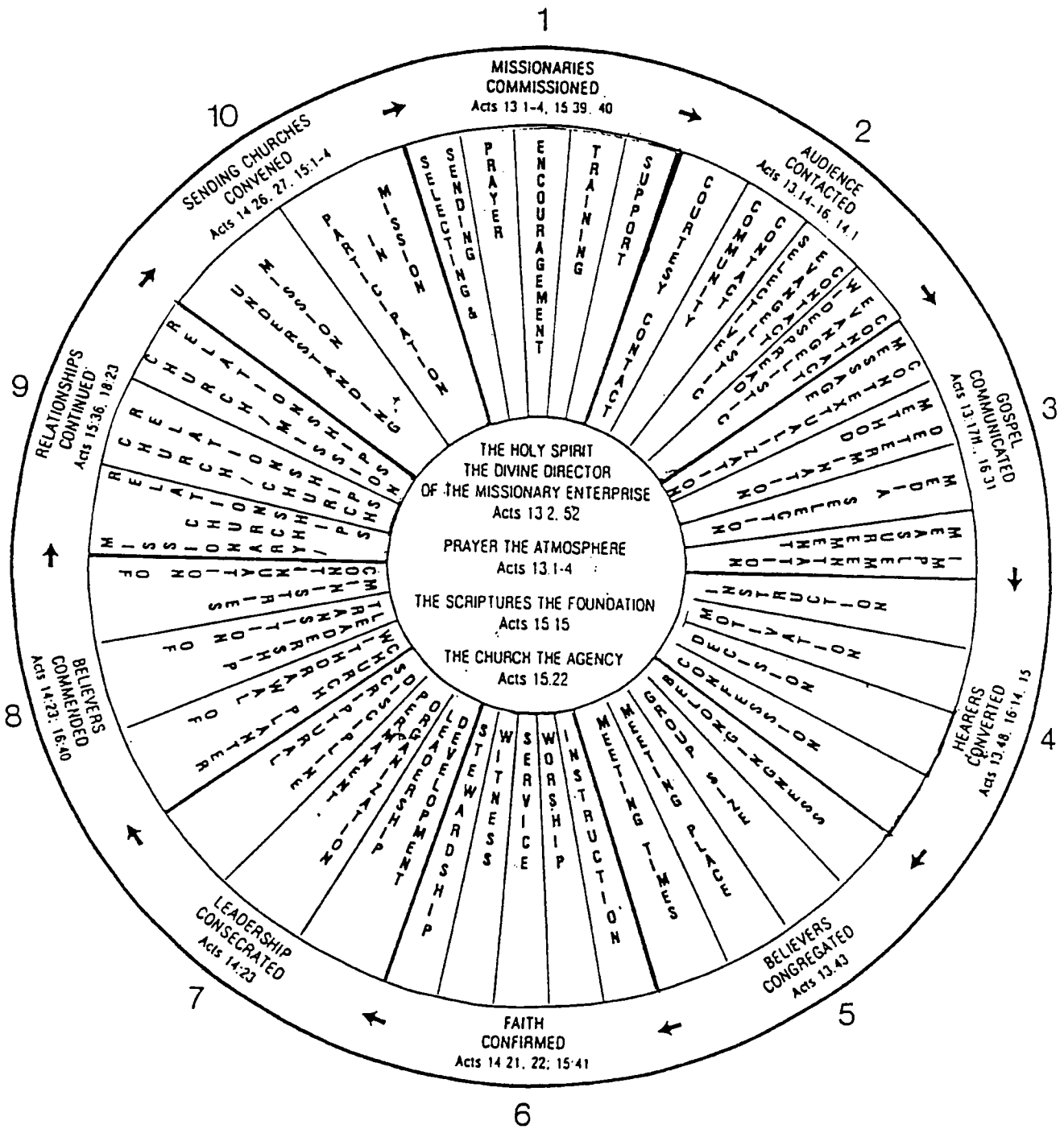


Figure 3

The Pauline Cycle

One of the main principles Vision fellowship incorporated was to be true to the original vision given by God to the people of St. John's. A vision from God is the paramount consideration in all ministry. As a part of this vision St. John's realized their ability to grow. The resources were and are available if used wisely and under the direction of the Spirit. One of the main components of the vision and also a main principle incorporated in Vision Fellowship was to reach the unchurched of Stamford. This meant some cross-cultural ministry had to be attempted. The ministry was not social gospel oriented. There was some social action involved but the main emphasis of the ministry was and is to make disciples. This implied more than making church goers, or making converts. To be true to the great commission, Vision was charged with the responsibility of converting, training, and sending.

Throughout the entire process, the spiritual aspects of ministry had to be kept in center focus. Success of this venture was not only measured by statistics but also by obedience to the vision given by God. Prayer was never forgotten. It was the foundation for the implementation and continuation of the ministry. The biblical pattern of Acts described by Hesselgrave as "The Pauline Cycle (58), had to be followed.

"The Pauline Cycle" impacted Vision Fellowship in various ways. First, the principle of complete discipleship as modeled by Acts and described by Hesselgrave was a foundational understanding for the entire ministry. Second, Vision Fellowship was a new field of ministry for the sending church of St. John's. This gave the people of St. John's an avenue for completing the cycle. Third, Vision Fellowship was not an end unto itself. The purpose of Vision

Fellowship was to make disciples who would also participate in mission.

The specific context of Vision Fellowship carried importance.

Characteristics of the middle-sized church had to be taken into account as well as the characteristics of the small town in general and Stamford in particular.

In order for Vision Fellowship to be effective, St. John's had to be willing to "pay the price" of growth. They could not underestimate the potential of their congregation. The most important characteristic of a small town church that had to be understood for St. John's was that small town churches are many times resistant to change. St. John's had to take care not to be resistant to positive change and thus stalemate the ministry of Vision Fellowship.

Another factor in the context of Vision Fellowship was that it represents one part of a multi-site congregation. Such churches have unique problems of their own with which to deal. Of specific importance, since Vision Fellowship was a multi-site congregation, was to consciously work for Vision Fellowship to be included under the umbrella of St. John's but allow enough autonomy to be viable as an entity of its own. This feat was and continues to be a delicate balancing act that needed to be continually scrutinized.

Other principles had to be considered. The leadership, both lay and clergy, had to remain visionary in nature and committed to growth even when the way became difficult. The practical factors, advertising, establishing a core group, and telemarketing, had to be taken into consideration if the off-site worship service was to be a success.

There were many other principles which had to be and must continue to be incorporated into the ministry of Vision Fellowship. This short summary

offers only a partial list. The success or failure of the ministry was and is a matter of the ability of St. John's United Methodist Church people to follow the leading of God, to be empowered by His Spirit, and to be faithful in fulfilling their ministry through Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

This chapter seeks to establish and report the intricacies of the design of the entire project. Each part of the study is listed and discussed for a clear understanding of the process.

The Problem Restated

The problem restated and simply put is the need for church growth. The purpose of this project was to implement and evaluate a strategy for growth called Vision Fellowship. Vision Fellowship is an alternative, second, off-site worship service to reach the unchurched of Stamford (a declining community) by the congregation of St. John's United Methodist Church. In Chapter 2 evangelism and the resultant church growth were defined by the term "disciplemaking." The reason for that discussion was to lay the foundation for the study of growth at Vision Fellowship. Because growth, in this context, implies more than mere numbers but also includes some form of spiritual growth toward being an effective disciple, spiritual growth must also be measured. Numerical growth will be studied through evaluating statistical information. Additional information was gained through interviews to determine aspects of the numerical growth such as race, age, and church status. Spiritual growth is much harder to measure. In order to get a measurement of this type of growth, spiritual growth will be evaluated through interviews with people from St. John's and Vision Fellowship. The interviews sought to determine the spiritual growth of each person interviewed. Spiritual growth in some respects is subjective, therefore, questions seeking to determine the

interviewees' own perception about their personal spiritual growth were asked, as well as questions that gave information for a more objective measuring of spiritual growth. Some objective measurements were continued involvement in worship and also involvement in their own ministry.

Implementation of Vision Fellowship

In Chapter 1, the establishment of Vision Fellowship was discussed. A short review of the process is needed so that the method of research can be understood.

The entire idea of Vision Fellowship was the result of a vision given by God to the St. John's people. That vision was to bring the unchurched in Stamford, Texas into the kingdom of God. This objective sought to be accomplished through Vision Fellowship, an alternative, off-site, second worship service. The preliminary factors, both motivational and practical, for the establishment of the service were accomplished. Here were the specific objectives that the ministry team set forth which needed to be in place.

1. A suitable location was found to hold Vision Fellowship services.
2. A phone survey of Stamford was developed and conducted to find interested people.
3. A packet of information on St. John's and Vision Fellowship was developed and sent to interested parties.
4. The opening was advertised by word of mouth, in the local newspapers, through the church newsletter and on the local marquee sign.
5. A ministry team to conduct praise and worship and do the teaching was secured and trained.

6. The meeting place was prepared for the opening.

7. Greeters were recruited for the first six weeks so that the atmosphere of Vision Fellowship was warm and inviting.

The specifics of how these objectives were met are explained in pages 20-23 of Chapter 1. The foundation for the launching of Vision Fellowship was in place by March 7, 1993, the date of the first service.

Time Schedule

The next step in the process of study of Vision Fellowship was to allow enough time to pass for valid information to be gathered. Through consultation with Dr. Leslie Andrews, Doctor of Ministry Director of Asbury Theological Seminary, a time period of at least seven months was established. Vision Fellowship would continue as a part of the ministry for at least this length of time, in order to provide enough time for the statistics and information gathered through the interviews to be valid. The actual time period used in this study was one year, March 1993 through February 1994.

Data Collection

For the data collection to be effective, it had to answer adequately the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Those research questions are:

1. In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create numerical growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?
2. In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?
3. How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?

4. Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through existing programs of St. John's?

5. Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what will contribute to the integration?

With these research questions guiding the data collection, the effectiveness of Vision Fellowship for creating church growth was measured.

Attendance Records

The average worship attendance figures were studied to determine if growth took place. The areas of statistical information kept were worship attendance by week, the number who attended at Vision Fellowship who did not also attend that week at St. John's, the names of all attenders, the number who participated in St. John's from Vision Fellowship, and the number of persons that joined the St. John's United Methodist Church through Vision Fellowship. Statistics needed from St. John's were ten year attendance figures (so a comparative analysis could be done), present attendance figures, the number of St. John's people that decided to attend Vision Fellowship, and the attendance figures for St. John's without the Vision attendance figures included. These statistics were studied to determine the growth trends.

Interviews

In order to offer more complete data informing the research questions three types of interviews were conducted. The following information categorizes the interviews and reveals the interview methodology of each type. The interview instruments were pre-tested on ministry team members of St.

John's who were not active in Vision Fellowship. The information gathered through these pre-tests helped refine the clarifying, follow-up questions used in a semi-structured format. The formal instruments were not altered. These pre-tests also helped the interviewer to understand the difficulty of this type of interview. The information gained, many times, was not specifically geared for the research questions. It was difficult not to be distracted from the intent of the interview. This also made the follow-up questions more important and prepared the interviewer for the "real" interviews.

The interviews, except for the five informal ones, followed a survey interview format (Stewart and Cash 143-179), a process that has ten stages and is best described by the graphic portrayed in Figure 4 (Stewart and Cash 144).

An introduction created rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. This introduction was standardized so that each interview was approximately the same. The interview instrument was used so that the same questions were asked in the same order to each person interviewed. At the end there was a brief closing expressing appreciation for the help with the survey and briefly answering any questions that were asked by the interviewee (Stewart and Cash 147-148).

The questions were in the open question format to allow as much freedom as possible to the interviewee (Stewart and Cash 79). This type of interview was harder to analyze but gathered information that was the interviewee's own opinions and revealed what the respondent felt was really important (Stewart and Cash 81). The samples were, as discussed before, ten randomly selected adult attenders of Vision Fellowship (divided into churched

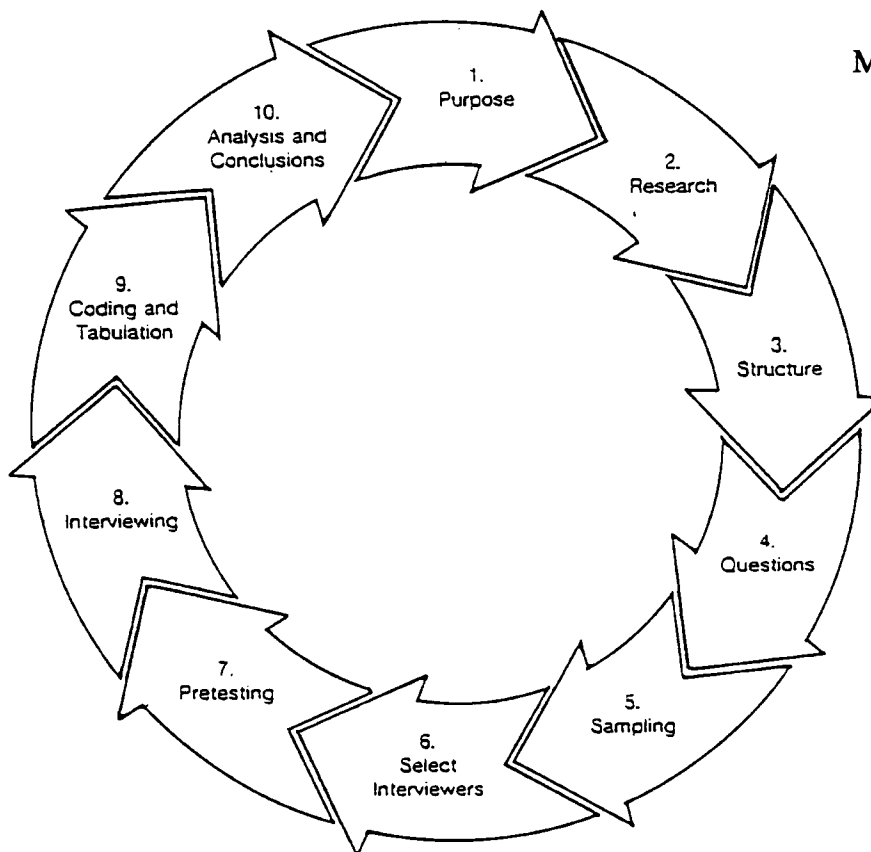


Figure 4

Stages in Surveys

and unchurched categories) and a randomly selected group of ten active members of St. John's United Methodist. (The definition of active members is found on page one and two of Chapter 1.) The interviewer was the pastor of St. John's and Vision Fellowship, Phil McClendon.

Vision attenders' interviews. Interviews were done with ten randomly selected adults who attended Vision Fellowship. These interviews determined who came to Vision Fellowship (age, sex, race, churched or unchurched) and any tangible effects on St. John's. Questions such as the following were answered. Did St. John's grow? If it did, was the growth from unchurched persons coming to St. John's or Vision? If it did, was the growth resulting from existing members of St. John's having another option for worship and thus becoming more regular than they were previously? If it did, was the

growth from people of other denominations who were looking for an alternative worship style? If growth occurred, was it from people of other denominations who were disgruntled with their present church and were looking for a change? All of these questions were answered through the interview process. When the determination had been made on who was coming to Vision, then reasons for the success and failure of growth in each area were explored. Information gathered from the Vision interviews determined trends concerning entry into the fellowship, likes and dislikes about the worship, unmet needs to be addressed, and self-professed spiritual growth experienced by each individual. This data helped greatly in determining changes for Vision Fellowship. See Appendix 8 for the specific interview questions.

The interviews were done in this semi-structured format with ten randomly selected attenders of Vision Fellowship. The selection was done by placing the names of available attenders in a hat and drawing out the names. The selected attenders of Vision Fellowship were contacted early in the month and an interview time and place established. Seven of the interviews were conducted in the homes or businesses of the interviewees. Three of the interviews were conducted in the pastor's office of St. John's by the interviewee's request. The location did not seem to affect the outcome of the interview. The interviewer spent approximately fifteen minutes with each person in the actual interview. The interview was audio taped, and the information needed, retrieved off the tape at a later time. Notes taken gave needed information, especially concerning non-verbal communication.

The Vision Attenders who were interviewed were divided into two categories. Five attenders were involved in some way with churches in the community and five attenders were unchurched. The interviews with the five involved in churches helped answer research questions one, two, and five (see page 61 and 62). The interviews with the five unchurched attenders helped answer all of the research questions (see page 61 and 62).

St. John's members' interviews. A second set of interviews was done with ten randomly selected members of St. John's United Methodist Church. The interviewees were chosen by placing all local, nonshut-in members names in a hat and drawing ten names. These interviews were conducted during the fall of 1993 and the spring of 1994. The interview process was approximately the same as listed above for Vision Fellowship, except that all interviews were in the homes of the members. The interviews determined the effect Vision Fellowship had on St. John's United Methodist Church and its ministry. These interviews partially answered research questions two, and five (see page 61 and 62) for the people of St. John's. Specifically, the data collection through St. John's interviews determined if the people of St. John's grew spiritually because of their involvement with the ministry of Vision Fellowship. They also helped answer if Vision Fellowship was integrated into St. John's or became autonomous. The information gathered from the St. John's interviews was used to determine if St. John's people felt that Vision was a part of their ministry or was completely separate from St. John's. It sought to determine if they had been involved in any of the ministry opportunities at Vision Fellowship and if there had been growth in their spiritual lives as a

result of the participation. These determinations are important for the Vision Fellowship ministry. The actual instrument used is found in Appendix 9.

Vision drop out interviews. A third group of people was informally interviewed in order to gather important information for evaluation of the ministry. Vision attenders who dropped out of attendance were contacted to determine the reasons for dropping out. This contact was not a formal interview so that the possibility of future ministry could be kept open. It was a follow-up contact showing concern for the individual. In the process of ministering to their needs, reasons for their departure from Vision Fellowship were determined. This information was invaluable to the evaluation of Vision Fellowship and the evaluation of this study. Informal interviews with five persons out of the entire group were reported. These five offer an overall view of the reasons for dropping out of Vision Fellowship. These five also represent people who attended more than two Vision Fellowship services. They were people who were not attending another church at the time of their attendance at Vision. These informal interviews of those who dropped out were done as a ministry follow-up by Phil McClendon. The main emphasis was to regain their attendance but in the process the reasons for their dropping out were explored. The information was reported by recounting the reasons stated by the persons themselves for their dropping out.

Input from all interviews along with the information gathered through the study of attendance figures determined the changes needed to be made in the style of ministry, content of ministry, and the logistics of the ministry of Vision Fellowship. Two other questions addressed were: Will Vision

Fellowship continue or be disbanded? If it continues will it have the same structure as established or will it change and become a church unto itself? The interviews aided in answering these important questions.

Although this was not a totally scientific method of research, the results were useful, especially to Vision Fellowship and St. John's in formulating future ministries as well as adapting ministries presently in use. It was also hoped that other churches, in this same situation, would find the perceptions of these interested people helpful as they developed growth ministries for their specific situation.

The Pastor's Perspective

A third avenue for data collection was my perspective. As the pastor of St. John's and the founding pastor of Vision Fellowship, as well as the author of this dissertation, I added information from my experience with the ministry.

Data Reporting

After the attendance data were gathered and reported and the interviews conducted, the research questions were answered. The reporting of data formed the basis for Chapter 4, "Findings of the Study." This chapter sought to gather all pertinent information concerning Vision Fellowship. After determining if growth occurred, the amount of growth and the type of growth were determined. This information was the basis for the last chapter of the project, "Summary and Conclusions."

Final Evaluation and Implications

Drawing on the findings in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, "Summary and Conclusions," sets forth implications of the study for church growth. The

limitations for use of the study are stated. Finally, the conclusions and practical applications are given for the local situation of St. John's United Methodist Church, Vision Fellowship of Stamford, Texas and for any who might feel that this ministry would be useful for them as they seek to grow and bring in the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

The data for consideration of this study were gathered by two different means. First, attendance statistics for Vision Fellowship with names recorded were kept for an entire year. Second, interviews were done with randomly selected persons from both Vision Fellowship and St. John's as well as selected drop outs of Vision Fellowship to answer questions concerning the purpose of Vision Fellowship, the need for Vision Fellowship, and the relationship between St. John's and Vision Fellowship. Both the statistics and the interviews were designed to answer the basic questions asked in the beginning of this study:

1. In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create numerical growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?
2. In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?
3. How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?
4. Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through the existing programs of St. John's?
5. Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what will contribute to the integration?

Attendance Statistics

After a year of ministry, the statistics on Vision Fellowship show some useful information. In order to better digest the information concerning Vision Fellowship so that trends can be evaluated and helpful suggestions made, the statistical data will be arranged three different ways. First the total attendance figures will be studied to see monthly trends. Second, the totals just attending Vision Fellowship and not also attending St. John's the same Sunday will be studied to see how effective Vision is at bringing in new persons or persons who identify only with Vision. Third, the combined attendance figures for Vision and St. John's will be studied to determine the overall effect of Vision for the ministry of St. John's. Table 1 shows these attendance figures in a comparative way on the basis of the entire year.

The monthly trends of the overall worship attendance show a slight increase over the prior year. The average gives a very good indication of the true effect of Vision Fellowship on the overall attendance figures of St. John's. The average for the previous year, March, 1992 through February, 1993, was 144.5 (see Table 2). The overall average for the first year of Vision Fellowship was 146.6. The increase was 2.1 persons per Sunday. The comparison for each month of the first year of Vision Fellowship, March 1993 through February 1994, as it relates to each month of the previous year, March 1992 through February 1993 is shown in Table 2.

These statistics show many interesting trends. Some of these trends will not be explored for the purpose of this study. Only the comparisons and

Table 1

Attendance Figures of Vision Fellowship and
St. John's Morning Worship

Month	Average at Vision	Vision Only	St John's	Total Worship
March	58	29	143	171.5
April	31	21	156	177.0
May	28	16	126	142.0
June	25	17	114	130.8
July	27	17	128	145.3
August	26	19	130	149.0
September	31	24	131	154.3
October	24	17	120	136.4
November	24	16	113	129.3
December	19	12	127	139.0
January	18	13	128	141.6
February	20	13	130	143.3
1 Year Average 3/93 – 2/94	27.7	17.7	128.5	146.6

Table 2

Comparison of Prior Year to the First Full Year
Of Attendance Including Vision Fellowship

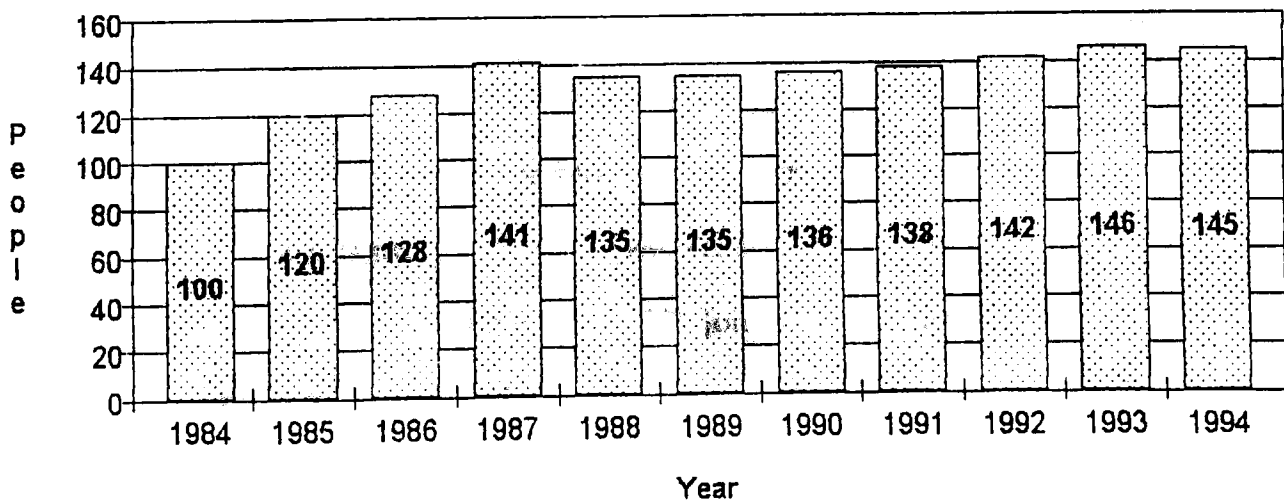
Month	1992 Average	1993 Average	Change
March	161.8	171.5	+9.7
April	180.3	177.0	-3.3
May	150.0	142.0	-8.0
June	148.8	130.8	-18.0
July	117.8	145.3	+27.2
August	133.4	149.0	+15.6
September	131.8	154.3	+22.5
October	152.0	136.4	-15.6
November	141.4	129.3	-12.1
December	135.7	139.0	+3.3
January	138.0	141.6	+3.6
<u>February</u>	<u>140.0</u>	<u>143.3</u>	<u>+3.3</u>
Average	144.5	146.6	+2.1

relationships that are vital to the research questions listed above will be studied. Other statistical information that is needed to answer the questions include the number of unchurched or inactive persons who have attended Vision Fellowship; the number of those unchurched or inactive persons that now attend; and the number of persons from St. John's that have switched to Vision Fellowship. The number of inactive or unchurched people that attended Vision Fellowship for the year was 90. Of those 90, 20 were active at the end of the year. Of those 20, 4 were previously connected to St. John's. Others from St. John's participated in Vision Fellowship but chose to remain active at St. John's. Some inactives at St. John's after attending Vision Fellowship a few times became inactive at Vision Fellowship and are represented in the 70 that were no longer active at the end of the year.

The growth trend over the last ten years gives valuable information for Vision Fellowship. Chart 1 below shows the trend.

Chart 1

Ten Year Worship Attendance Growth Trend



From the years of 1984 through 1987 there was a steady increase. The increase averaged 10.3 people per year. In 1988 there was a drop of 6 people per year. The next three years plateaued at 135. Then, in 1990 the church again began slow growth to a high of 146 in 1993. There was a slight dip to 145 in 1994. The average growth per year for this period was 2.25 people per year. The overall average gain for the entire period was 4.5 people per year.

The statistics given above and displayed through the tables and charts of this chapter give adequate information for determining the numerical impact of Vision Fellowship upon St. John's. This information also raises some important questions that cannot be answered through the statistics alone. Was Vision Fellowship a factor in the growth of St. John's for its first year (March 1993 - February 1994)? Did the implementation of Vision Fellowship hurt the attendance figures at the St. John's service? If so, why? Have any members been gained for St. John's through Vision Fellowship? Have any members been lost to St. John's because of the Vision Fellowship emphasis. Has Vision Fellowship fulfilled its purpose to reach the unchurched and inactive members of churches in Stamford? If so what are the contributing factors. If not, why?

Interviews

To help with the answers to these questions as well as the basic research questions for this study, interviews were conducted with both Vision Fellowship attenders and members of St. John's. These interviews were conducted in accordance with the interview instruments developed for this study (see Appendixes 9 and 10). The intent of the interviews was to fill in the blanks that are naturally present in a study of statistical information. As stated

above, the interviews were intended to answer some of the how and why questions enumerated. Fifteen interviews were conducted with Vision Fellowship attenders. Five persons who were unchurched were interviewed and five who attended other churches besides Vision Fellowship were interviewed. Five unchurched attenders who dropped out were informally interviewed. Ten interviews were also conducted with members of St. John's who did not attend Vision Fellowship. Results of the interviews appear below.

Vision Fellowship Interviews

Of the interviewees there were five persons who were active in churches before they began to attend Vision Fellowship. They did not drop out of their churches but merely used Vision Fellowship as a supplemental worship experience. Most of them cited a need for less formality and structure or rigidity than their present situation afforded. In other words the informality of the Vision service along with the style of worship were contributing factors for their presence at the service. The five who were churched will be designated for purposes of this dissertation C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, and C-5 (C represents "churched"). A short synopsis of each interview follows. Each gives the pertinent information for use in this study.

C-1 is in the thirty to forty age range. He has been active all his life in the Lutheran Church. The church of which he is a member strongly identifies with the Swedish ethnic group which is present in the Stamford area. C-1 is a part of this ethnic group. His extended family is very active in the church and there are many family and social ties to this particular Lutheran church. The church itself is very traditional and liturgical and perceived, at least by C-1,

as a bit lifeless. C-1 experienced a spiritual renewal through the Walk to Emmaus program and feels a call into some sort of music ministry. This renewal and call gave him a hunger for something more than he was receiving at the Lutheran church. However, because of the strong family and social ties to the church, he felt that he could not leave the church for another one. C-1 being personal friends with Phil McClendon, the pastor of St. John's, became aware of the plans being made for Vision Fellowship and showed interest in this concept. Phil, knowing of C-1's call into some form of music ministry, asked C-1 if he would be the worship leader for Vision Fellowship and C-1 accepted. C-1 was drawn to Vision by the fact that it provided an outlet for his call to ministry as well as provided a means to reach the unchurched of Stamford. C-1 says, "Vision Fellowship helps me answer my call into ministry and helps me bring hope to a town wrapped in despair." C-1 feels that the worship style of Vision is very important to him. As leader of worship he wants it to be, "an experience of worship—a total communion with God—true worship." When asked if he felt that Vision's worship style accomplished that he said yes. C-1's life has been changed by Vision Fellowship because it has provided a place of ministry for him and through that ministry he himself has grown closer to God. Another important factor for C-1 is that he is allowed to maintain his relationship to the Lutheran church and still be a full participant at Vision Fellowship. He views the purpose of Vision Fellowship as an outreach ministry. A ministry that will bring hope to a town wrapped in despair and bring people to Jesus. C-1 feels that Vision Fellowship is a very important supplement to his personal church life but feels frustration in

juggling the two churches' schedules. His suggestion for change deals with the need to bring more discipleship opportunities to the people attending Vision but at the same time change the schedule so that he could better integrate participation in both churches.

C-2 is thirty to forty and married to C-3. C-2 began attending Vision Fellowship at its inception. C-2 is a member of the same Lutheran Church that C-1 attends. C-2's church background is varied. As a child he and his family attended Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. For a while in college he attended an interdenominational church. He was influenced through a job connection with C-1 to attend the Lutheran Church. He has lived in Stamford for about three years and has just married C-3. Phil McClendon, pastor at St. John's and Vision, helped perform the ceremony, which was a result of C-2's attendance at Vision. This also helped continue the couple's involvement at Vision after the wedding. C-2 became interested in Vision through C-1 who invited him and encouraged him to attend. He was also seeking what he termed, "a spirit-filled church." He enjoys the praise and worship at Vision and the informality. He also enjoys the more informal, study type approach to the sermon. He likes the casual dress and comfortable atmosphere. Vision has offered an alternative to the formal service of his church and he enjoys this alternative. When asked what he would like to add, C-2 felt that more discipleship was needed in the form of a Sunday school or other study groups. For himself, he would like to see it at a time that did not conflict with the Lutheran services. He suggested, as a possibility, Saturday night or an earlier time on Sunday morning.

C-2's wife C-3 was also interviewed. She is in the thirty to forty age group and newly married to C-2. She is from a very strict Catholic background. She moved to Stamford five years ago from a German Catholic community where her family was very involved in the church from its inception. She still attends the Catholic church in Stamford and also Vision Fellowship with C-2. She first heard about Vision from C-2 and attends because of C-2. Essentially they use Vision as a common ground worship opportunity between the Lutheran and Catholic traditions. When asked about the worship style C-3 said it was very different from her tradition and for that reason it was a bit difficult for her at first. The differences lay in the informality and the participatory style of the worship as well as the music. She states she now enjoys all of these differences. C-3 feels that Vision has taught her to be more open to new and different ideas concerning worship and other traditions. She feels that others would come because they would enjoy it.

Both C-2 and C-3 do not see Vision Fellowship as their sole church. They use it as a supplement for other church activities. There is no involvement in any other programs of St. John's.

C-4 is also in the thirty to forty age group. He and his family are long time residents of the community. He has family active in the local Church of Christ where he is a member. C-4 first heard about Vision Fellowship from the Stamford School Superintendent who is a member of St. John's. The actual invitation to Vision Fellowship came through C-1, in a job related contact. C-4 was having some family problems related to his extended family in the community. He was also displeased with his home church situation. As

C-1 shared with him about Vision Fellowship he felt that Vision might offer an opportunity for spiritual growth and a place where he could experience God. He felt this need for his life and also for his wife and three teenage children. C-4 was impressed with the informality, the openness, and the friendliness of the service. He said that Vision had a comfortable atmosphere. For him the services were not routine and this was a plus. He enjoyed the fellowship, the song service, and the lesson that was short and to the point. He felt that the service could be characterized as a service of praise. For him personally Vision helped him open his eyes to other ways of doing things. He felt that for others to be interested in Vision that they would have to have a specific need that Vision might meet. He stated that the need might be that it was an alternative to dead worship. Vision for C-4 was founded on the Word of God and would be a comfortable setting for the unchurched. C-4 offered some suggestions from his perspective. Coming from a church that does not use instrumental music, he felt overpowered by the use of a full band for accompaniment. He liked the music but it was different for him and he felt like he had to compete with the instruments to have his praise heard by God. Another factor for him was the fact that communion was not offered often at Vision. Being from a church that offered communion every Sunday, he really needed that. C-4 and his family are no longer active in Vision but still remain active at the Church of Christ.

C-5, forty to fifty in age, is a long time resident of Stamford. He grew up in Stamford and has come back to raise his family in Stamford. He and his extended family who live in Stamford are members of St. John's United

Methodist Church. C-5 attends Vision occasionally but is mostly involved at St. John's. C-5 heard about Vision through the announcement of the program in the newsletter and from the pulpit of St. John's. He attended first as a part of the Sunday school class that were greeters for the first six weeks of Vision. He has attended sporadically since that time. C-5 sees Vision as meeting a need for ministry in his life and the life of St. John's. He is very interested in outreach and Vision provides that opportunity. The informal service and setting are pluses for him. He also enjoys the traditional service of St. John's but feels that Vision provides a more comfortable atmosphere for the unchurched. He personally likes this worship style as well. As a businessman he sees the need for productive change and Vision has given him that experience. He feels that the service at Vision has made him more comfortable with his faith and more comfortable in sharing his faith with others. C-5 uses Vision as a change from the traditional but will always view it as a supplement to St. John's and not a substitute. For C-5 it is an interdenominational service with the foundation and stability of an established, traditional church.

The next five interviews were with people from Vision Fellowship who were not attending any church at the time that Vision Fellowship began services. For purposes of this dissertation they will be designated U-1, U-2, U-3, U-4, and U-5 (U representing "unchurched").

U-1 is in the thirty to forty year age group. She is an outgoing person who is now in her second marriage. She is married and her husband has adult and college aged children. Her husband attends occasionally with U-1. She discovered Vision Fellowship one day while she was driving by on the street.

She saw the sign and activity and asked around until she learned the times. She immediately felt comfortable with the service. In part that was due to her previous church experience. She grew up in a very strict Catholic home. The church was alive yet very liturgical and formal. U-1 rebelled against the high church style and dropped out of the church until she was, in her words, "converted" in a Young Life meeting in college. One of the reasons U-1 likes Vision is because it reminds her of her Young Life group. The music and type of preaching were comfortable and inspiring. One problem she sees in Vision was that it did not provide for her the stability and community that she desired in a church home. After trying St. John's, U-1 settled on First Baptist as her church home because the formality of the Methodist service reminded her too much of her Catholic experience. She comes to Vision Fellowship for worship and uses First Baptist as her church home. U-1, being saved in Young Life has an affinity for youth. One of the reasons she remains very active in Vision is because of the potential she feels it has to reach the youth population in Stamford. Vision also met a spiritual need in U-1's life. She had fallen out of an intimate relationship with the Lord and needed very much to rekindle that relationship. Vision was the best opportunity for her to do that. She is now excited and very willing to help in any way possible to further the ministry. Two suggestions she offered were to change the time so that it would not conflict with other church services and to use personal testimonies in the service.

U-2 is in the forty to fifty age range. She is a single mother with a seventeen year old daughter. She teaches in an area school. She first heard

about Vision Fellowship through a newspaper article (see Appendix 5) in February of 1993. She had been searching for a church home without much success and felt that this format might meet the need. Growing up as a child in an Air Force family, her early church experience was that of the Air Force chapel. This non-traditional setting in her background influenced her to seek the informal style and setting of Vision. She also felt that "church" people didn't accept or welcome her. She is very interested in a service that is scripturally based and one where Jesus is the focus and not church doctrine. She felt that Vision met these needs. She likes the communicative style of the sermons and she likes the music. She feels that it has greatly benefited her teenage daughter as she wants to come to Vision and has become active in the St. John's senior high youth group as a result of attending Vision. It is evident that U-2 is much more comfortable in an informal setting and she enjoys the informality of Vision. When asked what the purpose of Vision was she replied, "To help people come to know Jesus as Savior and develop a closer walk with him." U-2 also sees some needs in Vision. She would like to see more people attend, especially men. She would also like more of the familiar music on special days such as Easter and Christmas.

U-3 is in the thirty to forty age group. She is married to U-4 and this marriage is the second for both. They live in Anson, a town approximately the same size as Stamford, twenty miles away. U-3 first heard of Vision Fellowship through her job. She works for a dentist who is a member of St. John's and he told her about Vision before the initial service. Her church background is interdenominational. She attended a growing charismatic

church in Anson before a pastor's infidelity at the church caused her to become disillusioned and she dropped out of church altogether. She married U-4 in the meantime and both felt a need to become involved in church again.

Vision provided that opportunity. The worship style is the main reason for her involvement in Vision Fellowship. She also enjoys the informal setting and style and the communicative style of the preaching. U-3 has a three year old son who needs a Sunday school and she would like to see either an opportunity at Vision developed or she would like to have the time changed so that her son could attend Sunday school at St. John's. She understands Vision is a ministry of St. John's and she likes the stability that the connection with St. John's affords Vision. Her desire, however is the praise and worship style of service that Vision provides. Vision met a need in U-3 for the type of worship she enjoys with the stability of a denomination. It came at a time in her life of great need and she was and is very receptive to the ministry.

U-4 is married to U-3 and is in the forty to fifty age group. As stated earlier he is in his second marriage and feels a need to return to church as a result of the needs of his life as it relates to the family situation. He heard about Vision Fellowship through U-3. U-4 is United Methodist in background but has been inactive for at least a year as a result of the family turmoil and the "coldness" of the Methodist church he attended. He does not feel comfortable in an openly charismatic church but likes the informality of a praise and worship style of service. He works as a pumper in the oil field and the flexibility in dress and the early time also is a benefit to U-4. He feels challenged by the sermons and desires to become more involved in a

fellowship atmosphere. He attends for his family (especially because U-3 wants him to attend) and for his personal growth. The opportunity of Vision Fellowship came along at a good time for U-4. Because of family turmoil and change he was receptive to a new idea and direction.

U-5 is the oldest of the regular attenders at Vision. He is a fifty to sixty year old bachelor who lives with his mother. U-5 bounces from job to job and is always looking for a better job situation. He grew up in the Baptist church and his mother still attends First Baptist in Stamford. He learned of Vision Fellowship by watching the activity of preparation at the vacant building that houses Vision Fellowship. He attended the first service and has been active since that time except for a brief time when he was out of town looking for work. U-5 was searching for something spiritually, and as a result ended up at Vision. He was no longer active in the Baptist church, and Vision provided an opportunity to "get back into church." He loves the informality of the setting and the personal quality of the teaching. He also likes the small size of Vision that allows personal contact with those in ministry positions. A problem for U-5 is the time frame that keeps those in ministry from having more time of informal sharing and counseling at the end of the service. U-5 enjoys Vision and also likes the connection with St. John's. This is so much the case that U-5 has come to St. John's morning service and now splits time between the two services. U-5 also felt a need to "join" a fellowship and transferred his membership from First Baptist to St. John's during a morning service at St. John's. U-5 feels free to participate with ease in any of the activities of either St. John's or Vision Fellowship. More than anyone else, U-5 has integrated the

ministries of St. John's and Vision Fellowship. He feels the purpose of Vision Fellowship was to provide another place where people could get back to church and learn about Jesus.

These are the ten interviews conducted with attenders of Vision Fellowship who are still attending. The people interviewed show a wide range of Christian and secular experience. Many of them come to Vision Fellowship with felt needs that Vision has somehow help to meet. Chapter five will deal in depth with the evaluation of these interviews. At that time conclusions will be drawn and suggestions made on the basis of the interviews.

Five more informal interviews were done with attenders of Vision Fellowship who quit coming after a time. These interviews were done in a ministry format and not in the formal interview setting. Essentially these interviews were follow up visits for the purpose of re-establishing contact with these individuals in hopes they would return. The information gained from them is valuable to evaluation of Vision Fellowship. The people contacted in these visits will be designated for the purposes of this dissertation, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4, and D-5 (D representing drop out).

D-1 is in his early fifties and is a local used car dealer in the community of Stamford. He is married to D-2 who is in her late forties. All of their children are grown. They responded positively to our phone survey and received a packet of information about Vision Fellowship. They began attending on the first Sunday and were regular for about nine months. Both had not been active in any church for years, although in their past they had a Baptist preference. The drop out was not sudden but their attendance began to

be sporadic and then finally not at all. After more than three weeks of non-attendance they were visited by Phil McClendon and D-1 assured him that everything was fine and that they just had some other obligations that took them away from Vision. D-1 and D-2 never did return to Vision and a second visit at a later date was conducted. D-1 in this visit again insisted there was no specific reason for their non-attendance. They had no problem with anything about Vision Fellowship or with any of the people. They had simply gotten out of the habit of coming and were intending to return. He said he felt very comfortable with the informal style and the music and preaching and was generally pleased with the ministry as a whole.

D-2 expressed many of the same sentiments as her husband. Some more background information concerning her attendance at Vision might be helpful in determining their reason for drop-out. At the time of her and D-1's attendance, her father had been diagnosed with cancer and his health was deteriorating. She had a felt need for spiritual comfort and information that was met through Vision Fellowship. After about six months her father died and Phil McClendon held the funeral. After that time D-1's and D-2's attendance began to be sporadic and finally they stopped coming. D-2 never mentioned this specifically in the visits. Her stated reason for dropping out was much the same as her husband's. There was no stated problem with either the ministry or the people of Vision Fellowship.

D-3 is in the fifty to sixty age range. She is married to an older man who is in a wheelchair. D-3 began attending Vision Fellowship at the invitation of a St. John's member whom she had met at an Al-Anon meeting. She is very

retiring and shy. D-3 attended for about two months at Vision Fellowship and then attended St. John's for another four months before dropping out of both services. When asked, D-3 shared that she was very uncomfortable around people that she did not know very well. She switched to St. John's because she grew up Catholic and felt like the formal service there was more like "church." She began to feel uncomfortable with St. John's because of the size of the congregation. She also stated that she felt intimidated by some of the "rich" people in the church. These feelings along with the demands of time placed on her by her husband and his situation caused her to drop out all together. After the visit she attended Vision Fellowship sporadically.

D-4 is Hispanic and in her thirties. Her husband is white and this is the second marriage for both. D-4 came to Vision Fellowship at the invitation of a St. John's member. She had not attended church in many years. She came by herself and attended about four weeks before dropping out. When visited, D-4 shared that she enjoyed Vision Fellowship and she felt accepted there. She was looking for something that she and her husband could both attend and thought that he might go with her to Vision Fellowship. He would not, so she had returned to her roots, the Catholic church. She said she just felt more comfortable there.

D-5 is a single mother in her forties from a neighboring community about fifteen miles away. She began attending Vision Fellowship at the invitation of U-3 (see interview above). She was also involved in the charismatic church that had pastor problems and she had dropped out of church altogether because of the turmoil. Her daughter is eight and attended

Vision Fellowship with her. D-5 was very regular until she attended an Emmaus Walk. She was the first Vision attender to go on a walk. She had a great experience at the walk but then her attendance at Vision stopped almost immediately. When visited D-5 said she was very pleased with Vision Fellowship for what it could offer. She was concerned, however, about the lack of discipleship opportunities, especially for her daughter. At her walk she had met some spirit-filled Christians from her community and was now involved with their fellowship in her own community.

These informal visits with people who have stopped attending at Vision Fellowship offer a very valuable critique of the ministry. They will help in the evaluation and inform some changes that need to be made if Vision is to fulfill its purpose. The evaluation will be completed in Chapter 5.

St. John's Interviews

The second set of interviews dealt specifically with people in St. John's. These interviews were intended to help answer the research questions from the point of view of the membership of St. John's. These interviews will also help understand how well the original vision for Vision Fellowship was communicated and the perceived relationship between the two groups from a St. John's membership perspective. These interviews were chosen by random selection and cover a wide range of the demographic characteristics of the church. The ten interviewees will be designated for the purposes of this dissertation S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, S-5, S-6, S-7, S-8, S-9, and S-10 (S representing St. John's).

S-1 is in the seventy to eighty age group. She is a widow and is still very active in the church and community. When asked what she had heard about Vision Fellowship she replied that most people are very interested in what is going on at Vision. Most of what she had heard was positive with the exception of a few St. John's people wondering if it were going to be a new church. This concern was minor and she felt good about what she had heard about Vision. She has been involved in Vision in two ways. She has made cookies for the fellowship time and also has taken some of her out of town relatives to the service. She and her relatives both enjoyed the service. The main differences she sees between St. John's and Vision is the worship style. She sees it as more informal and involved with praise and worship. Vision has impacted S-1 personally by renewing her energy to be involved in outreach. This has happened indirectly through the influence of Vision as an outreach service and the excitement generated by the starting of the ministry. She feels that there may be some minor misunderstandings about Vision that centers on the element of change. Some of the older members which are her friends are feeling uncomfortable with the changes Vision Fellowship represents. The feeling derives mostly from tension aroused between traditional worship and free worship. S-1 understands the purpose of Vision is to win people to the Lord, and she definitely feels that it should continue with this emphasis. As a participant in Vision but mostly involved with St. John's, S-1 offers a valuable perspective with her suggestions. She feels the sermons need to be even more basic than the one she heard. She also feels that a good discipling tool for Vision would be for the people to attend an Emmaus Walk.

S-2 is in the eighty to ninety age bracket. She is also a widow and still very active in the church. She has also heard good things about Vision from some people who had attended. She has heard no negative comments from anyone in the community or the church. Her involvement in Vision Fellowship has been limited to providing cookies for the fellowship for one of the services. She has no experience to base an opinion on the differences between St. John's and Vision. She felt that because of the common leadership, there would be no differences in the doctrine and direction of the two. She had a good understanding of the purpose of the ministry as she articulated, "Vision is to get those people to church who do not feel comfortable coming to St. John's, because of their clothes or other reasons." S-2 also felt that Vision Fellowship should be continued.

S-3 is in the sixty to seventy age group. She has never been married. She grew up in Stamford, then left and recently returned after retiring from teaching. She teaches pre-kindergarten in the St. John's Sunday school. Most of the talk she has heard about Vision from both church members and those in the community has been positive. The only negatives were some passing remarks about cults which she attributed to the heightened interest in cults due to the David Koresh incident. She helped make two banners used for decoration of the worship area at the Vision building. Besides this her involvement has been limited because of her Sunday school responsibilities. Most of what she knows about Vision she has obtained through talking with those who are involved. She knows that the worship is less formal than St. John's and that it centers on praise and worship instead of a liturgical style.

She feels that the service involves more people in worship but that the content is the same at both services. She has been influenced very little personally by Vision but does feel that it is a valid means of involving people in the ministry of the church. She feels the purpose of Vision is to have an outreach to people who won't come to St. John's. She believes that the ministry should definitely continue. She would hope that we could reach the unchurched and offered the need for personal testimonies during the service as a means to that end.

S-4 is another widow in the eighty to ninety age range. For years she has been very active in the church (her son is presently an ordained pastor in the Northwest Texas Conference). In the past two years she has become less active because of health reasons. Through her limited contacts, mostly with the women of her Sunday school class, she has heard only positives about Vision Fellowship. She has had no involvement in Vision Fellowship. She believes Vision is mostly different from St. John's in atmosphere and worship style (very informal). She believes the informality is necessary because of the purpose of Vision to reach the unchurched. The service style in her opinion would be conducive to reaching a different group of people, which is the goal. She is comfortable with the information she is receiving about Vision. She has a heart for the Hispanic population of Stamford and the unchurched children. She wishes Vision Fellowship could have an influence on these people for the kingdom of God.

S-5 is married and has two teenage children. She is in the thirty to forty age bracket and is very active in various ministry programs of the church. S-5 works at the local cotton gin half-time and at the local grain elevator half-time.

In this position she is privileged to hear much of the gossip that transpires in a small town, agricultural setting. From her vantage point she states that there has been much curiosity in the community and also the church about Vision Fellowship, especially in the beginning stages of the ministry. Although there has been talk concerning Vision, most of what she has heard has been positive. S-5 also agrees that Vision is positive. Her actual involvement was limited to attending two or three times as a part of the Sunday school class that served as greeters for the first six weeks. She noted the differences between St. John's and Vision and stated that Vision was more casual and relaxed and therefore, less traditional than the St. John's worship. She liked the praise and worship format of the Vision service. She felt from her experience that the theology, purpose, and direction of the both services were essentially the same. She has been influenced positively by Vision in two ways. First, the idea itself kindled an excitement in S-5 for reaching out to those in the community that did not know Jesus. Second, her teenage son enjoys the services and he attends quite often at Vision. He still comes to morning worship at St. John's and S-5 is pleased that he has an alternative worship service provided that he enjoys. She feels information has been adequately communicated to St. John's and Vision. S-5 also observed some of the Vision people involved in the Christmas activities at St. John's, which greatly encouraged her. She felt this was good as it integrated the two groups together. She is in agreement, along with all interviewed, that Vision should continue.

S-6 falls in the forty to fifty year age group. She is married and has two children in college and one that is a senior in high school. She is the home

economics teacher in the high school. She has been very active in both St. John's and Vision Fellowship. She states that she uses Vision as a Sunday school alternative and then comes to morning worship at St. John's. She has heard only positives and absolutely no negatives about Vision Fellowship. Her involvement is through attendance and she also worked on the initial phone survey of the community. She sees Vision Fellowship worship as different than St. John's in that it incorporates praise and worship music and is much more informal in style and dress requirements. She stated that she likes this format the best but that she also enjoys St. John's worship and feels like she has missed something if she can not attend one or the other. She feels that communication is good about Vision and felt that the ministry should definitely continue. She would like to see more people involved and thinks that publicity in the local media outlets plus more word of mouth contacts will make this happen. S-6 understands that Vision is an outreach tool but she is involved mainly because of the worship style afforded to her at Vision.

S-7 is a long time leader in the church. He is in the fifty to sixty age group. He is married and he and his wife have raised two children in the church. S-7 is still very active in the church. S-7 hears many things about Vision Fellowship, and from what he hears, Vision has great reports. Some of those outside of our church (some family members) with whom he has visited have expressed some concern because of the newness of the idea and the free worship style. He was involved in the very beginning of the Vision ministry by helping clean and do some minor construction on the building. He views the differences between Vision and St. John's as a matter of

style and not content. The worship style, he feels, is more informal. In his words he described the worship as, "free, open, and spontaneous." Although he personally prefers the more structured worship, he is supportive of this difference because he sees it as a way of trying to bring people to Christ. Personally S-7 feels that Vision Fellowship has helped him be more open to differing styles of worship. He also feels gratified that St. John's is actively involved in mission to the community of Stamford. He does not see a problem in the level of understanding of St. John's about Vision, although he feels that you can never receive too much information. S-7 believes the ministry should continue as long as there are people who are interested.

S-8 is in the thirty to forty age group. He is married and has two young children. He is a long time resident of Stamford, but has traveled extensively with a successful professional rodeo career. He has heard great things about Vision Fellowship. He personally has had no involvement in the ministry but has heard about it through talking with friends involved in Vision and St. John's. He personally feels that Vision is a good ministry because, "it is reaching people we couldn't reach otherwise." He feels that it provides another avenue for people to grow closer to God. He assumes that the services are relaxed and informal in dress and style. As a member of the community of Stamford he feels influenced by Vision Fellowship because it has influenced the community in a positive way. He is excited that St. John's is reaching out through Vision Fellowship to show the community that we care. He feels that adequate information has been given to the people of St. John's concerning Vision and he is definite that Vision should continue because, "we must reach

those who won't come to an established church."

S-9 is in the thirty to forty age group. He is married and has two children. He is a leader in the community (city councilman) and a leader in the church (lay delegate to annual conference). His involvement with Vision came during the planning stages and also he teaches the Sunday school class that served as greeters at the beginning of the ministry. He has heard mostly positives from St. John's people with a concern that Vision might take attenders away from the St. John's service. He feels that the community has been very positive about Vision. He has experienced the worship at Vision and knows it to be different from St. John's in that it is more free and less regimented. He feels that the aim of the service is different in that it is specifically for the non-traditional, unchurched person. However, the theological content is the same for both St. John's and Vision. He feels that St. John's people would better understand the ministry at Vision if they could be included somehow in the actual ministry. He feels one way this could be accomplished is by getting St. John's people involved in follow-up ministry to those who come to Vision. He supports the continuing of Vision Fellowship as long as it accomplishes its purpose to reach the unchurched, but believes that evaluation is always needed. He also believes that we need to narrow our target population so that we could do a better job of ministry.

S-10 is in the forty to fifty age bracket and is very active in many different areas of the church. He would be considered a leader in the congregation and the community. He is married and has two elementary age children. S-10 is the vice president of the local bank and is in the public sphere every day. He

has heard very positive things about Vision, especially from the membership of St. John's. He states that many of the members with whom he has spoken have expressed excitement in the fact that Vision is an outreach ministry of St. John's. He feels as well that Vision helps St. John's fulfill its mandate to reach out and evangelize. S-10 was involved from the very beginning with Vision Fellowship. As a part of St. John's ministry team, he helped shape and refine the original vision for the ministry. He was also instrumental in the phone survey and the preparation of the building for the first service. He has a great understanding of the entire program and is able to articulate its purpose. He sees that purpose as a ministry of St. John's to build the kingdom of God through a non-traditional avenue that will be inviting to the unchurched people of Stamford. As a secondary goal, S-10 feels that Vision will create growth for St. John's. He understands the worship service at Vision to be informal, with less structure. Even though he has not attended he feels the service is more participatory and praise and worship oriented. The content and theology of Vision Fellowship is not different from St. John's. The direction of the message is slightly different, in S-10's opinion, in order to reach a different target population. In S-10's mind Vision Fellowship is a true part of St. John's. S-10 sees no conflict presently between the two, but in order to continue this integration he feels some stories of personal victories and ministry should be shared during morning worship at St. John's. To S-10, Vision should continue, as long as it meets the need of outreach and does not become a detrimental drain of the spiritual or financial resources of St. John's.

These interviews are intended to give a basic understanding of the dynamics between the established congregation of St. John's and the new people that are becoming involved at Vision Fellowship. This understanding along with the statistical information will help determine the ways Vision Fellowship is successful. They will also help determine the extent of success of Vision Fellowship. Success is always relative to the the criteria for success. The criteria used will be both subjective and objective. The numbers will reveal the objective success and the interviews will deal with the more subjective points of success such as the benefits that Vision Fellowship affords the community, the new people at Vision, and the existing congregation at St. John's.

Summary of the Findings

The information revealed by the statistics shows interesting trends. The growth pattern for St. John's in relation to the implementation of Vision Fellowship shows a relatively flat rate of growth after Vision began. The response of the unchurched to Vision is also revealing. There seems to be a spiritual hunger in a good group of the unchurched people. Disturbing, however, is the reality that out of 90 unchurched people only 20 remained active in Vision at the close of the first year. These trends need to be explored for a complete understanding of the statistical information gathered.

Information gathered through the interviews also is revealing. The almost universal enjoyment of the worship style is notable. Ten out of fifteen Vision interviewees specifically expressed this sentiment. An interesting trend revealed through the St. John's interviews is the almost complete uniformity

in answers given to the purpose of Vision Fellowship. Eight of the ten St. John's people interviewed clearly articulated the purpose of Vision Fellowship was reaching the unchurched for Christ. Other recurring ideas surfacing through the interviews are the need for more discipleship opportunities at Vision; the problem with the time of Vision services; the agreement of the St. John's people with the ministry of Vision Fellowship; and the lack of participation in St. John's programs by Vision attenders.

Chapter 5 will analyze the information presented in this chapter in order to answer the research questions, and study these trends. Evaluations, theories, suggestions, and conclusions will be made in accordance with this information.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

In order to best understand the findings of this study, the summary and conclusions will be structured around the five basic research questions. Those questions, for review, are:

1. In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create numerical growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?
2. In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?
3. How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?
4. Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through the existing programs of St. John's?
5. Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what brought about the integration?

The content of this chapter will be structured around these questions from three different perspectives. First, where applicable, these questions will be answered from the basis of the statistical information gathered. Some of the questions can not be answered by statistics alone and in these cases theories will be postulated in order to offer plausible explanations. Second, where applicable, these questions will be answered from the perspective of the information gathered through the interview process. Where definitive answers arise, they will be given. Again, where the information is too

incomplete for an answer, theories will be postulated. Third, as the pastor of St. John's and the founding pastor of Vision Fellowship, as well as the author of this dissertation, I will add the perspective from my experience in the ministry of Vision Fellowship. As before, when answers are not definitive, I will propose possible solutions. After these three perspectives are explored, conclusions for the study will be drawn and suggestions for changes in Vision stated. Changes helpful to the research process will be suggested as well. Also, suggestions for the possible use of this type of ministry for other situations will be offered.

The answers to the research questions will only be preliminary at this time. As more information is made available through the rest of the chapter, these answers will be more definitive. There will be new questions which arise as a result of the discussion of each question. Answers to these questions will be offered on the basis of data gathered and further information will again be brought to bear on the question in the rest of the chapter so that a more definitive answer may be given.

Research Question One

In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create numerical growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?

This first question is answered primarily by the statistical information provided in Chapter 4. The increase in attendance was minimal with the implementation and ongoing ministry of Vision Fellowship over a one year period. To be exact, the average attendance increase was 2.1 persons per Sunday in the first year of Vision as compared to the prior year. There was an increase,

but the cause for the increase can not be specifically attributed to Vision Fellowship. When the ten year attendance pattern for St. John's is studied (see Chart 1 of Chapter 4, page 73), that increase of 2.1 falls well within the range of natural growth for the ten year period as well as the four year period just prior to and including the first year of Vision Fellowship, 1994. The ten year growth trend in attendance was 4.5 persons per year and the short term growth trend was 2.25 persons per year. From these numbers it appears that Vision Fellowship had no impact whatsoever on the numerical growth of St. John's as far as attendance is concerned.

Some questions about growth arise from the statistics when comparing the actual attendance at St. John's morning worship in the year prior to Vision Fellowship, 144.5, and the morning worship attendance at St. John's during Vision's first year, 128.5. The study shows that there was a decrease of 16 persons per Sunday in St. John's morning worship service. The question arises, did Vision have a negative impact on the morning worship of St. John's? Although some light can be shed on this question through the statistics, a fully definitive answer cannot be established by this means alone, if at all. There are so many varying factors to consider for this trend. For example the ten year growth trend showed another substantial drop in attendance, in 1988, after the first four years of growth, 1984-1987. The drop experienced in St. John's attendance during the first year of Vision, it could be argued, might be the result of various factors that affect a medium-sized church in a small town community. Vision Fellowship was not the cause of the decline in 1988 and therefore can not be singled out as the only factor in the

decline of 1994. The statistics do show, however, that, on the average, only four persons per Sunday switched from the service at St. John's to the service at Vision Fellowship. Therefore, a four person loss for St. John's can be directly attributed to Vision Fellowship. With this stated, however, there may be some indirect causes of this decline attributable to Vision Fellowship. These causes will be explored later in this chapter.

On the other side of this observation is the fact that without Vision Fellowship in place there would have been a decrease of 12 persons per Sunday in the first year. Instead, because of the attendance at Vision Fellowship, the combined total was up by 2.1 persons. Therefore, the actual benefit to St. John's worship attendance by Vision Fellowship was about 14 people per Sunday. Vision Fellowship, therefore, averted a major loss in attendance at St. John's. This loss could be attributed to the normal growth cycle for St. John's or could be attributed to factors unrelated to Vision Fellowship. A large number of St. John's attenders are older. Sixteen percent of the attenders on Sunday morning are seventy-five years and older. This age group is beginning to be much more sporadic in attendance because of illness. A survey of attendance registration shows around a five to ten person loss per Sunday over previous years due to this factor. Another major factor in the loss of attendance is that 15 persons moved out of the community and the church during the year. Although people move every year, only one other year, 1988, was comparable to 1994.

The theory that Vision did not adversely affect St. John's attendance is strengthened when data added by the interviews and my personal experience is

considered. The interviews with the Vision attenders do not give much information about this issue. C-5, being a St. John's attender before and after the start of Vision gives evidence to the fact that St. John's was not hurt by his attendance at Vision. He used Vision as a supplement to and not a substitute for morning worship at St. John's. The interview with U-5 also gives evidence that Vision, instead of having a negative impact, had a positive impact. U-5, who was not attending anywhere until Vision introduced him to the ministry of St. John's, began attending St. John's because of Vision. There is really no information in the Vision interviews that would lead one to conclude that Vision had a direct negative impact on the worship attendance of St. John's. Although there may have been some indirect factors involved with the decline of St. John's worship that may be attributed to Vision, there is no evidence of these in the St. John's interviews. The only evidence, although not enough for a definite conclusion, is that Vision was a positive influence. It would logically follow then, that the theory which suggested Vision, instead of hurting St. John's attendance, actually averted a drastic decline in overall attendance at St. John's, holds some validity. Again, this can not be asserted with certainty because, as of yet, there is not enough information to substantiate this claim.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this information is, that for the year 1994, Vision Fellowship had a minimal effect on the actual numerical growth of St. John's. Two theories that will need further information to prove or disprove are (1) Vision Fellowship caused a substantial decline in the morning worship service of St. John's in 1994, or (2) Vision Fellowship averted a substantial decline in the overall attendance figures for St. John's in 1994.

In my mind there has been substantial growth created by Vision Fellowship. The greatest potential for growth was the fact that 90 unchurched persons attended Vision Fellowship in just one year. Vision, then, was a great "port of entry" for the unchurched to be introduced to the gospel and to the church. This along with the fact that 20 have continued their interest in a regular fashion shows that Vision Fellowship was a substantial growth producer for St. John's United Methodist Church. In the first year, two Vision Fellowship attenders became members of St. John's. This level of commitment is encouraging and shows that membership growth potential as well as attendance growth potential is possible through Vision. The downside of this issue lies in the fact that St. John's attendance showed only minimal growth in overall attendance for the first year of Vision Fellowship. As the statistics showed earlier, the growth was only 2.1 persons for the year and this fits inside the normal growth pattern of St. John's. With the average attendance at Vision of 17.7 and the average attendance for the combined services at 146.6, this means that the attendance in the morning service dropped a little over 16 people per Sunday. This drop is lessened by the fact that, on the average, four persons per Sunday switched from St. John's to Vision Fellowship. Thus, the actual drop in St. John's attendance was 12 persons per Sunday. This amount is notable, in my mind, for two reasons. First, this type of drop is alarming in the life of any church the size of St. John's. Second, it must be determined if Vision Fellowship caused this drop.

A look at the statistics in March and April (Table 1, page 72) shows that the morning attendance at St. John's (without Vision) during March and April

averaged above the combined average of Vision and St. John's for the entire year. The drastic drop in attendance began in May and remained that way for the rest of the year period. If Vision Fellowship precipitated this drop, it did not happen immediately, but after a two month period. From my perspective, the infamous "summer slump" took its toll in the summer and the attendance at St. John's never recovered from it. I believe that Vision Fellowship had little to do directly with the decline in St. John's attendance. I do believe, however, there was an indirect cause that can be attributed to Vision. The amount of time and energy that I, as pastor, had to expend in order to start a ministry such as Vision Fellowship took away from the time and energy that I could expend in the normal evangelistic and pastoral work of St. John's. As stated in Chapter 2, a church and a pastor must be willing to pay the price for growth (Leading 46-67). Also, in July of 1993, my mother was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, which took her life in March of 1994. I spent my spare time and energy making the 300 mile round trip to take care of her as much as possible. In other words, the ministry of St. John's was hindered by less than normal ministry from its senior pastor due to the time requirements at Vision and for personal reasons. I believe, the drop in attendance at St. John's was due, in large part, to these two factors as well as the aging congregation and move outs.

In conclusion, I believe that Vision Fellowship was a contributor to the loss of attendance at St. John's in two ways. First, an average of four people switched from St. John's to Vision and second, the time requirements on me as pastor, in order to start the new ministry, had a detrimental effect on the

existing church. These two factors, although disconcerting, are minor as compared to the beneficial results for growth that Vision created.

Research Question Two

In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?

The spiritual growth of St. John's as it relates to Vision Fellowship is much more difficult to determine. The statistical information may indicate, in part, the spiritual health of a congregation, but it cannot be complete or definitive without other information. The statistics highlight areas of concern that might indicate some spiritual stagnation. The fact, already pointed out, of a decline in St. John's morning attendance may be an indication of stagnation. On the other hand, the fact that a church was willing to implement Vision Fellowship indicates some spiritual growth. The interviews will help fill in the gap on this subject.

In both the Vision and St. John's interview formats, questions were asked of the interviewees concerning the influence of Vision Fellowship on their lives. Nine out of ten of the Vision Fellowship interviewees specifically shared how Vision had benefited them. C-1 stating that his spiritual growth had been enhanced because it allowed him to express a call to ministry and U-1 rekindling her relationship with Jesus, offer two of the best examples of the spiritual growth fostered in people's lives through the ministry of Vision Fellowship. This growth was not limited to Vision people alone. The St. John's interviewees also expressed a positive impact on their spiritual lives due to Vision Fellowship. Seven out of ten expressed a positive impact on

their lives because of Vision. Most felt that Vision being offered gave them a way, as a church, to fulfill the mandate of Jesus to reach others for him.

These observations gathered through the interview process give evidence that Vision Fellowship has created some spiritual growth in those who are involved in the ministries of St. John's United Methodist Church.

From my observations, St. John's spiritual growth was enhanced by Vision Fellowship. This was accomplished in various ways. The most obvious is that the ministry of St. John's, through Vision Fellowship, touched the lives of at least 90 unchurched persons, and around 150 persons altogether, through its services. Seeds for the the kingdom of God were planted in the soil of their lives. Of this 90, 20 persons are still active in the kingdom because of Vision. They are growing in their relationship to Jesus through this ministry. This definitely shows spiritual growth. Another way spiritual growth is discernible is in the lives of those who have been involved in the ministry themselves. As Genesis chapter twelve shows, we are blessed to be a blessing. When persons involve themselves in ministry, their personal spiritual lives are enhanced. Vision Fellowship allowed many St. John's members to be involved in ministry through its various activities. From catching and processing God's original vision, through the planning stages, through the phone survey, on to the building preparation, to the worship team, to those who provided and served refreshments, to those who made follow-up visits, on to those who served as greeters, and those who helped with the evaluation of the ministry in the interview process, many have been able to minister on behalf of Jesus because of Vision Fellowship. This outlet for ministry is

definitely a spiritual growth producer. "The Pauline Cycle" that David J. Hesselgrave presents in his book, Planting Churches Cross-Culturally, and referred to in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, has affected the lives of St. John's members through Vision Fellowship. "The Pauline Cycle" shows how persons mature in the Christian faith from being the object of ministry to doing the ministry. Hesselgrave traces this maturing process through the book of Acts (Hesselgrave 58). The implication is that to the extent that one has become actively involved in some form of ministry, one has matured spiritually. The evidence of ministry involvement is one tangible measurement of spiritual growth. There have also been those in St. John's who feel a freedom to participate in their understanding of true worship through the worship service of Vision Fellowship. It can be said, without reservation, that Vision Fellowship has had a beneficial impact on the spiritual life of St. John's.

A suggestion for enhancing the growth potential of Vision Fellowship would be to better involve the membership of St. John's in the actual ministry of Vision Fellowship. The pastoral leadership, as with any growing church, can not and should not shoulder the entire weight of the ministry. Although there were many laypersons involved, more of the actual ministry could have been accomplished by the laity after the initial stages, especially through visitation and follow-up. It seemed that the enthusiasm of the laity for ministry slowed after about two months and most of the ministry obligations were left to the pastors. Their continued involvement would have made the ministry to Vision participants more viable and freed up some time and energy for the pastors to minister in St. John's proper. This lay involvement would

then need to transition from St. John's members to Vision members doing most of the ministry. C. Peter Wagner points out this important concept for church growth in his book, Leading Your Church to Growth (134-135). Growth is enhanced when a group takes responsibility for its own growth instead of allowing "outsiders" to carry the bulk of the ministry. Figure 2 in Chapter 2, on page 45 of this dissertation gives a graphic example of this principle.

Research Question Three

How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?

The statistical information also has a bearing on the third research question. The statistics show that approximately 1500 people are unchurched in Stamford. Of this 1500, 90 unchurched persons attended Vision Fellowship in its first year. Although this is a small percentage of the total, it is still a very meaningful amount in terms of the impact that one church the size of St. John's can make. At no other time in the last ten years has that amount of unchurched people come to St. John's in one year. The publicity, phone survey (which contacted 392 families, 100 of which were unchurched), and word of mouth contacts evidently had an influence on some of the unchurched and motivated them to try Vision Fellowship at least once. The problem with this, however, was that only 20 of these unchurched persons were still active at the end of the year. This number is substantial in terms of the history of success with the unchurched at St. John's. In the last ten year period this is the highest number of unchurched persons active in a one year period. Other years have had more persons join and become active, but about half of this number was transfer growth, not unchurched growth. The

problem however, is that while 20 is a good number, there were still 70 that "slipped through the cracks" and are no longer active. The question of why this happened cannot be answered by the statistics alone and will be addressed in more detail later.

The five interviews with unchurched Vision attenders deal with the loss directly. Each of these five persons are very pleased with Vision Fellowship and although most of them offer suggestions for its improvement, they have been effectively incorporated into a fellowship of believers because of Vision. They each express that Vision has been good for them spiritually. From this standpoint Vision Fellowship is very effective.

The question arises, however, why did 70 unchurched people drop out of Vision after being exposed to its ministry. The negatives pointed out by unchurched Vision attenders may give some clues as to why 70 unchurched people have dropped out. The suggestions for changes in Vision through the interviews seem to concern three areas. First, U-1, U-3, and U-5 suggested a time change for Vision Fellowship services. Second, U-1, U-2, and D-1 expressed a need for more discipleship opportunities. One meeting a week did not meet all of their needs in this area. It would seem logical that this factor could be an important element in the loss of "the 70." People in established churches when they are not active in some form of growth activity such as a small group, become stagnant in their growth and have a tendency to drop out. It would follow, then, that unchurched people who are not involved could easily lose interest and drop out as well. Some type of change in worship was suggested by U-1, U-2, . The changes suggested were all different; and this,

balanced with the nearly unanimous positive feeling about the worship services in general, discounts this as a major factor. As with any worship style, some will like it and some will not. That Vision provides an alternative to the formal, liturgical service might turn some away, but in order to be true to the original vision from God for Vision Fellowship, it will have to be maintained. There is not enough evidence for this being a major factor for the loss of "the 70" to mandate a major change in the worship style. These factors do not give a complete picture for the loss of "the seventy," but they do offer some clarifying information concerning this problem.

The informal interviews with the five Vision attenders who dropped out specifically impacts this question. The reasons given for dropping out directly address the issue raised by the loss of "the 70." The reasons given by these five people parallel those given by any person who stops coming to church. D-1 and D-2 allowed other activities to take precedent over worship attendance. This coupled with a general lack of commitment made it easy for them to drop out. Also, when D-2's personal crisis had passed, her need for spiritual nourishment also passed. The indictment on Vision Fellowship is that it did not elicit the commitment needed to maintain their attendance.

D-3's shyness along with her problems at home drew her away from attendance at Vision and St. John's. Her high church background caused her to need some formality in worship in order for her to feel comfortable in worship. This combination allowed her to drop out.

D-4's reasons for stopping attendance were also two-fold. First, she, being raised a Catholic, did not feel comfortable in a Protestant setting. Second,

when her Protestant (culturally) husband would not go to Vision with her, the need for being Protestant faded in her mind. These two reasons allowed D-4 to become inactive.

D-5's need for more community than Vision Fellowship offered, her daughter's need for growth opportunities, and her need to be involved in her home town led to her dropping out of Vision Fellowship. She especially enjoyed the style of worship at Vision, so this could not be the reason for her leaving.

These informal interviews lead to several conclusions. First, Vision has the same problems in creating commitment as any church does. The apathy of those who attend can lead to drop out. Second, style of worship is important to some people. They desire a more formal alternative. This is provided, however, in most other churches in Stamford. The uniqueness of Vision Fellowship is in part the informality of its service and so it appeals to those who desire that atmosphere for worship. Third, a lack of growth opportunities and service options at Vision Fellowship is a cause for drop out.

From my perspective, when I consider that there are approximately 1500 unchurched people in Stamford, the fact 90 were influenced with the gospel through Vision Fellowship seems a small percentage. The realization that only 20 of those 90 remain active in some form or fashion would seem to lessen the impact even more. These numbers are not the entire story. Although I would like to see more in terms of numbers, the fact remains that a substantial number of people were impacted by the ministry of Vision Fellowship. Even though St. John's does an effective job of reaching out to

middle class, traditional, persons in Stamford, Vision Fellowship allowed for a ministry to persons who were either turned off by organized, traditional religion or that were intimidated by all the religious trappings associated with church. I truly believe that many of these 90 persons would never have entered St. John's building or any other "church" building. In informal conversations with me, many of the attenders stated just that fact. So in terms of attracting and keeping the unchurched of Stamford, the measure of success is mixed. In overall numbers the impact seems minimal. In terms of what St. John's could do with limited resources, I believe it was a tremendous success.

I also believe that a door was opened by the newness of Vision Fellowship that will never be open in quite the same way again. In that respect, Vision has lost a great opportunity to include more of the unchurched into their ministry. Another lost opportunity is with the 70 persons who were not assimilated into the fellowship but "slipped out the back door." In searching for a cause for this occurrence, I feel that a lack of discipleship and fellowship opportunities that would integrate people into the life of a church was a major factor. I also feel that a lack of follow-up and pastoral care for those who attended was a factor. Both of these problems could have been avoided with more lay involvement. This involvement needs to come from two areas. First, St. John's people could fulfill many of these ministry needs, however, for Vision Fellowship to really have an impact on the unchurched community, the Vision attenders themselves will have to become active in inviting and discipling. When they begin to take ownership of their specific part of God's kingdom, then an impact will definitely be felt in Stamford. In

order to do this leaders need to emerge from the ranks of Vision Fellowship and a core group will need to surround the leaders with support. When the Vision people themselves begin to contact the unchurched through the natural web of their relationships, a greater receptivity will be seen and felt (Hesselgrave 58).

Research Question Four

Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through the existing programs of St. John's?

The statistics show that seven unchurched persons at Vision Fellowship have become involved in an existing program of St. John's. Programs such as short term Bible studies, the Bethel Bible series, revival services, vacation Bible school, and morning and evening worship have been repeatedly offered to the Vision attenders. Seven persons have taken advantage of this offer. Two adults have come to some morning and evening worship services and have both joined St. John's. They still maintain some contact with Vision Fellowship while involving themselves at times with St. John's in the worship services. A third person, a youth, has been influenced by David Skinner's ministry to become active in the youth program of St. John's and express a faith commitment. David preaches in the Vision rotation and also is the youth minister at St. John's. Four persons took advantage of Christmas programs, with two participating in the program. Although there is some evidence of a few Vision people benefiting from the programs of St. John's for discipleship, there are many who do not take advantage of this opportunity.

The interviews shed limited light on this question. All of the interviewees recognize the connection between Vision Fellowship and St. John's. Some of them, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, and U-1 use other church's activities for program opportunities. Five of them, C-5, U-2, U-3, U-4 and U-5 used St. John's for meeting this need, although not extensively. Of the unchurched Vision attenders U-2 (through her daughter), U-3, U-4, and U-5 use St. John's programs for discipleship. U-3 did express the need for a time change so that her family could take advantage of St. John's Sunday school opportunities. Some evidence shows that spiritual growth of Vision participants through existing St. John's programs could happen. This evidence is far from conclusive. U-2, U-3, and U-4's participation was minor. No ongoing involvement of the type needed for true spiritual enrichment took place. The interviews with St. John's participants show that there is a general acceptance of Vision Fellowship and a openness to these people participating in St. John's activities. The barrier, if one does exist, is not a result of a closed attitude on the part of St. John's members. Through the use of statistics and the interviews there is still not enough information to adequately answer this question.

Although some Vision attenders have tried St. John's programming, it is my opinion that, on the whole, St. John's will not be able to vitally benefit them spiritually through its programming. The same resistance to entering the church in the first place, plays a factor in entering the church for programs after a first contact has been made. Time and time again programs were made available to the Vision attenders through the avenue of St. John's. A new

Bible study at St. John's was created because of interest expressed by Vision attenders. The attenders were specifically invited to attend and none came. Very rarely did they take advantage of any opportunities based at St. John's. A few persons who had church backgrounds in their past took advantage of the programs but those who were totally unchurched never did. Usually, it was for special occasions such as Christmas activities that the interest was shown. A church planting principle applies here. New ministries grow faster than existing ones (44 Questions 27). For the people of Vision Fellowship to become more than nominal in their commitment, there will have to be a concerted effort at making new ministry opportunities available in their context, on their level, with their leadership.

Research Question Five

Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what brought about the integration?

The statistical information has no bearing on this issue except to show that after a year Vision Fellowship is still a part of St. John's.

The interviews give some interesting information about this issue. All of the Vision interviewees recognize the fact that Vision is a part of St. John's. None of them expressed a desire in any way for Vision to become independent of St. John's. There were needs expressed for Vision to begin to offer more opportunities for ministry than a single worship service, thus leading in the direction of more autonomy. These needs were expressed by C-1, C-2, U-1, U-3, and U-5. C-4 expressed a need for sacramental worship which also adds an

autonomous dynamic to Vision. U-1's expression of a need for a church home not being met in Vision suggests that Vision, on its own, is lacking and this might push for a fuller range of activities and programs designed especially for Vision. This assertion is strengthened by D-5's leaving Vision Fellowship for a church with a full range of ministry options. All of these dynamics could lead Vision toward autonomy. The statement by S-1 from St. John's indicates that there are people in St. John's who feel that this might be a possibility. On the other side of the issue, U-2, U-3, U-4, and U-5 being interested in St. John's programs in some way, leads to an assumption that some integration is taking place. The interview process suggests, that in the minds of most Vision and St. John's people, the two can exist in the present relationship. However, practically speaking, there is a movement toward autonomy. Again, there is not enough evidence to determine what will take place. Only time will tell the true story.

From a pastor's perspective, I believe this question has to be answered considering two groups. First, in the minds of a few persons from St. John's, there is a fear that Vision will become independent. This thought is much like leaven in a loaf. Although there is not much of it, it affects the entire loaf. Through the questions I have received and the concerns that have been raised by some in St. John's, I feel this could become a major issue in the future. How this issue will be resolved will determine the future and success of Vision Fellowship as a ministry associated with St. John's (Barker 69). I would also point out that, at this time, the integration seems to be working well with respect to St. John's. People for the most part do not seem threatened by the

ministry and are encouraged by it. They feel ownership of Vision without demanding control over every function of the ministry. If the leaven mentioned above can be controlled, this relationship should remain mutually productive for both St. John's and Vision.

From the standpoint of Vision Fellowship, signs of integration are mixed. Some, as stated before, are taking advantage of the relationship. Others are indifferent to the relationship. A problem that has surfaced from the Vision perspective is the lack of ownership that Vision participants feel for Vision. The connection allows a feeling that Vision is a St. John's program and does not belong to people attending Vision. As long as this perception continues, limited success for Vision will be realized.

This realization raises an interesting question. Should Vision be integrated or separate? I believe the answer is yes. It must be loosely connected but develop an autonomy of its own. The connection will be for stability and mutual support but a freedom must be allowed for the people of Vision Fellowship to catch their own vision from God. As stated in Chapter 2, Lyle E. Schaller writes about this principle in his book, 44 Questions for Church Planters. In discussing a multi-site congregation he maintains that four outcomes are possible:

1. The added site eventually separates and becomes independent;
2. The added site becomes the site for relocation of the entire church;
3. The arrangement is left completely open ended;
4. The multi-site arrangement remains permanent (44 Questions 56-57).

The fourth option is faithful to the original vision establishing this ministry. It remains to be seen if this delicate balance can be maintained.

Summary

To definitively answer the research questions and the attendant questions raised in their discussion, the preceding information needs to be integrated. The conclusions will be based on the integration of the statistics, the interviews, and the insights of the pastor.

Question One: In what ways does the implementation of a second, off-site worship service create church growth for St. John's United Methodist Church?

The implementation of Vision Fellowship had a minimal effect on the numerical growth of St. John's United Methodist Church. The growth for Vision Fellowship itself, was notable but not exceptional for a new ministry. Taking into consideration the community situation and the resources available to Vision Fellowship, the ministry was a success. Not only did the ministry impact the lives of 90 unchurched persons, it also touched the lives of more than 60 persons of other churches during its first year. One statistic that has not been mentioned previously is that the average attendance, including those who also attended the same day at St. John's, was almost 30 people. This is a great starting year for a new ministry in a community the size of Stamford. The problem of loss of attendance at St. John's can be explained by two factors. First, an average of four people switched their worship attendance from from St. John's to Vision; and second, the time and ministry requirements on the senior pastor, in order to start Vision, had a detrimental effect on the existing

church. Other factors than those attributable to Vision Fellowship created some of the loss as well. A study of the congregation shows these factors to be a loss because of illness in the older members of St. John's, and an unusual number of members moving out of the community for the year.

Growth is not limited to worship attendance alone. Other aspects such as membership statistics and attendance at Sunday school are also factors in numerical growth. Vision Fellowship did not offer a Sunday school program in its first year. Therefore, that statistic is not applicable except if there was a decrease in St. John's Sunday school attendance. A drop from 77 to 66 did take place. This drop can be explained through the fact that Vision Fellowship occurred at the same time as Sunday school at St. John's. Those involved in the ministry in various ways account for about five of the loss. Another factor in the decline is the fact that a Sunday school class which averaged 16 did not meet for six weeks and served as greeters for Vision Fellowship. The attendance in this class remained abnormally low for three months after their greeting time because their popular teacher was gone for three months on business. When he returned the class moved back to full strength. Taking these factors into consideration explains the loss of attendance. There was, however, a minimal effect on Sunday school due to some St. John's people using Vision Fellowship as a Sunday school alternative.

Membership statistics show a decrease for 1993 of six members. However, this decrease was reversed in 1994 as there was an increase of ten members. This increase was the largest increase for the past ten years. The evidence is therefore, inconclusive as to the overall effect on membership. As a direct

result of Vision, only two people have become members of St. John's. This is a result of emphasis being placed on attendance not membership at Vision. Another factor may be that in St. John's persons who are transferring from another denomination or who join by profession of faith usually join in the second year of their attendance. If this is true for Vision Fellowship, not enough time has transpired for the attenders to make this decision. A clearer picture of membership growth will come with time.

Question Two: In what ways does Vision Fellowship create spiritual growth for attenders and for St. John's United Methodist Church?

Spiritual growth is much harder to determine than statistical growth. Based on the information gathered above, spiritual growth has taken place in the Vision attenders and many of the St. John's attenders. Nine of ten Vision interviewees specifically mentioned that their lives had changed positively because of Vision. Seven out of ten St. John's interviewees came to the same conclusion. These testimonies of spiritual growth and the observation of the senior pastor that lives have been affected and growth toward Jesus has taken place, leave only one conclusion. Vision Fellowship has contributed to spiritual growth for the entire church, both St. John's and Vision Fellowship.

An unforeseen benefit to the kingdom of God is that Vision Fellowship has influenced the spiritual growth of people who are involved in other churches of the community. This has been accomplished without proselytizing. All of those involved in Vision from other churches have remained active in their own church. Some have become even more active. Those who are involved in other churches and Vision Fellowship are C-1, C-2,

C-3, C-4, and U-1. Vision has also been a port of entry for two persons, D-4, and D-5, to become involved in other churches. This ecumenical benefit is a pleasant surprise benefit of Vision Fellowship.

Question Three: How well has Vision Fellowship attracted the unchurched of Stamford?

The actual involvement of the total population of the unchurched in Stamford at the time of the writing of this dissertation seems minimal. The potential for this to change however is great. Anytime 20 unchurched persons have been touched for Christ, their web of influence runs deep into the unchurched community. If they will begin to take on ministry responsibilities, the potential for impacting the unchurched community of Stamford is staggering. The laity of St. John's will need to resource their ministry through money, and example. They must also be willing to relinquish control of the ministry to Vision attenders in time, as they become more mature in the faith.

A second effect that needs to be discussed is the impact of Vision Fellowship on the unchurched who came to Vision. The troubling fact is that 70 unchurched persons dropped out of Vision after visiting. This trend has to be stopped if Vision is to be as effective as possible. In order to stop it, more opportunities for discipleship and community building will need to be provided. Also, the laity of Vision will need to begin to take leadership in the visitation and discipling ministries. This will hopefully increase involvement and commitment. In other words, Vision people will need to take ownership of their ministry and not leave it up to the pastoral leadership. The worship style will need to be continually evaluated and matched with the target

population, and Vision will need to continually seek out the needs of their target population and try to meet them.

Even with the loss of "the 70" to the worship service, all is not lost for them. Seeds of the gospel have been planted through Vision Fellowship that would not have happened otherwise, and at a more appropriate time in their lives the harvest will take place.

The third effect of Vision on the unchurched is associated with the unchurched persons who remained a part of Vision Fellowship for the year. It is evident that real growth has taken place in their lives as a result of Vision Fellowship. There are 15-20 persons attending church today that may not have been otherwise. Also, spiritual growth is evident in their lives by their own admission and also by the observations of others. This effect is by far the greatest and most satisfying one of all.

One failure of Vision Fellowship is that it did not effect the unchurched minority population of Stamford in a lasting way. There were seven Hispanics and no black persons who attended. These seven are no longer active. Victor Peña dropped out of the preaching rotation after two months due to time conflicts and this dimension of the ministry faded with his departure. The Hispanic population of Stamford is rapidly growing and to fully impact the unchurched population of Stamford, ministry to this growing segment of the population will need to be developed.

Question Four: Can the unchurched people who attend Vision Fellowship benefit spiritually through existing programs of St. John's?

The actual answer to this question is yes. The unchurched people who attend Vision *can* benefit spiritually through the existing programs of St. John's. This is proven by the fact that some of them have taken advantage of this opportunity. The real question here is *will* the unchurched use this avenue for discipleship? The answer to this question is yes and no. Some will, but many will not. The same hindrances to evangelism inherent at St. John's that led to the implementation of Vision Fellowship, are also hindrances for discipleship. These obstacles can be and are overcome with some people, but they remain obstacles just the same. In order for more effective ministry to take place, discipleship opportunities will have to be provided on an on-going basis at Vision Fellowship. This will allow leadership to develop at Vision and will also make discipleship ministries more inviting to the unchurched.

Question Five: Will Vision Fellowship become independent of St. John's or remain a part of St. John's? If it remains a part of St. John's, what brought about the integration?

The answer to this question is elusive at this time. The reality is that Vision Fellowship is a part of St. John's and will probably remain so. There will need to be a loose connection between Vision and St. John's that will allow Vision Fellowship the freedom to receive their own vision for ministry and their future. It will also need to allow them to develop their own leadership and community. On the other hand the original vision for the ministry was given to St. John's and the support through resources and prayer needs to be maintained for them to accomplish the vision. In the future more autonomy for Vision may be required, but at this time the connection needs to

be evident. This connection will be maintained through sharing the pastoral leadership between the churches. This leadership needs to maintain adequate communication between the ministries. Also mutual ministry and fellowship opportunities will need to be explored so that integration will be enhanced.

Suggestions for the Future

Needs for some changes in Vision Fellowship to be effective in the future must be realized. There must be a re-emphasis on the original vision for the ministry, as an outreach to the unchurched population of Stamford. Specific ways to reach the minority population of Stamford will also need to be explored and developed (Hesselgrave 36-37). Also needed is a re-emphasis on prayer, as well, if the ministry will have a future (Church Planting 46). Vision Fellowship will need to develop leadership from within and not depend on St. John's for its leadership if it is to remain a viable ministry. Vision Fellowship will also have to develop and maintain effective discipling programs for its attenders.

Some specific changes are being implemented in order to bring about these changes. First, the time of Vision Fellowship will be moved back to 9:00 a.m., Sunday morning. This will allow for those who want to be involved in other church activities to do so. St. John's Sunday school will be offered as a discipleship opportunity. Second, St. John's evening worship will be moved to the Vision building. This move will accomplish three purposes: (1) It will add more people to the service at Vision making it less threatening to new-comers. (2) It will provide a mutual ministry opportunity for both groups and allow communication and integration to take place. This will lessen the threat to St.

John's people and will enhance the support of Vision Fellowship. The evening time may also be more conducive for the unchurched population of Stamford. (3) It will serve as an anchor for the establishment of Vision Academy. Vision Academy will be a series of thematic studies offered through Vision Fellowship. Both St. John's and Vision laity will be used in teaching and leadership. These classes will begin at 5:00 p.m. Sunday evening and Vision evening worship will begin at 6:00. Adult and children's classes will be offered and the youth ministry of St. John's will be available for the youth. A Sunday afternoon fourth through sixth grade program for both St. John's and Vision children will be developed. These changes will provide an opportunity for discipleship and leadership development for Vision attenders. It is hoped that with these changes and a re-emphasis on prayer, areas of need to be corrected in Vision Fellowship will be addressed and the future effectiveness of the ministry secured.

Conclusion

Vision Fellowship was the result of a church, St. John's United Methodist, receiving a dynamic vision for growth and having the courage to attempt to fulfill it. Although the implementation, and administration of this vision has been flawed by human frailty, it has nonetheless been a very successful attempt. Many small failures have been noted in this dissertation, however, many great successes will carry St. John's and Vision Fellowship into the future. The people of St. John's have sought to be true to the vision given by God and that is the greatest success of all. God has moved in the lives of St. John's and Vision attenders alike and his Holy Spirit has been evident in the

midst of the ministry. The future of Vision Fellowship as it now exists already holds some drastic changes. What the future is beyond the changes is up to God and those of Vision Fellowship and St. John's who hear his voice.

For those who might attempt this type of ministry, there are some suggestions that would be helpful. First and foremost, a church growth strategy such as Vision Fellowship, which seeks to incorporate many principles of a new church start in the midst of an ongoing ministry, should never be attempted without the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Success will be elusive if attempted outside of God's will. Both the pastor and church must count the cost of the ministry. As can be seen through this dissertation, there are many factors that will affect both the original church and the new ministry. Success will need to be measured least in terms of numerical growth, next in terms of spiritual growth, and most in adherence to God's will. The success or failure of the attempt must be measured in light of the resources of the church and the potential of growth of the community. The laity must also embrace the vision for ministry and not only be supportive but actively involved in the ministry. If there was any short coming in the entire ministry of Vision Fellowship, it came in this area. More of the actual ministry needed to fall into the hands of the laity and less into the hands of the pastoral leadership. Time and the demands on emotional and spiritual resources of the pastoral leadership requires effective and capable lay involvement.

The final writing of this dissertation is approximately two years and six months after the earliest discussions which birthed Vision Fellowship. The changes recommended above have been in place for almost one year. The

morning worship time was moved to 9:00 a.m. which allowed some to be involved in the Sunday School program of St. John's. Very few took advantage of this opportunity. Vision Academy was established and met with limited success. Vision and St. John's people attended the various classes. U-1, a Vision interviewee, taught an "Experiencing God" class which was attended by mostly St. John's women and this experience greatly enhanced her spiritual maturity. The class also facilitated the integration between the two groups. The morning Vision service attendance remained around 20 for the next year and the evening Vision service grew to around 50. This service was beginning to attract some new unchurched people. Another change was mandated at the end of 1994 as the building housing Vision Fellowship was leased. The ministry was postponed until a new building could be located. A building near the old location has been given to the church and remodeled to house Vision Fellowship and new vision is being sought for the future.

This entire project has been very beneficial to St. John's and to me. I see areas where the project could have been enhanced with some changes. More interviews in the unchurched population of Vision Fellowship would have given a clear picture of the dynamics of the ministry. The conclusions would have then been clearer and easier to draw. More structure to the interviews with the unchurched drop outs would have given better information. Better record keeping within St. John's would have given a clearer picture of congregational trends that have a bearing on Vision Fellowship. These changes would have made the project more concise and complete. Still, on the whole, it has been a tremendous learning experience for St. John's and me.

In closing, a prayer seems appropriate:

Father, you have been gracious to give your vision for growth to a small town church. We, the people of St. John's and Vision Fellowship pray that we have heard your voice clearly and have responded faithfully. You have seen fit to bless our attempt to follow your will. Many times we have failed. We pray that you will teach us from our failures. We pray for the unchurched and unredeemed of Stamford and the world. May your vision to reach them be revealed to each of us. We ask that you prepare the way for people to come to know you through your Son, Jesus. We pray also for the ministry of Vision Fellowship and others like it that you will call into being. May they touch lives for you and may we all grow in our relationship to you and one another. Thank you Father for your vision. Thank you Jesus for your love. Thank you Holy Spirit for your presence and power. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

Appendix 1

Covenant Sunday Newsletter

We are fast approaching 1993. With that in mind St. John's has begun to plan to accomplish the vision God has given us for the year. There is a five part plan for the INVOLVEMENT OF THE LAITY in ministry that has been adopted at our charge conference. The plan is outlined below with areas of service listed. Be in prayer to see where you fit in. EVERYONE has a place! Pray to understand where God would have you serve.

ON DECEMBER 13 WE WILL HAVE COVENANT SUNDAY AND YOU WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SIGN UP FOR YOUR PLACE OF SERVICE. Make plans now to be in attendance on December 13. It is of utmost importance for the ministry of St. John's.

- I. Prayer: St. John's Intercessors
 - A. St. John's Intecessors (Prayer chain and 30 minute covenant prayer group)
 - B. Sunday 9:00 AM prayer group
 - C. Men's prayer breakfast
- II. Evangelism: St. John's Witnesses
 - A. Visitation teams
 - B. Alternative service, 9:30 AM Sunday; Anthony's Building
 - C. Witness Team (further training for visitation teams in leading people to Christ)
- III. Discipleship: St. John's Teachers
 - A. Bethel Leadership Training
 - B. Teaching Sunday School
 - C. Sponsoring Young Couples Home Group
 - D. Sponsors for Youth groups
 - E. Leader's and muscians for children's choirs
 - F. New member sponsors (1 on 1 discipleship for new members)
- IV. Encouragement: St. John's Shepherds
 - A. Shut-in communion
 - B. Light-Bite Meal (Wednesday)
 - C. Christmas Dinner
 - D. Visitation of Membership
 1. Hospital
 2. Shut-in
 - E. Funeral Meals
 - F. Altar counselors
 - G. Love Bank (Put on a list so that you can meet the needs of the underprivileged in Stamford on a 1 on 1 basis)
- V. Warfare: St. John's Directors
 - A. Counseling Team
 - B. Deliverance Team

December 13, 1992

Covenant Sunday

Appendix 2

Covenant Sunday Letter and Commitment Form



St. John's United Methodist Church

P. O. Box 1155
STAMFORD, TEXAS 79553

CHURCH OFFICE
773-2561

Dear People of St. John's,

Many of you have heard of our new five point vision for ministry for 1993. I have preached a sermon series on the vision and written newsletter articles about it. This letter is to give you further information and also to ENCOURAGE YOUR PARTICIPATION IN ST. JOHN'S COVENANT SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13. On that day you will be able to sign up for the particular area of ministry where you would like to serve. Please be in prayer so that you may hear from the Lord about your specific responsibility. Pray also for a great attendance on that day. It is a most important time of commitment for our church.

The following service areas are a part of the over all vision for ministry in 1993. Pray about where you might serve.

- I. Prayer: St. John's Intercessors
 - A. St. John's Intecessors (Prayer chain and 30 minute covenant prayer group)
 - B. Sunday 9:00 AM prayer group
 - C. Men's prayer breakfast
- II. Evangelism: St. John's Witnesses
 - A. Visitation teams
 - B. Worship team for Alternative service, 9:30 AM Sunday; Anthony's Building
 - C. Witness Team (further training for visitation teams in leading people to Christ)
- III. Discipleship: St. John's Teachers
 - A. Bethel Leadership Training
 - B. Teaching Sunday School
 - C. Sponsoring Young Couples Home Group
 - D. Sponsors for youth groups
 - E. Leader's and muscians for children's choirs
 - F. New member sponsors (1 on 1 discipleship for new members)
 - G. UMW or Busy Bees
 - H. Adult Choir
- IV. Encouragement: St. John's Shepherds
 - A. Shut-in communion
 - B. Light-Bite Meal (Wednesday)
 - C. Christmas Dinner
 - D. Visitation of Membership
 - 1. Hospital
 - 2. Shut-in
 - E. Funeral Meals
 - F. Altar counselors
 - G. Love Bank (Put on a list so that you can meet the needs of the underprivileged in Stamford on a 1 on 1 basis)
- V. Warfare: St. John's Directors
 - A. Counseling Team
 - B. Deliverance Team

These are the options available for 1993. Everyone in this church has a place to fit in. Be sure to mark your preference after much prayer. We need everyone's participation so that the Kingdom of God might truly come in Stamford.

In Christ,

Appendix 2, continued

Covenant Sunday Commitment Form

- I. Prayer: St. John's Intercessors
 - St. John's Intecessors (Prayer chain and 30 minute prayer group)
 - Sunday 9:00 AM prayer group
 - Men's prayer breakfast
 - Other _____
- II. Evangelism: St. John's Witnesses
 - Visitation teams
 - Worship team, Alternative service, 9:30 AM Sunday
 - Other _____
- III. Discipleship: St. John's Teachers
 - Bethel Leadership Training
 - Teaching Sunday School
 - Sponsoring Young Couples Home Group
 - Sponsors for youth groups
 - Leader's and muscians for children's choirs
 - New member sponsors (1 on 1 discipleship for new members)
 - UMW or Busy Bees
 - Adult Choir
 - Other _____
- IV. Encouragement: St. John's Shepherds
 - Shut-in communion
 - Light-Bite Meal (Wednesday)
 - Christmas Dinner
 - Visitation of Membership
 - Hospital
 - Shut-in
 - Funeral Meals
 - Altar counselors
 - Love Bank
 - Other _____
- V. Warfare: St. John's Directors
 - Counseling Team
 - Deliverance Team
 - Other _____

I Covenant to fulfill the ministry marked above through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Signed _____

Appendix 3

Phone Survey

Callers Dialog:

Hello, my name is _____ from St. John's United Methodist Church here in Stamford. Would you mind helping me with a church survey that will take about 5 minutes of your time? (If they say no--thank them for their time and politely end the conversation, if yes, continue with:)

Let me make sure that I have the right home, this is the _____ residence, correct?

Do you presently attend a local church in our community?

If yes: Which church would that be? Thank you very much for your time, that will help us tremendously with our survey. Good bye.

If no: Would you or any one in your family be interested in a new church service begining on Sunday mornings at 9:45 starting in March. It will a brand new exciting very informal opportunity with lots of fellowship and music and you could be on the ground floor of something fresh and new here in Stamford. What do you think?

If no: Thanks for your time. This will help us tremendously with our survey. If you are ever looking for a church home think about St. John's we would love to have you. Goodbye.

If yes: Great! We would like to get some more information to you about the service, could we have your address please?

How many are in your family?

Would you mind giving me your children's ages so that we can be prepared for them in our service?

Now do you have any questions?

Thanks! We will get back with you with some information very soon. Good bye.

Appendix 3, continued

Phone Survey, continued

Answer Sheet for Phone Survey

Name Called:_____

Number Called:_____ Non-working , Busy , Not at home

Correct Residence Name:_____

(Church Attending:_____)

Service interest:_____ (If No, Denomination Preference_____)

Mailing Name and Address:

Number in family: _____

Children's ages:_____

Comments:

Appendix 3, continued

Phone Survey, continued

Fact Sheet for Vision Fellowship

Sponsored by: St. John's United Methodist

Purpose: Fellowship and Worship for people who don't know alot about church

Place: West side of the square in the old ANTHONY'S Building

Type of service: Very informal, praise and worship chorusus with full band.

Time: Sundays at 9:30-10:30 AM, Beginning March 7th

Dress: Informal, come as you are.

Other Info:

–There will be coffee and donuts and fellowship before the service begins.

–The format will be fellowship for about 15 minutes, 30 minutes of Praise and worship, 15 minutes devoted to teaching the Bible.

–Children are welcome at the service or those under 3 may be taken to the St. John's nursery.

–Various Bible teachers will be speaking including Victor Pena, David Skinner, and Phil McClendon.

–EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!

Appendix 4

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation

St. John's



*A Holy Spirit Led,
Bible Centered Ministry*

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

St. John's Worship

Traditional and Contemporary

If you are looking for a church home in Stamford, St. John's is the place for you. The 10:50 AM Sunday worship service is a blending of the traditional and contemporary that makes the service friendly and open yet reverent and worshipful. You will find people of all ages and backgrounds gathered for the common purpose of Holy Spirit led, Bible centered worship. The warmth of the fellowship ushers in a family atmosphere. It is a place where you can belong.

The 6:00 PM Sunday worship service is designed for those who enjoy the freedom of contemporary praise and worship. Praise and worship choruses, prayer, ministry, and Bible centered preaching allow for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to touch each heart.

The *Spirit* is moving at St. John's. Come join us .

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Activity Schedule

Sunday:

Prayer	9:00 AM
Chapel Communion	9:00 AM
Vision Fellowship	9:30 AM
Sunday School	9:45 AM
Morning Worship	10:50 AM
Jr. High Youth	5:00 PM
Evening Worship	6:00 PM
Sr. High Youth	7:00 PM

Monday

Busy Bees Women's Group	7:00 PM
(First Monday of the Month)	

Tuesday

Men's Prayer Breakfast	7:00 AM
United Methodist Women	10:00 AM
(Second and Fourth Tuesdays)	
Young Couples Home Group	7:00 PM
(Second and Fourth Tuesdays)	

Wednesday

Cherub Choir (2-4 yrs.)	6:30 PM
Sonshine Choir (Elementary)	6:30 PM
Bethel Bible Study	6:30 PM
Adult Choir	7:30 PM

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Vision Fellowship

A brand new start for people in Stamford

Vision Fellowship is a ministry of St. John's United Methodist Church, meeting at the old Anthony's Building, on the west side of the square in Stamford. The fellowship and worship will be at 9:30 Sunday Mornings, beginning March 7th and will be conducted in an inter-denominational style. The dress will be informal, the style relaxed, the music contemporary, and the atmosphere friendly and inviting.

It is our desire to bring a message of love, hope, joy, and power through Jesus to the people who will attend. If you are looking for a fresh start, some hope for the future, a purpose for life, a new power for living, or just a place to belong--here's your chance. Be on the ground floor of something new and exciting in Stamford. Be a part of Vision Fellowship!

Info

Place: West Side of the Square (Old Anthony's)

Beginning: March 7th, 1993

Time: 9:30-10:30 Sunday Mornings

Activities: Fellowship with coffee and muffins

Praise and Worship through song

Bible Study and Prayer

For more information call 773-2561.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Discipleship

St. John's people believe in discipleship (helping others to strengthen their relationships to Jesus). Those in this ministry are called St. John's Teachers. The leader is Joe Smith Upshaw, 773-2273. Some opportunities for discipleship are:

- 1. Sunday School (Sunday morning Bible study groups)*
- 2. Bethel Bible Studies (In depth mid-week Bible study)*
- 3. Home Groups (mid-week groups for study, fellowship and prayer)*
- 4. Youth Groups (Jr. High and Sr. High groups to help young people grow closer to Jesus.)*
- 5. Children's Choirs (groups for elementary and pre-elementary children that teach about Jesus through music)*
- 6. New Member Sponsors (people who will make sure the needs of new people are met)*
- 7. UMW or Busy Bees (women's groups that support missions and do service projects)*
- 8. Adult Choir (those who lead others in worship through song)*
- 9. Emmaus Walks (weekend retreats for renewal and growth)*
- 10. Reunion Groups (small groups for further growth for people who have attended an Emmaus Walk)*

If you need teaching about the Bible or Jesus or would like to enter into this type of ministry for others, please call Joe Smith.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Evangelism

St. John's people are committed to the ministry of Evangelism (sharing the love of Jesus with others so that they might receive Him and His love). Those who have entered into this ministry are called St. John's Witnesses. The leader of this group is John B. Martin, 773-5097. Ministries offered are:

- 1. Vision Fellowship (a new service reaching out to those with no church home. See page opposite.)*
- 2. Visitation Teams (this group visits those who visit in our services)*
- 3. Worship Team (this group will lead praise and worship for the Vision Fellowship)*
- 4. Witnesses (this group will be trained to lead others to a relationship with Jesus)*

If you need to talk with someone about knowing Jesus, or would like to be a part of ministry of evangelism please call John.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Encouragement

St. John's people encourage others through caring activities & personal concern. Those active in this ministry are called St. John's Shepherds. The leader is Gary Decker, 773-3231. Ministries of encouragement are:

- 1. Shut-in Communion (a monthly serving of communion to those who are not able to go to a church service.)*
- 2. Hospital Visitation (visits for those facing serious illness in the hospital)*
- 3. Shut-in visitation (an expression of care for those who can no longer get out)*
- 4. Funeral Meals (a group prepares and serves meals for the family of some one who has died.)*
- 5. Love Bank (people willing to help the needy in a tangible way)*
- 6. Christmas Dinner (a meal for those who may not have another opportunity to celebrate Christmas)*

If you are in need of Christian care or would like to take part in this ministry, please call Gary.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Prayer

St. John's people believe in the ministry of prayer. Those who have entered into this ministry are called St. John's Intecressors. The leader of this ministry is Beth McKeever, 773-3703. Prayer ministries offered are:

- 1. St. John's Intercessors Group (a prayer chain and a 30 minute a day commitment to pray for the church)*
- 2. Sunday 9:00 AM Prayer Group (this group prays for Sunday's activities and ministries)*
- 3. Men's Prayer Breakfast (this group of men meet a 7:00 AM Tuesdays for a light breakfast and to pray for needs)*

If you need prayer or would like to be a part of the ministry of prayer, please call Beth.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Warfare

The people of St. John's realize we are fighting a spiritual battle against real spiritual forces. We seek to help all who have been injured in the midst of the battle. Those involved in this ministry are called St. John's Directors. The leader of this ministry is Jim Astin, 773-2456. Warfare ministries are:

- 1. Counseling (a ministry to help overcome emotional scars)*
- 2. Deliverance (a ministry of freedom for those bound by spiritual forces)*

If you need real freedom for victorious living or would like to help in these ministries, please call Jim.

Appendix 4, continued

Ministry Packet and Letter of Invitation, continued

Dear Friend,

We want to thank you for taking time to help us with our phone survey and for your interest in Vision Fellowship. It is our hope to provide for you and others in Stamford an exciting place for fellowship and finding out more about Jesus.

In this mailing you will find an information packet about St. John's United Methodist Church and its ministries, including the exciting new ministry of Vision Fellowship. We invite you to be a part of any of the opportunities that St. John's has available. You are always welcome and we want to be a service to you in any way possible.

Vision Fellowship's first Sunday will be March 7th. We will meet each Sunday following at 9:30 AM on the West Side of the square in Stamford. We are looking forward to seeing you there. Jesus is doing something brand new in Stamford. Be a part of it!

In Christ,

Your Friends at St. John's

Appendix 5

Stamford, Texas Newspaper Articles

Stamford American

STAMFORD, JONES COUNTY, TEXAS 79553, Thursday, March 4, 1993, 14 pages, 2 inserts

Vision Fellowship to begin services Sunday

St. John's United Methodist Church is on the forefront of a new concept of ministry. This Sunday at 9:30 AM, the door will open on Vision Fellowship. The concept of ministry is unique in that Vision Fellowship offers a new church atmosphere and at the same time gives everyone who comes, an opportunity to have a full range of programs through St. John's existing structures.

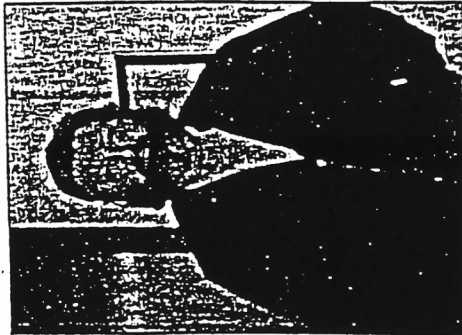
Phil McClendon, pastor of St. John's has sought out United Methodist denominational officials who have confirmed that this concept is indeed new, at least to United Methodism. Many new churches have been started and many second worship services have been added in the existing church building, but the idea of an alternative place of

McClendon and Victor Pena, who will help each person to understand the real issues that face them each day. Third, it will seek to address the moral, and spiritual climate of Stamford in ways that will allow its membership to impact the community life of Stamford in a very positive way.

Vision Fellowship is sponsored by and fully supported by St. John's United Methodist Church. It will meet each Sunday at 9:30 AM in the old Anthony's building on the west side of the square. It is designed for those people who have no church home at the present time and a warm invitation is extended to all. Be a part of something new and exciting in Stamford. Be a part of Vision Fellowship.

worship to provide the new church atmosphere, coupled with the stability and programming of an existing United Methodist Church is something unique.

Vision Fellowship will meet the needs of Stamford in various ways. First it is something new and fresh. In the present community climate of store closures and lay-offs this ministry will offer the community of Stamford a new alternative for church. It will be something new in Stamford. Second, the atmosphere will be informal, no suits and ties. The style of worship will be up beat and contemporary with a full team of musicians leading the singing of praise and worship songs. It will also offer a team of speakers including David Skinner, Phil



Victor Pena will be speaker for some of the services at the new Vision Fellowship.

Appendix 5, continued

Stamford, Texas Newspaper Articles, continued

Vision Fellowship begins with good attendance

St. John's United Methodist Church held its first outreach service in the old Anthony's building on the west side of the square with 78 in attendance. The new ministry is an informal, contemporary service that will be held every Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. The style of the service is a positive approach to everyday life situations here in Stamford.

Phil McClendon gave the sermon. David Skinner, associate pastor of St. John's opened the service. Tony Nauert read the scripture and lead in singing with Misty Kohout assisting. Music was provided by Jennie McClendon on keyboard, Rocky Underwood and Phil McClendon on guitars, David Skinner on drums as several praise songs were sung by the congregation.

This coming Sunday, Victor Pena, a Methodist lay speaker from Aspermont will conduct the services at 9:30 a.m. this coming Sunday.

Everyone is welcome to this "come as you are" service.

Appendix 6

Abilene, Texas Newspaper Article

Religion

Saturday, March 6, 1993 ■ Abilene Reporter-News

Stanford Methodist Vision Fellowship to open

By ROY A. JONES II
Religion Editor

STAMFORD — St. John's United Methodist Church's long-time vision will become a reality with the opening of a new Vision Fellowship Sunday.

Vision Fellowship, a unique concept of ministry within the United Methodist Church, will open its doors at 9:30 a.m. in the former Anthony's building on the west side of the courthouse square.

The Fellowship will offer an informal and relaxed worship atmosphere — no suits and ties. But at the same time it will also offer those who attend access to a full range of programs through the existing structure of the sponsoring church.

The Rev. Phil McClendon, St. John's pastor, said Stanford's concept is new to United Methodism. Many churches have started new congregations and some have added second worship services in existing church buildings, but the idea of providing an alternative place of worship, coupled with the stability and programming of an existing church, has not been tried in the denomination.

Members of the Genesis Sunday School class, taught by Gary Decker, will be hosts and hostesses for the first services Sunday. Other classes will serve as hosts on subsequent Sundays. Officials are hoping that about 75 persons who have no regular church home will attend on

Church notes

Sunday, said John B. Martin, publicity chairman for the project.

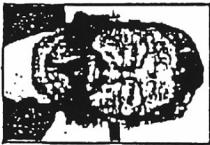
A survey of Stanford churches showed more than 900 residents are not members of any church, he said. More than 300 of those have been contacted personally and many said they do not feel comfortable attending services in the traditional church setting.

"We'll be there in our Levi's to welcome anyone who wants to come," Martin said.

Free use of the building was offered by its owner, Dr. Nordie Bayouth, a member of St. John's.

The style of worship will be upbeat and contemporary with a team of musicians leading the singing of praise and worship songs.

Vision Fellowship will also offer a team of speakers including McClendon; the Rev. David Skinner, associate pastor; and Victor Pena of Aspermont.



Pena, owner of a welding service, is a Methodist lay speaker and has conducted many lay revivals throughout the area.

In the present community climate of store closures and lay-

offs, Vision Fellowship will offer Stanford residents a new alternative for worship and will allow them to positively impact the community life of Stanford in a way they feel comfortable, McClendon said.

Appendix 7

Newsletters Announcing Vision Fellowship

The walls are up, the sign is out, and the finishing touches are being made for the Vision Fellowship service which will start 9:30 AM, March 7th down on the square. The only thing needed is people to come and worship. That is where you come in. There are various ways that you can make sure that happens:

- 1) You need to pray for the success of the new service.*
- 2) You need to invite those who might be interested in coming.*
- 3) You can help us finish our telephone survey. 500 more calls need to be made. Call the office if you can help.*
- 4) You can stuff envelopes for our mailing next week.*
- 5) You can help with the clean up of the building, Monday, February 22nd at 6:30 PM.*
- 6) You can help with the visitation team to visit our most interested people, Thursday, February 25th.*

As you can see there is much to be done for Vision Fellowship to be a success. The beauty of this ministry is that it will over Jesus to people who may not here about him any other way as well as giving each person in our congregation an opportunity to be a part of the ministry. Exciting things are underway at St. John's.

For all of our members I have a challenge for you as well. Our attendance in our worship service has hit a plateau at 140. We need to bust that figure so that more growth in our 10:50 service can happen. Won't you make it a priority to be in worship for this spring. It will make the service more inviting and warm with your presence. Jesus will meet your needs and begin to use you for a wonderful purpose. Don't miss it!

In Christ.

Phil

Appendix 7, continued

Newsletters Announcing Vision Fellowship, continued

I'll never forget the first time I stepped on the track to run competitively for Baylor University. I was a measly freshman from a small West Texas town and I was lined up in lane three with a guy from Texas A&M. We were about to run the 880 in the Southwest Conference Indoor Championship meet! Can you imagine that? The very first competitive meet as a collegian was the Indoor Conference Meet in Fort Worth at the Tarrant County Coliseum. There were about 3000 people in the stands and it was the first time for me to wear the green and gold. Needless to say many things were going through my mind. The one that really sticks with me to this day was the feeling of fear that I might not be able to compete on that level. I had never run with the "big boys" so I didn't know if I was good enough or not.

Have you ever had that experience in your life? Have you ever started something not knowing whether or not you could finish it and be successful at it? Most of us know that feeling and probably have experienced both success and failure at times. To be honest with you I am experiencing that feeling right now about VISION FELLOWSHIP. There are a few butterflies flying in the pit of my stomach. However, there is a major difference between VISION FELLOWSHIP and running track. This difference is explained in the Word. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus says, "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, even to the very end of the age." You see, on the track it was just me. With Vision Fellowship, God has given us the commission to make disciples and has promised us to be with us while we do. Anytime we are involved in "Kingdom" business we are not alone. We work not only in our power but with the power of the Holy Spirit as well. Yes, there are butterflies of fear but there are also butterflies of anticipation and excitement. I can't wait to see what God is going to do.

Launch date is this Sunday at 9:30 AM. Continue in prayer that God may bless the people of Stamford and St. John's with this new and exciting ministry. One of the things that we have discovered is that there are many people in Stamford who do not presently attend church. Some may want to come to Vision Fellowship, however, I am just as sure that there are many who would feel more comfortable in a traditional worship atmosphere. So whether you invite them to become a part of Vision Fellowship or to come to St. John's morning worship, the key is to INVITE—INVITE—INVITE!! I can still hear the starter, "Runners to your mark,"

In Christ,

Phil

Appendix 8

Vision Fellowship Interview Instrument

Introduction:

Hi, I am _____, from Vision Fellowship. I called earlier to set up this appointment to talk with you about Vision. We are doing some research concerning Vision Fellowship to determine how effective it is in ministering to you. Would you mind giving me about fifteen minutes to answer a few questions? Thanks.

I first need to get some basic information from you. What age group do you fall into: 20-29 years; 30-39 years; 40-49 years; 50-59 years; 60-70 years; over 70 years. (If there is any question on race, it will need to be cleared up at this point.)

- 1) How did you first hear about Vision Fellowship?
- 2) What first influenced you to attend Vision Fellowship?
- 3) What was your church background and experience before becoming a part of Vision Fellowship?
- 4) What were your impressions of the worship service at Vision Fellowship? (Use probe questions if necessary, for greater clarity.)
- 5) In what ways is your life different since attending Vision Fellowship?
- 6) If you were going to invite someone to Vision Fellowship, what would you say to them to encourage them to come? (Probe question if needed.)
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about Vision Fellowship?

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions that I could answer? Have a good evening.

Appendix 9

Interview Instrument for St. John's Attenders

Introduction:

Hi, thanks for agreeing to help with this survey. We are studying Vision Fellowship to determine how successful it is and how we can make it better. I would like to ask a few questions that would help greatly. (Determine age group, sex, and race.)

- 1) Now that Vision Fellowship has been established for about 7 months, what do you hear others saying about Vision Fellowship? Do you agree or disagree?
- 2) Have you been involved in any way with Vision Fellowship? What was the involvement?
- 3) How do you think Vision Fellowship's worship service is different from St. John's? Do you see any other differences?
- 4) How has Vision Fellowship influenced your life?
- 5) What else should we be doing to help St. John's better understand what is going on at Vision Fellowship?
- 6) Should Vision Fellowship be continued? (probe question to determine why.)
- 7) Is there anything else you would like to say about Vision Fellowship?

Conclusion:

Thanks for your time. I know your answers will help tremendously in our study. Do you have any questions I might could answer for you? Have a good day.

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