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## ABSTRACT

The Relationship of the Pastors' Sermon Preparation Methods  
To Average Worship Attendance in the Churches of the  
Missouri East Conference of the United Methodist Church.

by

Lynn Edward Crader

This dissertation looks at how sermon preparation methods relate to church attendance. Many Christian communicators today find a desperate need for better sermon quality. This study presupposes the importance of sermon preparation to achieving better sermon quality.

One hundred seventeen pastors from the Missouri East Conference of the United Methodist Church responded to a twenty question sermon preparation survey. The researcher divided the pastors into three groups based on their average worship attendance. Interviews conducted with selected pastors added greater insight into the sermon preparation process.

The surveys measured how the pastors prepare as to priorities, study time, resources, prayer life, planning, and techniques.

The study did not confirm a direct relationship between sermon preparation practices and worship attendance.

However, the study found important differences among the pastors in the attendance groups in five areas: advance sermon planning, the number of resources publications utilized, the number of hours spent in preparation, the strategies for protecting preparation time, and the frequency of last-minute sermon preparation. The Appendix includes a copy of the survey and the results.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
**THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PASTORS' SERMON PREPARATION METHODS  
TO AVERAGE WORSHIP ATTENDANCE IN THE CHURCHES OF THE  
MISSOURI EAST CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

presented by

**Lynn Edward Crader**


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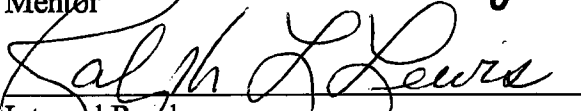
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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
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Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Lynn Edward Crader

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## Table of Contents

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| List of Figures . . . . .                         | vi   |
| List of Tables . . . . .                          | vii  |
| Chapter   |      |
| 1. Understanding the Problem . . . . .            | 1    |
| Purpose . . . . .                                 | 8    |
| Research Questions . . . . .                      | 8    |
| Definition of Terms . . . . .                     | 8    |
| Population . . . . .                              | 10   |
| Methodology . . . . .                             | 10   |
| Variables . . . . .                               | 11   |
| Instrumentation . . . . .                         | 12   |
| Data Collection . . . . .                         | 12   |
| Delimitations . . . . .                           | 14   |
| Generalizability . . . . .                        | 14   |
| Overview . . . . .                                | 15   |
| 2. The Review of the Related Literature . . . . . | 16   |
| The Preaching Situation Today . . . . .           | 16   |
| The Importance of the Task . . . . .              | 28   |
| The Immensity of the Task . . . . .               | 31   |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Elevating Readiness . . . . .                                   | 39 |
| Planning Ahead . . . . .  | 42 |
| Securing Time . . . . .   | 44 |
| Reading Widely . . . . .  | 46 |
| Summary . . . . .   | 49 |
| 3. Design of the Study . . . . .                                | 52 |
| The Problem and Purpose . . . . .                               | 52 |
| Hypothesis . . . . .  | 52 |
| Population and Sample . . . . .                                 | 53 |
| Instrumentation . . . . .                                       | 54 |
| Reliability and Validity . . . . .                              | 55 |
| Data Collection . . . . .                                       | 56 |
| Variables and Scales . . . . .                                  | 60 |
| Data Analysis . . . . .   | 61 |
| 4. Findings of the Study . . . . .                              | 62 |
| Demographics . . . . .  | 63 |
| Research Findings . . . . .                                     | 65 |
| Qualitative Research . . . . .                                  | 82 |
| Description of the Churches<br>and Their Environments . . . . . | 82 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Findings . . . . .                             | 85  |
| Summarization . . . . .                        | 91  |
| 5. Summary and Conclusions . . . . .           | 92  |
| Unexpected Findings and Observations . . . . . | 94  |
| Conclusions . . . . .                          | 95  |
| Recommendations for Further Research . . . . . | 97  |
| Works Cited . . . . .                          | 100 |
| Appendix A . . . . .                           | 105 |
| Appendix B . . . . .                           | 115 |
| Appendix C . . . . .                           | 138 |



## Figures

| Figure   | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Computer Use. . . . .                           | .70  |
| 2. Saturday Night. . . . .                         | .72  |
| 3. Hours Needed/Hours Spent . . . . .              | 75   |
| 4. Attendance When Pastor is Away . . . . .        | 76   |
| 5. Style Preferences. . . . .                      | 77   |
| 6. Sermon Preparation Survey . . . . .             | 105  |
| 7. Interview Questions . . . . .                   | 107  |
| 8. Survey Cover Letter . . . . .                   | 108  |
| 9. Survey Follow Up Post Card . . . . .            | .109 |
| 10. Script for Follow up Telephone Calls . . . . . | .110 |
| 11. Interview Confirmation Letter . . . . .        | 111  |
| 12. Permission to Tape Post Card . . . . .         | 112  |
| 13. Wesley's Suggested Reading List . . . . .      | 113  |
| 14. Transcripts of Interviews . . . . .            | 115  |

## Tables

| Table  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Demographic Information . . . . .                               | 64   |
| 2. Sermon Preparation Attitudes . . . . .                          | 66   |
| 3. Day Sermon Preparation Begins . . . . .                         | 68   |
| 4. Strategies to Protect Sermon Preparation Time .                 | 74   |
| 5. Kruskal-Wallis Test:<br>Analysis of Variance by Ranks . . . . . | 81   |
| 6. Survey Results by Question . . . . .                            | 138  |

## CHAPTER 1

### Understanding the Problem

The preaching of the Gospel stands essential to the mission of the Church. The preparation of the sermon prevails as one of the most crucial ingredients in effective preaching today.

Bruce and Marshall Shelley remind us that, "The need today is for ministers who understand unchurched America and ways to make the gospel clear in it" (213). Effective preaching emphasizes both what the sermon declares and what the sermon does. Sermon preparation remains a vital factor. Many people hear or fail to hear the gospel due to the type of sermon delivered.

Chuck Swindoll, one of today's leading authorities on communicating the Christian message, contends that preaching preparation ranks as a critical key to reaching people for Christ. He uses the analogy of "fishing for men" that Jesus used in Mark 4:19. Swindoll contends, "We need to provide the right lures and bait to attract our listeners." To those who believe the fish wait there and one needs only put

down the line and reel them in, Swindoll replies, "Well, friend, even hungry fish know a naked, dull, rusty hook when they see one. They aren't going to be attracted when dozens of more-appealing prospects are dangling nearby" (76).

Other leaders in the Christian communication field support Swindoll's hint at the need for better sermon quality. Dan Bauman declares that, "Quality preaching does not happen by accident. It is the result of hard work, creative thinking, careful research, and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is no short cut to homiletical excellence" (Berkley 81). Today's society questions the integrity of the ministry with a new skepticism. Haddon Robinson points out that, "Perhaps we're not lumped with scam artists or manipulative fund raisers, but we face an Olympic challenge to earn respect, credibility, and authority. ... Our task is to speak a word that is qualitatively different from normal conversation" ("What Authority" 24). For what *qualitative* difference do people look?

Communication today has become a more competitive field than in past generations, the sermon, like the rest of the worship experience, must contain the highest quality to impact the listeners positively. Citing television media as one of the preacher's competitors, Swindoll discloses:

Today's communicator faces a stiffer challenge than ever before. This means that we who communicate Christ must work especially hard at winning and maintaining a hearing. This doesn't mean we need to put on a better show or shout louder or attack our competition. What it does mean is that we must meet at least three demands. (76)

He spells out the three demands of effective communication as follows: 1) *we must be prepared*, 2) *we must be interesting*, and 3) *we must be practical*. Preparation is key to the effective proclamation of the Gospel in the world. This study assumes the essential relationship of preparation to preaching.

Preaching today must hold *interest* for the listener. Stuart Briscoe indicates how preparation relates to making a message interesting to the listeners by sharing a conversation he had with a good pastor friend who said to him, "Every week God gives me bread for his people." Briscoe looked him straight in the eye and replied, "That's

true, but you spend a lot of time in the kitchen!" The friend agreed with him, for those hours "in the kitchen," says Briscoe, "are among the most important of my week. Why? Because in the kitchen I prepare what God gives me to feed his people. And they can be picky eaters" (Hybels, Briscoe and Robinson 67-68).

David Babin in his preaching textbook, Week In-Week Out, highlights Anthony Trollope's scathing charge that much of preaching bores:

There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilised and free countries, than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms, the power of compelling an audience to sit silent and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruisms, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour as though words of impassioned eloquence, or persuasive logic, fell from his lips. Let a professor of law or physics find his place in a lecture-room, and there pour forth jejune words and useless empty phrases, and he will pour them forth to empty benches. Let a barrister attempt to talk without talking well, and he will talk but seldom. A judge's charge need be listened to per force by none but the jury, prisoner, and gaoler. A member of Parliament can be coughed down or counted out. Town councilors can be tabooed. But no one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the old man whom we Sindbads cannot shake off, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our

religion and makes God's service distasteful. We are not forced into church! No: but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire, nay, we are resolute, to enjoy the comfort of public worship; but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience; that we may be able to leave the house of God without that anxious longing to escape, which is the common consequence of common sermons.

(1-2)

The sensitive pastor wants to know how to combat Trollope's charges and deal with the "common consequences of common sermons." Most professors of preaching believe the means to conquer this malady lie in better preparation. Several factors contribute to gaining and holding audience attention. Ralph Lewis recognizes six such factors: (1) Intensity, (2) Movement, (3) Change, (4) Novelty, (5) Relevance, and (6) Repetition (98). Even though each of these primary interest holding techniques relate to delivery, the pastor can develop all of them in his or her study.

Preaching today must be *practical* preaching as well. Many preachers urge the preaching of sermons that connect. For example, Craig Loscalzo and co-authors Mark Galli and Craig Larson have each written recent books with the word connect in the title: Preaching Sermons That Connect and

Preaching That Connects respectively. What do they mean by "connect"? To preach a sermon that connects to the listener is the same as preaching a sermon that relates to the real or felt needs of the listener. The issue is one of relevancy. Loscalzo writes:

To expect a hearing just because you are 'the preacher' is naive. Vibrant preaching comes from those who identify with their hearers, who make the biblical revelation real to their life situations. Preaching that enables the Bible's message to intersect the Monday-through-Saturday lives of people is worthy of the name Christian. (17)

In a review of Galli and Larson's book, Calvin Miller helps explain what the authors intend by their use of the word "connect":

They want the sermon to remain simple, relational, and accessible. They want the sermon to be artsy, but less Rembrandt and more Calvin and Hobbes. They want the sermon to be creative but not hoity-toity. They would rather sermons connect than amaze or stupefy or just ornament or separate the anthem from the benediction ... *Preaching That Connects* is about how to preach about what people care about, and if you master it, who knows, people may care about what you preach about. ("Priming the Pump" 112-113)

Harry Emerson Fosdick owed much of his great influence to his philosophy of preaching. He captures this philosophy in his definition of preaching as "personal counseling on a large scale." Fosdick believed in making practical



application to the lives of his listeners: "Every sermon should have for its main business the solving of some problem" (Bishop 42-43).

How can we regain the legitimate authority our preaching needs to communicate the gospel with power and effect? The preacher's preparation of the message can utilize nearly everything veteran pastors and professors of homiletics suggest to improve preaching and relate to the contemporary mind-set of the listener. An author of the best preaching manual ever, writing to a young messenger of God said: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Every preacher of the gospel can do a better job preaching through more thorough preparation. In this study, therefore, I assume sermon preparation methods have an impact on the average worship attendance of the church.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this proposed study was to determine how pastors' sermon preparation methods relate to high, medium, and low average attendance at worship in the congregations of the Missouri East Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

## **Research Questions**

This study will address two fundamental questions.

1. Is any particular sermon preparation strategy common to these pastors?
2. What, if any, relationship exists between sermon preparation methods and average worship attendance?

## **Definition of Terms**

In this study, the key terms are defined as follows:

*Sermon preparation*: the process of planning, researching, constructing, and rehearsing the sermon for preaching at the principal weekend<sup>1</sup> worship services of a given church and pastor.

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<sup>1</sup>Many churches now have multiple weekend services in addition to a traditional Sunday morning service.

*Sermon preparation methods:* the individual pastor's habits for managing his or her resources, time, and skills in producing the sermon.

*Average worship attendance:* the average number of persons present at a local church's principal weekend worship services each week. *High worship attendance:* an average worship attendance of 200 or more. *Medium worship attendance:* an average worship attendance of 100-199. *Low worship attendance:* an average worship attendance of fewer than 100.

*Pastors:* those persons currently appointed by the bishop of the Missouri East Annual Conference including ordained pastors, licensed local pastors, student pastors, lay pastors, retired pastors, and those serving in assignments beyond the local church (i.e. district superintendents and the conference council on ministry directors).

## Population

The 351<sup>2</sup> pastors in the Missouri East Conference who were under appointment in 1995 formed the population for this study. The population group was divided into three groups: the 172 pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of less than 100, the 56 pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of 100-199, and the 38 pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of 200 or more.

## Methodology

In order to determine which pastors qualify for this study, the researcher examined journal records for the Missouri East Conference for the year 1995.

Each pastor selected for the study received a survey. This researcher trained a team of volunteers to help carry out the survey process. The surveys were designed to gather data on sermon preparation methods (see Appendix A, Figure 6). When the surveys were completed, the researcher

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<sup>2</sup>This number includes pastors under special appointment in 1995.

and volunteer team compiled them. The researcher completed the analysis.

From those who responded to the surveys, the researcher conducted in-depth telephone interviews (see Appendix A, Figure 7) with six of the pastors (two from each group respectively). A random selection determined these pastors. Interviews provided a clear understanding of the sermon preparation methods of these pastors.

### **Variables**

The dependent variable of this study, the average worship attendance of a church, had three levels:

1) average worship attendance less than 100; 2) average worship attendance of 100-199; and 3) average worship attendance of 200 and above.

The independent variable was the sermon preparation method of each pastor. The priority and emphasis indicated by the pastors studied denotes their sermon preparation methods. In this study, the researcher assumed the sermon preparation methods of the pastor influence the level of worship attendance.

### **Instrumentation**

A survey determined the sermon preparation methods of each pastor. A personal interview of select pastors added depth and color to the study. The researcher designed the survey and the interview to discover quantitative and qualitative data. A pre-test of both instruments, on pastors representative of the population, preceded the actual research.

### **Data Collection**

The Missouri East Conference Journal records for the year 1995 provided data concerning the pastoral records and average worship attendance records of the population group. The conference office at Ballwin, Missouri, retains these records in print.

Each pastor, meeting the criteria, received a cover letter along with the survey explaining the nature of the study and the importance of each respondent to the study (see Appendix A, Figure 8). The letter requested each pastor to fill out the survey and return it to this researcher in the provided postage paid envelope. One week

later those pastors who had not yet returned their surveys received a follow-up postcard (see Appendix A, Figure 9) requesting that they complete and return the surveys. The researcher prepared replacement surveys. At the end of the third week, those not responding, received phone calls to verify their receipt of the initial letter and to determine their continued willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix A, Figure 10). Those who needed them received replacement surveys.

This researcher selected six pastors from the group participating in the study for telephone interviews. The researcher called each candidate to request an interview either at the time of the call or at a later date. This researcher then sent a letter verifying the time and date of the interview (see Appendix A, Figure 11) and return postcard giving permission to tape the interview (see Appendix A, Figure 12).

### **Delimitations**

This study focused on United Methodist pastors within the geographical boundaries of the Missouri East Annual Conference. In order for a pastor to qualify for the study and to keep the study within a manageable length of time in recent history, he or she must have served a church during 1995.

### **Generalizability**

The findings of this study have direct implications for the group studied. One can only make generalizations about United Methodist pastors beyond the Missouri East Conference with caution. I assume many similarities exist between pastors serving churches with worship attendances of under 100, 100-199, and 200 and above, respectively. More research must occur to apply the results of this study to pastors of other denominations, or of other conferences of the United Methodist Church that serve churches of similar size.



## **Overview**

Four chapters will follow this chapter.

A review of the principal sermon preparation literature and research appears in Chapter 2. The chapter begins with an overview of the preaching situation today. An exploration of materials that deal with preaching, especially message preparation, follows this analysis. The last part of the chapter focuses on the practical aspects many renowned preachers employ and suggest to prepare excellent sermons.

The design of this project and a detailed explanation of the conducting and analyzing of the research occurs in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 consists of the presentation of the results of the study. This chapter includes an analysis of the responses to the research questions.

Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings of this study. Conclusions will be offered as to how this project gives direction for future study and application to other pastors.

CHAPTER 2  
THE REVIEW  
OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Preparing sermons that make a real difference is the focus of this study. What do people require to come to faith in Jesus Christ and grow in that most important relationship? What can the proclaimers of the good news do to move today's sermon listeners to hear, listen, and live out the gospel on a day to day basis? How do we preach to make a positive difference in the lives of those entrusted to our care?

The Preaching Situation Today

*"The need for effective preaching has never been greater."*

—James Broadus

Increasingly society calls for renewal and reform. People expect first rate quality from every product and service. The Church has no exemption from these demands. Researcher George Barna notes, "Like any other institution in America, the Church will be regarded with skepticism. We will be guilty, in the minds of millions of people, until proven innocent" (The Frog In The Kettle, 46). He says the

secular world sees the church (perhaps all too accurately) as guilty of "irrelevance and unreliability."

I believe Christian communicators can do something to change this perception. Many people say they would attend church if it did not bore them. Is the Gospel of the Lord so dull that people must find something else to do with their time? Does the problem lie in lifeless worship services and flat preaching? The Bible fascinates as much as the latest cinema thriller (with the possible exception of an occasional genealogy and a census or two) presenting all types of human predicament and Divine intervention.

Why then does preaching fail to come alive with the interest and excitement its Book portrays? In The Empty Pulpit, Clyde Reid lists some of the most common criticisms of contemporary preaching. One which particularly indicts preachers: "Most sermons today are dull, boring, and uninteresting" (qtd. in Loscalzo 113). Loscalzo adds, "The question haunts us: *What does my preaching do?*" (104). Writing to help preachers "connect" with their people, Loscalzo suggests we "Imagine how our

sermon preparation and delivery would change if we really thought that what we said from the pulpit had the potential to change lives. Imagine how our congregations would view preaching if they believed that sermons have life-changing consequences" (31). The congregation and the preacher would change their view of preaching.

I think most preachers would make a tenfold effort to revitalize their preaching if they believed life-altering results were imminently possible. Perhaps preachers today have lost the sense of urgency and importance their vocation once held. I believe, if God calls us to preach, He calls us to put every ounce of energy into the faithful execution of our task -- the lion's share of which incorporates preaching preparation. Introducing their annotated bibliography, Recent Homiletical Thought, Duane Litfin and Haddon Robinson, "were surprised by subjects that were seldom discussed: Jewish preaching, television preachers, women preachers, *the preacher's personal life and preparation*" (8, emphasis added). The shortage of

literature in this area matches the shortfall of the practice of preaching.

Harry Emerson Fosdick felt that preaching was God's means for calling us to action and as such held the potential for life changing power:

The preacher's business is not merely to discuss repentance but to persuade people to repent; not merely to debate the meaning and possibility of Christian faith, but to produce Christian faith in the lives of his listeners; not merely to talk about the available power of God to bring victory over trouble and temptation, but to send people from their worship on Sunday with victory in their possession. (99)

Who does not want to send people away "with victory in their possession"?

William Barclay, the world renowned New Testament interpreter and Christian communicator of extraordinary gifts, believed that every preacher could help his or her people by giving them three things while preaching. First, he insisted the preacher must give *something to feel*:

No great preacher was ever afraid of emotion. He must give the impression that this matters intensely, both to him and to his hearers; that it is in literal fact a matter of life and death.

The preacher must feel the wonder of the Christian message. Only then can he stab awake the dull and listless hearts of men and women for whom a church service has somehow become a bore rather than a thrill. (In The Hands 22)

J. A. Davidson echoes Barclay's observation by confessing, "Often we are sinfully timid and hesitant in our preaching, making the gospel message sound almost unbearably dull and inconsequential" (55).

Second, Barclay believed the preacher should give *something to remember*. Giving his audience something to remember served Barclay's preaching in at least three ways: (a) He perceived it as the proper balance for the emotional aspects of his first requirement (i.e. feeling). He believed the preacher "must inform the mind as well as the heart." (b) He gained concision of purpose. "A sermon is more like a bullet than a charge of small shot," he stated. He believed the preacher and his listeners should be able to sum up the message in one sentence. "If we were asked after listening to a sermon: 'Now, what was that all about?' it should be possible to put the essential content in a sentence." (c) It was a mnemonic aid to his audience. He taught that each sermon "should be so orderly and so intelligible that it should lodge immovably in the memory" (In The Hands 22-23).

Third, Barclay sensed his task incomplete if he did not give his listeners something else. In addition to something to feel and something to remember, he believed the preacher must finally give them *something to do*. Barclay explains what he means by "something to do":

It must be a challenge to action, in regard to oneself or in regard to other people. A friend of mine used to say that every sermon should end with the spoken or unspoken question: "What about it, chum?"

Here exactly is the trouble, not so much about preaching, as about listening to preaching. It is a psychological fact that the oftener an emotion is stirred without accompanying action, the less likely it is that action will ever happen. It becomes in the end very easy to make emotion a substitute for action.

What a different world it would be if all the fine impulses were acted upon, if every time we felt moved to do something fine, we did it! This is indeed a case when we must strike when the iron is hot. The impulse is born, it glows and flames, but unless it is acted upon it cools and fades, and every time it is not acted upon the heart grows a little harder and the will grows little weaker and action is less likely....

Something to feel, something to remember, something to do--the preacher who supplies these things will indeed be gladly heard.

(In The Hands 23)

Barclay challenges today's preachers to make the Word of God real to the people under their care. If not meaningful to the people in our pews how can the sermon impact the lost souls on life's highways and byways?

Barclay states that we need to give our people better preaching. But how do we give them "something to feel, something to remember, and something to do"? Knowledge and practice are leagues apart. Surely this requires a major investment in preparation for the preacher.

The need for study time today increases due to outside factors compounding the difficulty of preaching relevant, interesting, and action producing sermons. The electronic media noticeably effects oral communication like preaching.

Since each 20 second commercial holds many changes in voice, light and volume television leads its audience to expect as much from all types of communication. Secular communicator, Ron Hoff, notes the impact television has on our culture:

TV has taught our brains to disengage and think about something else--sex, grocery shopping, bowling, whatever. After all, our brains have been on TV "overload" for years. The A. C. Nielsen people say that the average adult now spends twenty-four hours a week in front of the set (the average child spends thirty hours). Other researchers peg the adult viewing time at over seven hours per day! (75)

Researchers discover how people conditioned by television respond to other forms of communication. Every



preacher will benefit from reading John Stott's discerning analysis of television's influence on today's sermon listeners (69-76). Stott concludes his study with this reminder, "Whatever is dull, drab, dowdy, slow or monotonous cannot compete in the television age" (76).

How do we compete for people's attention so our proclamation of Scripture can impact their lives? Preaching can make a difference. We can preach in a way which helps our listeners feel, remember, and act on the truth of God's Word.

Today's preacher finds relevance of special importance. George Barna says many people possess an "unflattering image of the local church." Barna notes that only 28 percent feel strongly that the Christian churches in their area relate to the way they live today (Americans Believe 185). Maybe that's why so many contemporary authors of preaching textbooks devote a significant portion of their work to this topic. Ralph Lewis notes the natural relevance of preaching to meet listeners' needs: "Some problems are almost universal; others are more individual. But as a rule our

contemporaries are very interested in answers to their needs--reasonable, relevant, practical, concrete, common-sense answers" (28).

The studies of Craig Loscalzo offer a cogent case for what he calls *connecting* (relevance) by the preacher's identification with his or her congregation:

To expect a hearing just because you are 'the preacher' is naive. Vibrant preaching comes from those who identify with their hearers, who make the biblical revelation real to their life situations. Preaching that enables the Bible's message to intersect the Monday-through-Saturday lives of people is worthy of the name Christian.  
(17)

In the *Kudzu* comic strip, Rev. Will B. Dunn discovered a new way of identifying with his audience: "Brothers and Sisters of the congregation, remember--if you do as I say ... you'll get a shiny gold star on the forehead of your soul ... and a 'happy note' sent home to the Almighty ... or you can spend all eternity in the 'time-out' corner!" The character adds: "When you're dealing with spiritual five-year-olds, you gotta tune in on their wave length" (Duncan with Akers 86).

The legendary preacher Phillips Brooks once addressed the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Brown University saying, "All scholarship must minister immediately to life." Warren

Wiersbe said of Brooks, "He believed that truth, rightly presented, not only enlightened the mind but also stirred the heart and captured the will" (introd. to Brooks 19).

There exists a widespread consensus that the listener's needs must remain front and center in the preacher's mind when preaching. This increases the preacher's assignment as it takes more time to search out and think through the various needs that can exist on any given day.

The *bridge building* metaphor developed by Stott describes the essential nature of preaching. According to Stott a bridge "is a means of communication between two places which would otherwise be cut off from one another by a river or a ravine" (137-138). In homiletical terms the bridge spans the gap between the Word and the world. Relevancy sits at the center of this metaphor. While it is new as a metaphor, the bridge building concept has existed for a long time for Stott readily admits, "Throughout the history of the Church Christians have tried to relate the biblical message to their particular culture; and that each new Christian generation has entered into its predecessor's

labours" (139). However, his metaphor has brought renewed attention to the issue of relevancy. Tradition tells that D. L. Moody preached with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other (Barth also said this of himself). This, in large measure, defines bridge building. Essentially incarnational bridge building has Divine precedent. Just as the Living Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the written Word must take a form that intersects contemporary human life. The communicator's task, exacting and demanding, requires both a "timeless and a timely" message (Stott 147).

Again we see the need for adequate sermon preparation because the task of finding relevance is both "exacting and demanding." Simply standing up to preach does not assure relevance. While biblical truth maintains its relevance and needs no modernizing, it does require a presentation that helps the audience see how such truths relate to them personally.

Perhaps an old story can add focus to the necessity for keeping sermons intensely personal for the sake of both the

listeners and the preacher. Once at a dinner party, after the guests had dined, someone suggested that everyone should recite a favorite piece of poetry. One after another stood and recalled beloved lines. A famous actor was a member of the party, and, when his turn came, recited the 23rd Psalm with all his skill. When he finished, he sat down to a storm of applause. An undistinguished little man was next. He, too, began the 23rd Psalm, and at first there was a murmur of surprise and a titter of amusement that he would be so bold as to compete with the great actor. Soon there was complete stillness. When he sat down there was no applause, only that silence that is more eloquent than applause. When the little man had finished, the great actor turned to him. "Sir," he said, "I know the psalm, but you know the shepherd."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This story can be found in several sermon illustration publications. However, this version is adapted from Communicating The Gospel by William Barclay, p. 70-71.

The Importance Of The Task

*"The trivialization of preaching is one of the chief sources of weakness in the church."*

—Daniel Jenkins

J. A. Davidson writes:

. . . a study of the history of the church shows that effective preaching has always been a cause and a concomitant of renewal in the church. Perhaps it is not that preaching has become obsolescent in our time but much of the preaching that is being produced is ineffective. We who preach do have much to answer for. Often we fail to prepare ourselves adequately for our pulpit task. (55)

Jesus' ministry centered on preaching. He "came preaching." In Luke 4:18-19 we see his commission in specific terms as he read from the scroll of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Anointed to preach by his heavenly Father and by the Holy Spirit, Jesus truly preached. Broadus said of Jesus, "His preaching was a cry, urgent in its compassion and masterful in its urgency" (On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, 4).

Just as Jesus felt commissioned to preach he also commissioned his disciples. "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'" (Mark 16:15). The apostles in turn gave priority to the proclamation of the word. Their handling of a food distribution problem proves this. The matter was settled to everyone's satisfaction when they delegated the responsibility to seven Spirit-filled wise men so that the apostles could devote themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:1-5).

In the book of Acts we see again the priority of preaching the Word even in the midst of a persecuted and scattered young church:

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

(Acts 8:4-8)

Note the results of Philip's faithful preaching. His preaching set a vile Samaritan village free from the past and set the people on fire with the joy of the Lord.

Broadus sums up the importance Jesus and the early Christians attached to preaching: "Thus our Lord preached. And for their mission after him, he gave his apostles the same strategy" (4). Furthermore, he attests to the power of great preaching through the centuries:

In the power of the same Spirit, they and those who came after them faced the pagan world with the message of salvation . . . that in three centuries made Christianity the foremost religion in the Roman Empire. And in the centuries since those early triumphs of the gospel, the quality of preaching and the spirit and life of the church have advanced or declined together. If preaching, often faltered in periods of spiritual crisis, it has always led in the periods of revival. Of every age it is true that there has been no great religious movement, no restoration of scriptural truth and reanimation of genuine piety without new power in preaching. (5)



The Immensity Of The Task

*"The office of preaching is an arduous task. . . .  
I have often said that,  
if I could come down with a good conscience,  
I would rather be stretched upon a wheel  
and carry stones than preach one sermon.  
For anyone who is in this office will always be plagued;  
and therefore I have often said that the damned devil  
and not a good man should be a preacher.  
But we're stuck with it now. . . .  
If I had known I would not have let myself  
be drawn into it with twenty-four horses."*

*—Martin Luther*

Building bridges from the past to the present,  
preaching with interest, being relevant, dealing with the  
effects of the television age, and giving the people  
something to feel, remember, and do sounds like pretty  
demanding work! How does the preacher pull this off week  
after week? C. Neil Strait, while pastor of the First  
Church of the Nazarene in Lansing, Michigan suggested an  
answer:

Take time to do it right. "The task of preaching ... is my most important assignment. Does it have a fair share of my time and my study? Have I cut corners, hoping to make it up later? If I apply the question -- "If I don't have time to do it right, when will I have time to do it over?" -- I know there is only one go around for a sermon. If I miss it that first delivery, that first opportunity to reach some need with the sermon, I may have missed it forever so far as that life is concerned. (54)

Young ministers often asked the great scholar and preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, to explain the secret of his success as preacher and a pastor. His answer to them, "Work, hard work, and again work." James McGraw, in his biography of great evangelical preachers, wrote of Morgan,

Until the last few months of his ministry Morgan was in his study without interruptions. He recommended to young preachers that they not look at the newspapers or read anything secular until after one o'clock in the afternoon, so that their minds could remain fresh while studying the Word. (134)

As the minister's schedule becomes more hectic he or she can easily develop what one writer labeled "Marthaplexy" -- a disease of misplaced priorities. Robert Russel interprets Marthaplexy: "Martha served busily (and somewhat resentfully), but Mary focused on matters of the Spirit. The increasing demands of the ministry heighten the risk of Marthaplexy" (56).

We now live in a world of busy-ness. The demands on our time are greater than ever. In order to give proper attention to the matters of the Spirit we must follow the example of Eugene Peterson, professor and veteran Presbyterian pastor, who advises, "The trick, of course, is to get to the calendar before anyone else does. I mark out the time for prayer, for reading, for leisure, for the silence and solitude out of which creative work--prayer, preaching, and listening--can issue" (Berkley, 54).

In interviewing Princeton preaching professor, Thomas Long, Leadership magazine asked, "What's the hardest part of preaching for you?" Long responded:

So much of it. The actual putting of the sermon on paper, taking an insight from the text and hammering it into the sermon, I find toilsome. Write, rewrite. I can't say it like I want to say it. I've got to get this done by six o'clock tonight and nothing fresh is coming. (135)

Hudson called preaching "the most magnificent task."

You and I are entrusted with communicating the riches of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. It is the most magnificent task in the world. If it is worth doing at all, it must be done to the very best of our abilities. It is the most arduous

work in the world, but its reward is that of any job well done: the feeling that we have done our best unto Him who we call Lord. (19)

In spite of preaching's arduous nature, Hudson believed if worth doing, it is worth doing well. Yes, it is hard work and yet, "Will modern, over-worked preachers take the time necessary to make preparation a top priority?"

Broadus called for "fresh enthusiasm, improved skill, and spiritual power" in preaching. "[Preaching] deserves the highest excellence because it remains God's chief instrument of reaching a lost world. 'So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ' (Rom. 10:17)" (6-8).

With all said and done the congregation finds the minister as no better or worse in their eyes (and ears) than his Sunday sermon. "It is still true that the *piece de resistance* with which the minister must wrestle each week is the Sunday sermon. The impression that he makes upon his congregation will be almost entirely determined by his effectiveness in executing this weekly responsibility. Regardless of his competence and faithfulness in administrative and pastoral details, the attendance at the

Sunday morning service will diminish unless the level of his preaching is kept high" (Hudson 15). Whether or not each week's sermon is a *piece de resistance* or a piece easily resisted depends in a large measure on two elements, preparation and delivery. Good preparation habits certainly cannot be sacrificed.

An increasing number of writers in the field place renewed emphasis on quality of content. Long makes clear that he prefers intensity in the study to intensity in the pulpit:

What is more important in preaching -- zeal or artistry? The passion that's communicated or the eloquent phrasing of the message? ... That's a false dichotomy, of course, but ... if you push me to choose, then, I would choose the side of responsible crafting over personal zeal. I can be nourished by a preacher whose spirit is subdued, who carefully interprets the Word in my situation and finds just the right words to communicate to me. Such preachers may not be charismatic, but I can still be nourished by them. I can't, however, be nourished by zealous sermons if they are not well-crafted -- to me they never connect.

(Long 139)

Robert Russell in The Price You Pay in A Growing Church puts the accent in the same camp as Long when he says, "For me, sermon preparation puts on more pressure than sermon delivery. The better my preaching, the higher the

expectations become, both from the congregation and from myself. I may exaggerate my role and think, *If I don't do well this Sunday ...* Every message becomes critical as self-imposed pressure mounts" (53).

The consensus prevails that good message preparation and good message delivery are not mutually exclusive. Certainly thoroughgoing preparation stands to enhance delivery.

We find general agreement from numerous writers on many of the principles of good preaching preparation. In 1985, Edward F. Markquart extracted the diamonds from the homiletical mines of twenty-three great books on preaching. He put them together in his landmark book, Quest For Better Preaching. He writes from the perspective of a working parish pastor who "tests everything I read against the realities of parish life." From his reading, Markquart compiled a list of the most frequent lay criticisms of preaching. He advises preachers to take these "Eleven Deadly Sins" seriously and overcome the temptation to assume these are criticisms about someone else. The most notable

criticisms of preaching by the laity follow:

- 1) Most preaching is too abstract and academic, too theoretical and theological.
- 2) Sermons contain too many ideas which are too complex and come at the listener too fast.
- 3) There is too little concern for people's needs.
- 4) There is too much theological jargon and biblical talk.
- 5) Too much time is spent describing the past and telling about the "land of Zion."
- 6) There are too few illustrations and these are often too literary and not helpful.
- 7) There is too much bad news and not enough good news in preaching, too much diagnosis and not enough prognosis, too much "what's wrong with the world" and not enough "what we can do to make it better?"
- 8) Sermons are too often predictable and passionless.
- 9) Much preaching is moralistic.
- 10) Preachers don't take quality study time.

- 11) Preaching too often consists of "Saturday night notions." (22-45)

While only the last two statements appear to relate to better sermon preparation, one may argue that careful work in the preacher's study could at least partially avert all eleven criticisms. Detecting needs and wrestling with what Scripture says about them may overcome "too little concern for people's needs." One may then unearth the language that clearly communicates God's remedy for those needs.

Southern Baptist Preaching Today, compiled by well-known Baptists, R. Earl Allen and Joel Gregory, has had limited circulation outside their denomination. However, this book is a gold mine of wisdom on the methods many renowned Southern Baptists use to prepare themselves for preaching.

Researching forty-nine of their denomination's best pastors, Allen and Gregory discovered the philosophies, principles, and practices with which these preachers prepare themselves. A brief summary of their most powerful suggestions and methodologies, along with some of the best



thinking on the subject from other outstanding preachers, follows.

Elevating readiness

*The church needs better preaching.  
The church's image is suffering in the eyes of those it is trying to reach.  
The ministry itself is of considerable disrepute these days.  
Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart certainly have done all preachers harm.  
But what about the rank and file preacher whose lifestyle  
has not gathered the media's attention?  
Have not many helped contribute to our image as irrelevant, lifeless,  
and boring by their sloppy preparation and proclamation?"*

—George Barna

Many of the pastors studied encourage preachers to elevate the status they give to their readiness for preaching. John R. Bisagno points out: "A preacher's preaching must be his priority. My people will forgive a missed hospital call or an unaccepted social invitation, but there is no forgiveness, there is no excuse for a poorly prepared or ineptly delivered sermon" (Allen and Gregory 476). Bisagno makes an important practical observation when he writes, "Weak preaching builds weak sheep that necessitate hours and hours of counseling and personal ministry. I prefer to put the emphasis on preaching and

teaching and build strong sheep that can more easily stand alone, rather than emphasize propping up weak sheep created by poor preparation, inept delivery, and powerless preaching" (Allen and Gregory 476).

"Preparation must be a priority for preaching," says Morris H. Chapman, who studies in his home three to four mornings a week and saves the entire day of Thursday for study. He devotes each Monday to administrative matters and program staff meetings. He's discovered he must discipline his time or preparation for preaching will be easily bumped by the other demands and duties of a pastor's life. "The choices are often difficult," confesses Chapman. "Yet our primary calling is to 'preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine' (2 Tim.4:2). Preparation is a priority!" (Allen and Gregory 480-481).

Dan Baumann, in Volume 1 of the new Leadership Handbook of Practical Theology, writes of sermon preparation:

Quality preaching does not happen by accident. It is the result of hard work, creative thinking, careful research, and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is no short cut to homiletical excellence.

Those who want to preach well need to reserve large chunks of time for sermon preparation, because it takes time, time, time. Harry Emerson Fosdick spent one hour in preparation for every minute of delivered sermon. Bill Hybels, pastor of well-known Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago, does approximately the same, and it shows!

Some preachers may complain about the stranglehold of administration, but many of them might well admit that they just don't enjoy studying. For them, administrative detail is a convenient scapegoat. Yet, as Chuck Swindoll once said, *"Every time I say yes during the week, I say no to the congregation that gathers on Sunday morning."* (Berkley 81, italics added)

Stuart Briscoe advises:

The preacher will, of course, need to block out time for the planning, and if this is not readily available, a specific request should be made to the church leadership for an opportunity to engage in this significant work. At the same time, the preacher should recognize--and, if necessary, help his or her church leadership to see--that quiet, unhurried preparation time is as much a priority as anything else. It should figure largely in the apportionment of a pastor's time. (Berkley 54)

Emeric A. Lawrence in an article entitled, "Preaching:

You Never Finish Preparing" writes:

Time spent in preparing a homily never is wasted; you cannot start too early to put something worthwhile together. . . .

Preaching is, of course, demanding because of the hard work of preparing the sermon (really preparing) and of getting to know more and more about the people who are to listen. This is an aspect of the ministry that no one ever exhausts.

(27)

Planning ahead

*"We shall remember that the real preparation of a sermon is not the few hours which are specifically devoted to it, but the whole stream of the Christian's experience thus far, of which the sermon is a distilled drop."*

—J. C. Ryle

Planned preaching offers blessings and benefits. This method lessens the pressure of preaching to a noticeable degree. Pastors who prepare ahead spend most Saturday evenings relaxing instead of working in the office on the finishing touches of a sermon. They can now accept social invitations which before they would have considered in very poor taste. The sheer audacity of someone inviting a preacher out on a Saturday night! One wonders if sermon listeners know what goes into quality preaching. Unprepared pastors may hesitate admitting a lack of complete preparation prior to Sunday morning. Prepared pastors want their people to know that they take their assignment to preach seriously enough to plan ahead. Pastors want their people to know it takes time--a lot of time to prepare a good message. Preacher beware! Once the congregation knows how much time you invest in your sermons you risk a kindly

whisper at the door that maybe you should not spend so much time on those sermons after all!

What is planned preaching? How does it relate to sermon preparation? What role does the Holy Spirit take in preparation? Stuart Briscoe helps us at this juncture:

At the most basic level, *planned preaching* means preparing in advance what you intend to say, before opening your mouth. This does not preclude the possibility of spontaneity or thinking on your feet. Neither does it conflict with beliefs in Jesus' promise that "the Holy Spirit will remind of you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Even the Holy Spirit only *reminds* us of what is already *in* the mind. So, this promise actually makes a case for preparation rather than dissuading us from doing it. (Berkley 52)

Few have a philosophy of sermon preparation as comprehensive as Paul D. Duke: "Preparing a sermon is a systematic affair, but not necessarily a controlled one. The preacher will set aside blocks of time and will undergo a disciplined regimen of reflection, reading, and writing toward the preparation of a sermon. But this weekly discipline is only the outer form of an inner process that is more profound and less predictable" (Berkley 488). For Duke, the process of sermon preparation corresponds most closely to the act of giving birth:

There is a gestation, an interior stirring and kicking, a feeding and growing. And all the preacher's unborn "children" are different. To be pregnant with some sermons is to glow; with others it is to feel mostly sick. In the actual birthing, some arrive rather easily while others require considerable pushing; some are breech, some don't want to come forth at all by Sunday but must be seized by force, arriving at the pulpit like Paul at his apostleship, "untimely born." Most good sermons take the preacher down to the gates of pain. All of them bear the most notable --sometimes the most ludicrous--resemblance to the preacher. But by some wonder they will often not only live and breathe, but cry out with a sound that is eerily or beautifully the voice of Another. (Berkley 488)

As E. M. Bounds has put it, "The man, the whole man, lies behind the sermon. Preaching is not the performance of an hour. It is the outflow of a life. It takes twenty years to make a sermon, because it takes twenty years to make a man" (qtd. in Ryle 308).

Securing time

*"In the providence of God, rarely does a passage, planned months before, fail to meet the people at the point of present need."*

—Richard Halverson

James T. Draper, Jr. believes his first calling is as a preacher of the Word of God. "For every one person I will personally minister to or counsel with, there are hundreds who will only know me from my preaching. For that reason I

approach preaching as my primary responsibility as a minister. It must occupy the center of my concentration, prayers, and preparation. I must maintain a discipline in study and preparation that allows me to give the proper attention to this vital part of my ministry" (Allen and Gregory 486).

Draper offers a helpful personal example of how he guards his study time:

Unless it is an emergency, I do not answer or return phone calls or have appointments before 11:30 A.M. . . . it is extremely important for me to hold these morning hours. This is the greatest challenge in my ministry. Truthfully, very few, if any, individuals really believe I need time to study. Close associates will infringe on the time if I allow it. No one but the preacher will fight to protect this time. Without a doubt, it is the hardest part of my ministry, protecting the time for spiritual preparation.

(Allen and Gregory 486-487)

Good preaching needs time to mature. Once the preacher conceives the sermon idea, he or she has a lot of work to do before stepping into the pulpit with it. Exegeting the Scripture, developing the train of thought, verifying factual information, and collecting illustrations must be completed before beginning to write an outline or manuscript. All this requires quality work immersed in

quiet meditation and prayer. In other words, time spent in preparation!

The preacher can relieve some of the resultant tension by planning a series of messages well ahead of time. This frees the pastor to think about already-determined topics while dealing with must-do-today activities (Berkley, 53).

Reading widely

*"Some truth which one has long known,  
stirred to peculiar activity by something that has happened  
or by contact with some other mind, makes the best sermon;  
as the best dinner comes not from a hurried raid upon the caterer's,  
but from the resources of a constantly well-furnished house. . . .*

*Here is the need of broad and generous culture.  
Learn to study for the sake of truth, learn to think for the profit and  
the joy of thinking. Then your sermons shall be like the leaping of a  
fountain and not like the pumping of a pump."*

*—Phillips Brooks*

Effective ministers have always been great readers, says Kent Hughes, "from the arch bibliophile Charles Spurgeon to Alexander Whyte, who advised, 'Sell your bed, if need be, to buy books,' to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who, on vacation at the beach, sat reading heavy theology while his children played in the surf" (Berkley, 86).



John Wesley advised ministers to: (1) rise at four; (2) meditate, pray, and read Scripture for an hour each morning and evening; (3) read in order, "from six in the morning till twelve (allowing an hour for breakfast) 'The Christian Library' and the other books which we have published in prose and verse, and then those which we recommended in our Rules of Kingswood School" (Addresses 314).

Wesley cut right to the heart of the issue asking his preachers, "Which of you spends as many hours a day in God's work as you did formerly in man's work?" He demanded they "Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or, at least, five hours in four-and-twenty" (Addresses 315). So as not to leave any doubt he flatly said, "without exactness in redeeming time, you cannot retain the grace you received in justification" (Addresses 316).

Though a man of one book, Wesley said read, read, read! Yet, he kept his propensity for study in perspective by declaring, "I would throw by all the libraries in the

world, rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul"

(Addresses 304).

Wesley's advice to a young lady (apparently a newcomer to the faith) who sought "to enjoy [God] in time and in eternity" seems more fitting for a preacher: "Might it not be well then to spend at least two hours every day, in reading and meditating upon the Bible?" Furthermore, he suggested:

Your studying hours (if your constitution will bear it) might be five or six hours a day. Perhaps from nine to twelve in the morning, and from two to four or five in the afternoon. And whenever you begin to be tired with books, that require a strong and deep attention, relax your mind by interposing history or poetry, or something of a lighter nature. (Letters 260-261)

He continued laying forth his course of study by naming thirty-four books (see Appendix A, Figure #13) that if one's constitution allowed could be covered adequately over the course of three to five years to assure "knowledge enough for any reasonable Christian" (Letters 262).

"The preacher's life must be a life of large accumulation," proclaimed Phillips Brooks. "He must not be always trying to make sermons, but always seeking truth, and out of

the truth which he has won the sermons will make themselves"  
(122-123).

### Summary

Upon examination of a number of texts and articles in the homiletical field, one discovers several sermon preparation motifs time and again. The more salient concerns include: 1) understanding the nature of the task that includes hard work; 2) misplaced pastoral priorities requiring spiritual discernment and good government of time; 3) regaining a sense of the magnitude of preaching and the need for excellence in the preaching task; 4) committing to disciplined preparation methods; 5) keeping the message unmistakably clear and speaking in every day language; and 6) taking time for the refreshment of the preacher's own spirit or knowing when to say no to non-essential duties.

The relevant literature suggests better preaching hinges on better preparation by the preacher. A plethora of details demand the preacher's awareness and attention. Much requires consideration. As Litfin and Robinson observed, "We were impressed--in fact overwhelmed--by the expectations

that writers place on preachers. No mere human could possibly fulfill the conglomeration of demands set forth in [the] literature" (8). No "mere" human can do what they say it takes. Creative, effective preaching today, as always, needs the breath of God. Paul Duke acknowledges, ". . . but by some wonder [the sermon] will often not only live and breathe, but cry out with a sound that is eerily or beautifully the voice of Another." The task remains difficult, if not impossible; yet, for maximum effectiveness, it must continue as a labor of love and blessed joy to all who accept this calling. God has chosen this strategy despite its foolishness, idiosyncrasies, and human shortcomings. We cannot overlook the human element. Paul Scherer clarifies, "The only thing in God's economy that can ever take the place of preaching is better preaching. And every man is capable of that. Not of good preaching. Good preaching may be quite beyond us. But better preaching. That is beyond none of us" (qtd. in Markquart 16). Let us bring our best sermon spadework before the Lord, offering ourselves on the altar of

readiness as instruments sacrificed in His service. Through the work of the Spirit we seek to revive today's preaching. This revival comes through better preparation based on the knowledge others discovered in their labors toward more effective preaching.

Jesus announced, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). I hope to continue faithful in the "least" things of sermon preparation. As Madame Swetchine concedes, "It is not on great occasions only that we are required to be faithful to the will of God. Occasions constantly occur, and we should be surprised to perceive how much our spiritual advancement depends on small obediences" (qtd. in Tileston 154).

Paul best states my heart's desire in preaching, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

## CHAPTER 3

### Design of the Study

#### The Problem And Purpose

Within local churches, several variables influence their average worship attendance. One of these, the quality of preaching, appears significantly to impact attendance. Since sermon preparation has a bearing on the quality of preaching, a pastor's sermon preparation methods may also relate to the attendance at that pastor's church. This study proposes to discover what effect, if any, sermon preparation methods have on church attendance. This study addresses two fundamental questions:

1. Do the pastors studied have any particular sermon preparation habit in common?
2. What, if any, relationship exists between sermon preparation methods and average attendance?

#### Hypothesis

A positive relationship seems to exist between the quality of a pastor's sermon preparation and the average attendance of his or her church. Stated simply, the

pastor's preaching preparation habits may relate to the size of the church in which that pastor serves.

### **Population And Sample**

The 351 pastors in the Missouri East Conference of the United Methodist Church serving under appointment in 1995 made up the population for this study. The researcher contacted 144 of these pastors. The population group was divided into 3 groups: a random sampling of 50 of those pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of less than 100, all those pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of 100-199, and all those pastors serving churches with an average worship attendance of 200 or more. The Missouri East Conference has over twice (nearly 65%) as many small churches as middle and large size churches combined. Records indicate that only 56 pastors serve churches with worship attendance of 100-199 and only 38 pastors serve churches with 200 or more in attendance.

From the group that participated in the study the researcher interviewed six pastors (two from each attendance level). A table of random numbers determined the six

pastors for the interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

This research utilized two different instruments. Each pastor participating in the study received a researcher-designed survey (see Appendix A, Figure 6). The survey asked the pastor to indicate his or her habits for managing resources, time, and skills in preparing the sermon. The survey consists of 24 questions: seven questions designed to gather data reflecting the use of time in sermon preparation, nine questions designed to reflect the resources and strategies utilized in sermon preparation, and eight questions concerning the respondent and his or her church.

The researcher also designed an interview for use as the second research instrument (see Appendix A, Figure 7). The interview provided a descriptive picture of the church and the preparation process utilized by the pastor. The basic interview consisted of ten questions which the interviewer asked each of the six pastors selected. The researcher requested permission from each pastor to make a



voice-recording of the interview to increase accuracy and to produce a transcript. The transcript has a two-fold purpose: 1) to provide the researcher with a visual copy of the interview to aid analysis and 2) to create the means for the pastor interviewed to review and approve the contents of the transcript.

### **Reliability And Validity**

The Survey. A pre-test of the survey insured reliability, clarity of terms, and an improvement of general perception. Two groups received pre-tests. First, members of the researcher's local ministerial alliance completed the survey. Though the membership of this group differs by denomination from the sample population and most likely may not have familiarity with United Methodist terminology, they did have the ability to offer valuable advice on the overall design of the survey and suggestions for clarifying the questions. Second, five United Methodist pastors representative of the study population received the opportunity to take and evaluate the survey. This group consisted of three ordained pastors, one lay pastor, and the

researcher's district superintendent. Both of these groups had balanced representation according to age, sex, and race. When the pilot surveys came back the researcher analyzed and refined them as needed for improvement.

The Interview. Two persons reviewed the interview questions and made suggestions for improvement. One of the pastors who piloted the survey also critiqued the interview questions. Additionally, one lay person with expertise in interviewing read the interview questions for her suggestions on improving the questions and the process.

#### **Data Collection**

An overview of the process of collecting data through the *survey* was as follows:

1. Gathered a team of volunteers to assist with the processing, mailing, and compiling of surveys and follow up letters.
2. Gathered Missouri East Conference Journal records of church attendance and pastors for 1995.

3. Used a table of random numbers to select 50 pastors from those serving churches with an average worship attendance of 1-99.
4. Sent cover letter to qualifying pastors along with the survey and a return stamped envelope.
5. After one week sent postcard to those pastors who had not yet returned their survey.
6. Prepared replacement surveys during the second week.
7. At the end of the third week made phone calls to confirm willingness to participate in the study and to offer replacement surveys if needed.
8. Sent replacement surveys.

The researcher obtained the information concerning the pastoral records and average worship attendance of the population group from the Missouri East Conference Journal records for the year 1995. The conference office at Chesterfield, Missouri, retains these records in print.

Each pastor meeting the criteria of the study received,

along with a survey, a cover letter (see Appendix A, Figure 8), explaining the nature of the study and the importance of each respondent to the study. The letter requested each pastor fill out the survey and return it to the researcher in the provided postage-paid envelope. The pastors received their surveys printed on colored paper (pastel yellow) in envelopes hand addressed by the research team. The researcher used special commemorative stamps in lieu of metered mail or standard postage.

One week after the initial request those pastors who have not yet returned their survey received hand addressed post cards (see Appendix A, Figure 9).

At the end of the third week those pastors who had not yet returned the survey received phone calls (see Appendix A, Figure 10) asking if they still wished to participate in the study. The researcher offered to send a replacement survey. The pastors requesting replacements received them in hand addressed envelopes with postage paid return envelopes. This process resulted in 117 surveys returned

for a response rate of 81%, a more than adequate sampling of the population.

An overview of the process of collecting data through the *interviews* now follows:

1. Selected six pastors (two from each group) who had completed the surveys.
2. Made phone calls to set up the interviews with the pastors.
3. Confirmed the date in writing (see Appendix A, Figure 11)
4. Sent each pastor the agenda of questions (see Appendix A, Figure 7) along with a letter requesting permission to tape the conference (see Appendix A, Figure 12).
5. Following the interview, submitted a transcript of the interview (see Appendix B, Figure 14) and asked for an acknowledgment of its accuracy.

Using a table of random numbers the researcher selected six pastors, two from each group studied, to interview. The researcher called and asked to schedule an interview with

each of the six pastors at his or her earliest convenience. Each pastor received a letter confirming the date for the interview (see Appendix A, Figure 11), including a copy of the questions the researcher would ask the pastor and a return form requesting permission to tape the conference (see Appendix A, Figure 12). Following the interview the researcher mailed a transcript of the interview (see Appendix B, Figure 14) to each interviewee, asking him or her to acknowledge its accuracy.

### **Variables And Scales**

The sermon preparation method of the pastor, measured by the survey, became the independent variable in this study. The levels of this variable measure both the quantitative and qualitative methods outlined below (see Data Analysis).

The dependent variable is the size of the average worship attendance of the church as measured on three levels: 1) average worship attendance less than 100; 2) average worship attendance of 100-199; and 3) average worship attendance of 200 and above.

## Data Analysis

To discover the existence of a positive correlation between sermon preparation methods and church attendance requires the categorization of the levels of the independent variable. The research team calculated percentage differences between the groups from the data received in the surveys. Graphs illustrate the interrelationship of the independent and dependent variables.

The information gathered from the interviews augments the results of the statistical analysis mentioned above. The interviews helped provide a fuller view of the sermon preparation process of the pastors in each attendance group. The interviews also provide a picture of the churches involved. The interviews examine some additional variables which may contribute to the attendance of the churches.

## CHAPTER 4

**Findings of the Study**

In 1995, the Missouri East Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church had 172 churches with average worship attendance under 100, 56 churches with average worship attendance between 100 and 199, and 38 churches with average worship attendance of more than 200.

This researcher sent 144<sup>1</sup> sermon preparation surveys along with letters describing the research to pastors who qualified for this study (see Appendix A, Figures 6 and 8). Within two weeks of the mailing, 93 of the 144 pastors (65%) had completed and returned their surveys. A follow-up card (see Appendix A, Figure 9) was sent to those pastors who had not returned their inventories. After two weeks, 18 additional surveys were returned. Two separate attempts were made to phone the pastors who had not returned their surveys. Only six pastors were reached by phone. All of the pastors reached by phone completed and returned their

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<sup>1</sup>For an explanation of how the sample was selected please see page 56.



surveys. A total of 117 surveys were completed and returned. The total response of all the surveys was 81%.

The data from the surveys were divided into three groups based on Missouri East Annual Conference Journal records for 1995. Group A represented those pastors whose churches had an average worship attendance of less than 100. A total of 37 pastors in group A completed surveys. Group B consisted of those pastors whose churches reported an average worship attendance between 100 and 199. A total of 43 of these pastors in group B responded. Group C consisted of those pastors whose churches reported an average worship attendance of 200 or more along with seven district superintendents and one conference staff member. A total of 37 pastors from group C returned surveys.

### **Demographics**

Table 1 shows the demographic information for the total number of pastors responding in all three worship attendance groups. The Missouri East Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has a high percentage of clergy over the age of 45. Nearly 40 percent of the pastors surveyed fell

**Table 1**  
**Demographic information**

| <i>Church Size</i>       | Group A<br>1-99 | Group B<br>100-199 | Group C<br>200+ | Totals     |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                          | 100 (37)        | 100 (43)           | 100 (37)        | 100 (117)  |
| <i>Gender</i>            |                 |                    |                 |            |
| Female                   | 18.9 (7)        | 6.9 (3)            | *** (1)         | 9.4 (1)    |
| Male                     | 75.6 (28)       | 90.6 (39)          | 94.5 (35)       | 87.2 (102) |
| Total                    | 94.5 (35)       | 97.6 (42)          | 97.2 (36)       | 96.6 (113) |
| <i>Age</i>               |                 |                    |                 |            |
| 35 or under              | *** (1)         | 9.3 (4)            | *** (0)         | 4.3 (5)    |
| 36-45                    | 13.5 (5)        | 25.5 (11)          | 24.3 (9)        | 21.4 (25)  |
| 46-55                    | 21.6 (8)        | 18.6 (8)           | 43.2 (16)       | 27.4 (32)  |
| 56-65                    | 43.2 (16)       | 44.0 (19)          | 21.6 (8)        | 36.7 (43)  |
| 66 or over               | 13.5 (5)        | *** (0)            | 10.8 (4)        | 7.7 (9)    |
| Total                    | 94.5 (35)       | 97.6 (42)          | 100.0 (37)      | 97.7 (114) |
| <i>Pastoral Position</i> |                 |                    |                 |            |
| Associate                | 5.4 (2)         | *** (1)            | *** (0)         | 2.6 (3)    |
| District Supt.           | *** (0)         | *** (0)            | 5.4 (2)         | 1.7 (2)    |
| Lay Pastor               | 5.4 (2)         | *** (0)            | *** (0)         | 1.7 (2)    |
| Licensed                 | 10.8 (4)        | *** (0)            | *** (0)         | 3.4 (4)    |
| Retired                  | 13.5 (5)        | *** (1)            | *** (0)         | 5.1 (6)    |
| Senior                   | 59.4 (22)       | 86.0 (37)          | 91.8 (34)       | 79.5 (93)  |
| Total                    | 94.5 (35)       | 90.6 (39)          | 97.2 (36)       | 94.0 (110) |

Notes: \*\*\* Indicate frequencies of less than 1%. The numbers in parenthesis are the raw scores.

Since four of the pastors did not submit complete demographic information in some instances column totals may not equal 100%.

in the 56-65 year old age bracket. Another 27 percent of the pastors fell in the 46-55 year age bracket. Pastors over 45 years old predominantly serve churches with average worship attendances of 200 or more (43%). Only nine pastors 45 and under serve churches with 200+ attendance and no pastors under 35 years of age serve in such large congregations. Three district superintendents and one conference staff member responded to the survey. Eighty-nine of the pastors requested a copy of the survey results.

### **Research Findings**

The analysis below seeks to answer these three questions: Do the pastors studied have any particular sermon preparation habits in common? What, if any, relationship exists between sermon preparation methods and average worship attendance?

First, we examine how the pastors surveyed felt about sermon preparation. Sixty-six percent of all these pastors felt sermon preparation was either exhilarating or joyful. Less than 10 percent labeled sermon preparation as being time consuming, painful, or as drudgery. Table 2

illustrates how the pastors responded in each of the attendance groups respectively.

**Table 2**  
**Sermon Preparation Attitudes**

| <i>Church Size</i>      | Group A<br>1-99 | Group B<br>100-199 | Group C<br>200+ |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Attitudes</i>        |                 |                    |                 |
| Joyful & Exhilarating   | 63%             | 74%                | 59%             |
| Time Consuming/Drudgery | 8%              | 7%                 | 8%              |
| Other                   | 19%             | 12%                | 19%             |
| All                     | 5%              | 5%                 | 5%              |

One hundred seven of the 117 pastors reporting believed preaching to be one of their highest ministry gifts. All the pastors except one considered preaching to be one of their top three ministry priorities. The majority (58%) of the pastors felt that sermon preparation was more important for them today than it was five years ago.

The pastors were asked to rate the *importance* of eight different sermon preparation techniques to their preaching. Sixty-two percent of all the pastors rate "studying the

scripture passage" as most important to them. One hundred fourteen of the 117 respondents ranked "studying the scripture passage" of either most or second most importance to their preaching. Thirty-two percent considered "praying" to be the most important while another 27 percent considered "praying" to be second most important. The pastors rated "background reading" a distant third in importance to their preaching with 20 percent indicating it as their first or second choice. Sixty of the pastors (51%) considered "rehearsing" the least important aspect of their sermon preparation. The following list shows how pastors ranked the importance of each of the elements in descending order:

- 1) studying the scripture passage
- 2) praying
- 3) background reading
- 4) research
- 5) finding illustrations
- 6) outlining
- 7) writing
- 8) rehearsing

How do pastors spend their preparation time? When asked to rank the amount of *time spent* on the same eight

sermon preparation techniques pastors gave similar results. Overall, pastors again ranked the items in the same order as above. There is, however, one notable exception. Prayer was ranked second by all the groups in importance but in churches with 200 or more in attendance prayer dropped to a sixth place ranking when it came to the amount of time spent.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 3**  
**Day Sermon Preparation Begins**

| Day Preparation Begins | 1-99      | 100-199   | 200+      | Total      |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Sunday                 | 7         | 4         | 5         | 16         |
| Monday                 | 15        | 27        | 17        | 59         |
| Tuesday                | 5         | 4         | 3         | 12         |
| Wednesday              | 4         | 0         | 4         | 8          |
| Thursday               | 2         | 3         | 0         | 5          |
| Friday                 | 1         | 1         | 0         | 2          |
| Saturday               | 1         | 0         | 0         | 1          |
| 2 weeks before         | 2         | 2         | 2         | 6          |
| 10 days before         | 0         | 1         | 3         | 4          |
| other/no response      | 0         | 2         | 2         | 3          |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>37</b> | <b>43</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>117</b> |

Table 3 illustrates that pastors in all the worship attendance ranges prefer to start their sermon preparation on Monday. The majority of all pastors responding begin

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<sup>2</sup>Over 50% of the pastors serving churches of 200 or more said "praying" was #1 or #2 in importance to their sermon preparation. However, less than 25% of the pastors in this group ranked "praying" as #1 or #2 in time spent. One third of the pastors said "praying" was #6 in the amount of time spent.

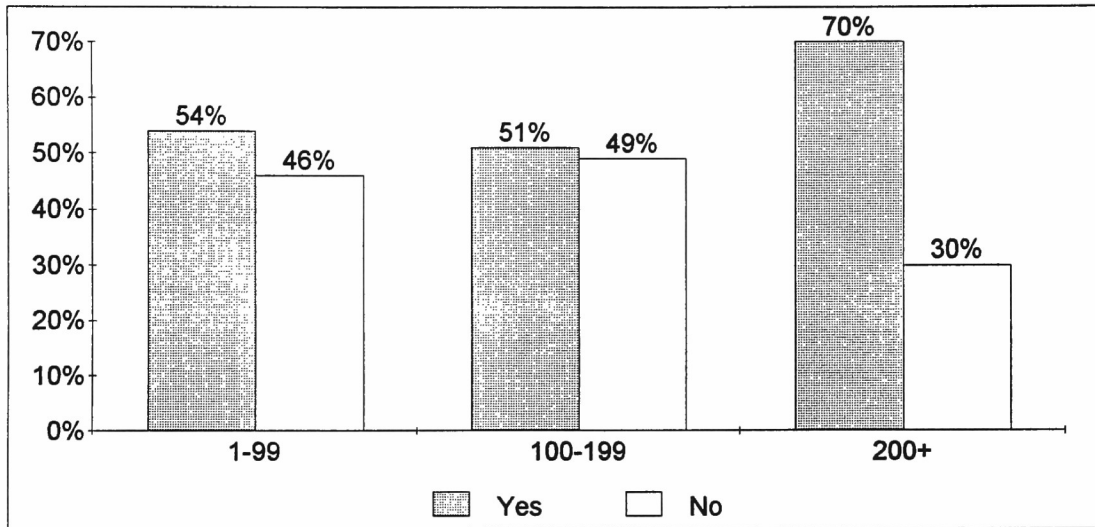
their sermon between Sunday and Tuesday.

How far in advance do pastors plan their sermons? Of the pastors surveyed over 40 percent plan their sermons one week before preaching them. Another 25 percent plan their sermons one month ahead. Fewer than one-third (30%) of the pastors in the 1-99 attendance group plan more than one week in advance while over one-half of the pastors in the 100-199 (54%) and 200+ (57%) groups do so.

How many pastors today utilize a computer or word processor in their sermon preparation? Over 50% of the pastors in every group said they do use a word processor or computer to help them prepare their messages (see Figure 1). Nearly the same number of pastors of the small to medium size churches said yes as those that said no. Seven out of 10 pastors in churches of 200+ size indicate they use a computer or word processor.

The pastors completing the survey shared the number of sermon resource publications they regularly utilize in sermon preparation. Seventy-five percent of all the pastors surveyed use at least one sermon resource publication. The biggest difference appears among those pastors using three or more resource publications. One-sixth of the pastors in

**Figure 1**  
**Computer Use**



churches with attendance of less than 100 use three or more publications while one-third of the pastors serving medium size churches do so. Over 43% percent of pastors serving churches with 200 or more in attendance utilize three or more resource publications.

Pastors also seem to share commonalities in how they rehearse their sermons. The distribution of answers was very similar between the three groups. Seventy-two percent of all the pastors checked "read silently" as their top method of practicing their sermons. "Practice alone" was a close runner up with 63 percent. One-fourth of the pastors



also depended on "the Spirit's leading during delivery." Nine pastors in the high attendance group, six pastors in the medium attendance group, and fourteen in the low attendance group indicated the importance of waiting for the Spirit's leading.<sup>3</sup>

What other resources do pastors use to prepare their sermons? Pastors indicate they used everything from the Bible to a thesaurus to an on-line computer service. All 117 of the pastors say they utilize the Bible. Over 100 pastors resource their sermons with either commentaries (112) or books (103). More pastors in the low attendance churches use a thesaurus than those in either of the other two groups. A greater number of the pastors in high attendance churches use the newspaper than those in the other groups.<sup>4</sup>

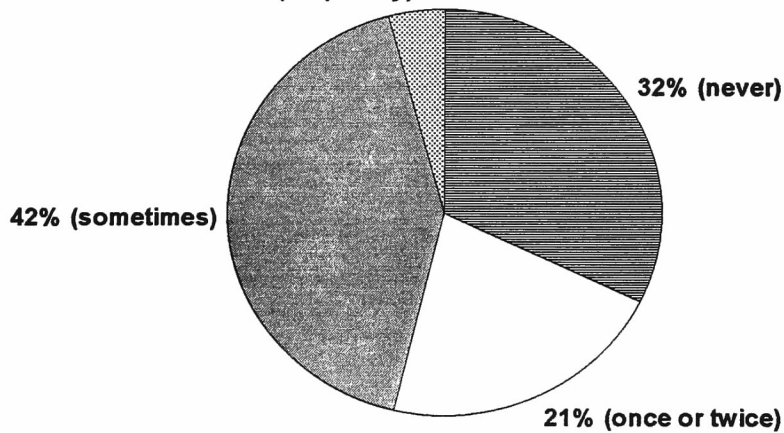
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<sup>3</sup>"Waiting for the Spirit's leading during delivery" was the only choice indicated by three of the pastor's in the low attendance group.

<sup>4</sup>Nineteen percent more pastors serving churches in 200+ attendance group use the newspaper than the 1-99 attendance group and 23% more than the 100-199 attendance group.

The pastors were asked to respond to the question, "Do you ever find yourself doing 'Saturday Night Special'<sup>5</sup> sermon preparation?" Six out of 10 had done a "special" at least once or twice. One-third of the pastors surveyed said they had never done a "special", of these one-half pastored churches with 200 or more in attendance.

**Figure 2**  
**Saturday Night Specials**  
**Combined Averages For All Groups**  
**4% (frequently)**




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<sup>5</sup>"Saturday Night Special" is a phrase used to indicate a sermon prepared at the last minute or a sermon hurriedly prepared the night before it is to be delivered.

How long do the pastors normally preach? Sixty-two percent of the pastors surveyed report they normally preach sermons 16-20 minutes in length. Seventeen of the pastors preach less than 15 minutes (only two from the 200+ group). From all the groups only seven pastors preach longer than 26 minutes.

What strategies do the pastors employ to protect their sermon preparation time from distractions? The pastors listed avoiding the church office by working elsewhere as their most common strategy (see Table 4). Five out of ten pastors indicated avoiding the office as their major tool to secure quality preparation time.

Three out of ten pastors said they rarely enjoy undisturbed sermon preparation time. Over 40 percent of the pastors of churches with low attendance compared to only 30 percent of the pastors in the medium size churches and 27 percent of the pastors in the high attendance churches shared that frustration.

Table 4

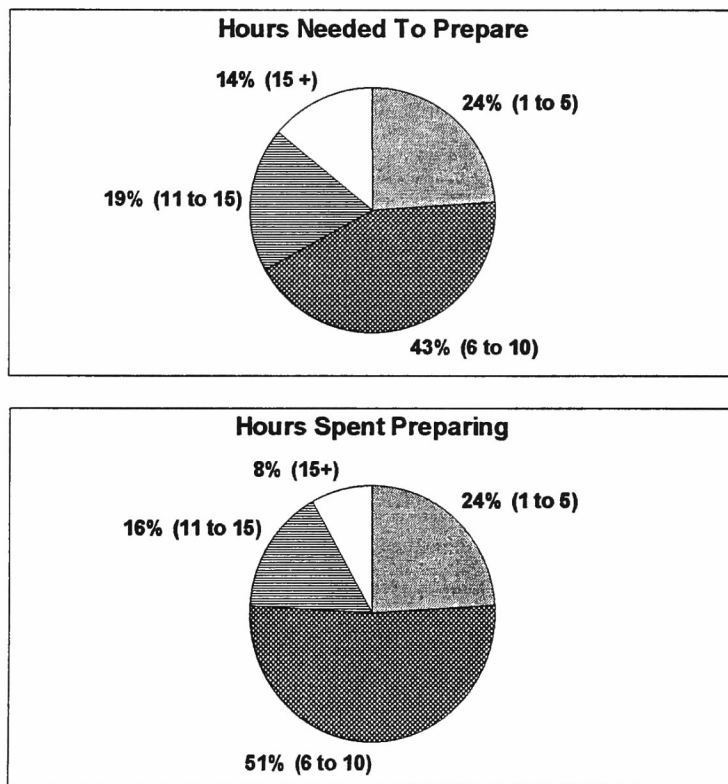
| Strategies To Protect Sermon Preparation Time        |    |
|--|----|
| (N=117)*   |    |
| Avoid church office by working elsewhere             | 60 |
| Inform congregation of sermon preparation time slots | 8  |
| Secretary screens calls and visitors                 | 35 |
| Use "day off" for sermon preparation                 | 18 |
| Rarely enjoy undisturbed time                        | 38 |

\*The pastors were invited to give more than one response to this question .

How much time do pastors need to prepare a sermon adequately? Forty-three percent of all the pastors surveyed indicated they need six to ten hours to prepare. Nearly one-fourth of the pastors require 11 to 15 hours for sermon preparation. Another 21% said one to five hours allows adequate preparation. While two out of ten pastors in the low and medium attendance churches felt the need for more than ten hours to prepare their sermons adequately, five out of ten pastors in the high attendance churches require more than ten hours to prepare.

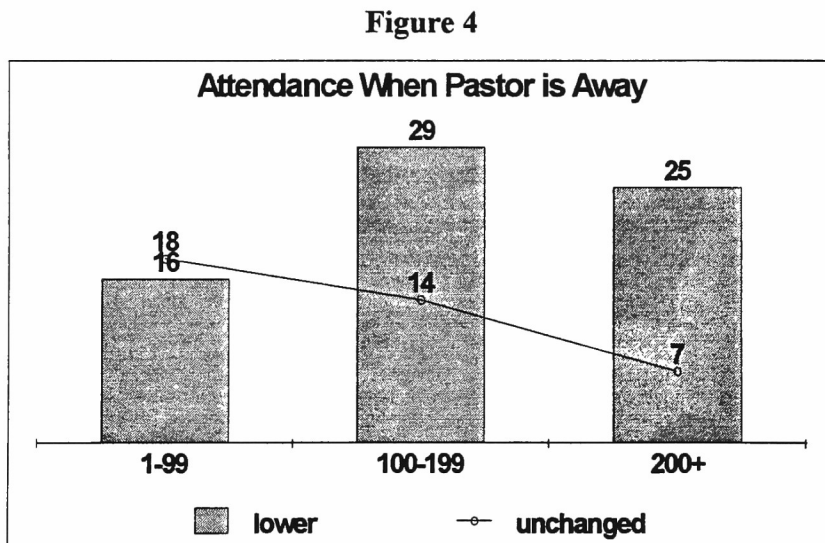
The pastors surveyed remained consistent when the researcher compared the time they indicated they need to prepare to the time they said they actually spend on sermon preparation (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**



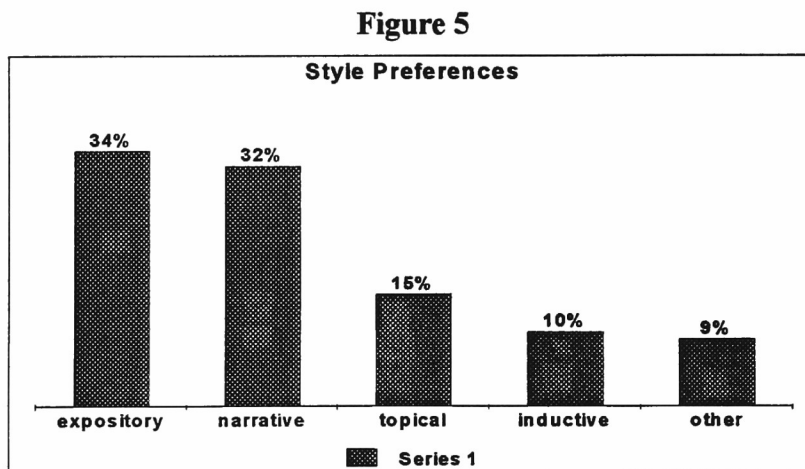
What effect does the pastor's scheduled absence from the pulpit have on worship attendance? Nearly seven out of ten pastors in both the 100-199 group and the 200+ group report a worship attendance noticeably lower when they do

not preach. However, nearly five out of ten pastors in the 1-99 group report their attendance relatively unchanged in their absence. Figure 4 displays these results in raw scores with the bar graph reflecting a lower attendance and the line graph showing unchanged attendance in the pastor's absence.



The survey suggests the pastors have a high degree of confidence in their ability to find the sermon material they need. Nine out of ten pastors said they usually or always find what they need. Only six percent of the pastors felt their filing system rarely produces the material they need.

Figure 5 shows the preferred preaching styles of the pastors studied. More pastors choose to preach sermons in expository and narrative styles than any other. However, only slight differences appear in the styles of the pastors in the three attendance groups. This is understandable, when one considers that in practice these sermon styles often overlap and that all styles of preaching require some degree of preparation.



The above analysis indicates that while there are differences, the pastors studied share several sermon preparation methods. The vast majority hold the same attitude about preparation (i.e. exhilarating and joyful).

All but one pastor felt preaching to be a ministry priority and most of the pastors considered preaching one of their gifts/talents. Nearly half of the pastors begin preparing their weekly sermons on the same day (Monday). A majority of pastors utilize a computer or word processor to aid their preparation. Additionally, most of these pastors rehearse in the same ways, preach sermons of the same length, and use similar resources.

Differences do exist between the sermon preparation methods of the pastors serving churches in the three attendance groups. Based on simple averages the most significant differences between the groups appear in five areas tested by survey question numbers 9, 14, 16, 17, and 19: advance sermon planning, the number of resource publications utilized, the number of hours spent in preparation, the strategies for protecting preparation time, and the frequency of last-minute preparation or "Saturday Night Specials". A complete listing of responses from all surveys by question can be found in Table 6, Appendix C.



The toughest question still remains to be answered. What, if any, relationship exists between sermon preparation methods and average worship attendance?

Using a Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance test on the five areas of greatest percentile differences the researcher attempted to determine if the population in the studied groups was normally distributed and if the population variances were the same. The first step was to state the null hypothesis: No difference exists in the distributions of the scores for the pastors in churches of less than 100, 100-199, and 200 or more. The alternate hypothesis then states: A difference exists in these distributions. The .05 level of risk was selected. The researcher used the chi-square to formulate the decision rule. The critical value for 2 degrees of freedom and the .05 level of risk is 5.991. Thus, the decision rule: Do not reject the null hypothesis if the computed value of the test statistic  $H$  (signifies Kruskal-Wallis test) is less than or equal to 5.991. Reject the null hypothesis if the computed value of  $H$  is greater than 5.991, and accept the alternate

hypothesis. In the next step the researcher selected data from the three attendance groups. Using the five categories identified as making the greatest potential difference between preparation methods and attendance, five raw scores were selected for each group. The responses were chosen, using the following criteria:

- 1) plan sermons more than one week in advance
- 2) spend more than 11 hours a week in preparation
- 3) regularly utilize three or more sermon publications  
in preparation
- 4) have one or more strategies for coping with  
distractions during preparation time
- 5) rarely (once, twice, or never) do a "Saturday Night  
Special"

The use of the above listed criteria should prove a correlation, if one exists, between sermon preparation methods and worship attendance as these areas showed the greatest variance by church size.

For the  $H$  test, all the sample values combine and the combined values are ordered from low to high. The ordered

values are then replaced by ranks starting with 1 for the smallest value. The scores on this test are recorded in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

| <b><u>Kruskal-Wallis Test: Analysis Of Variance By Ranks</u></b> |          |             |                                 |          |             |                                |          |             |
|--|----------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|--------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <b>Scores, Percent, and Sum of Ranks of Pastor Responses</b>     |          |             |                                 |          |             |                                |          |             |
| <b>1 - 99<br/>attendance</b>                                     |          |             | <b>100 - 199<br/>attendance</b> |          |             | <b>200 +<br/>attendance</b>    |          |             |
| <b>Score</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Score</b>                    | <b>%</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Score</b>                   | <b>%</b> | <b>Rank</b> |
| 11   | 30       | 3.5         | 23                              | 53       | 10          | 23                             | 62       | 12          |
| 9  | 24       | 2           | 12                              | 30       | 3.5         | 17                             | 46       | 8           |
| 8  | 22       | 1           | 16                              | 37       | 6           | 16                             | 43       | 7           |
| 22   | 59       | 11          | 30                              | 70       | 13.5        | 27                             | 73       | 15          |
| 13   | 35       | 5           | 23                              | 47       | 9           | 26                             | 70       | 13.5        |
| <b><math>R_1 = 22.5</math></b>                                   |          |             | <b><math>R_2 = 42</math></b>    |          |             | <b><math>R_3 = 55.5</math></b> |          |             |
| <b><math>n_1 = 5</math></b>                                      |          |             | <b><math>n_2 = 5</math></b>     |          |             | <b><math>n_3 = 5</math></b>    |          |             |

The test resulted in a computed value of 5.505. Since the value of  $H$  is less than the critical value of 5.991, the null hypothesis is not rejected at the .05 level. There is no difference in the distributions of the scores for the pastors in churches of less than 100, 100-199, and 200 or more.

## **Qualitative Research**

In order to provide a more complete portrait of the sermon preparation methods used by the pastors in this study and to reveal additional factors which contributed to the churches' attendance, telephone interviews were conducted with six of the pastors. The pastors were chosen for the interviews by random selection (two from each group) from those returning surveys. The pastors interviewed were:

Rev. John Fox - Dorsey-Martin UMC, Martha Marston - Kidron Valley UMC, Rev. Ralph Davis - Barnstable UMC, Rev. Marc Campbell - Main Street UMC, Rev. George Rosewood - North Valley UMC, and Rev. Ben Davidson - District Superintendent and former pastor of Agape UMC.<sup>6</sup>

## **Description of the Churches and their Environments**

Dorsey United Methodist Church is located in a small rural town with a population of 994. The church has an average attendance of 45-50. Most of the members fall into the middle income socio-economic range. On a typical Sunday morning the congregation consists of eight children,

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<sup>6</sup>Names of pastors interviewed and names of their churches have been changed to protect their privacy.

three teenagers, five or six people in their late 20s or early 30s, and "everyone else would be in their 60s or thereabouts."

Kidron Valley United Methodist Church is a rural church located in mid-Missouri near the town of Linn. The demographics indicate the church is made up of a high number of lower income, retired members. Martha Marsten, came to Kidron Valley three years ago as a lay pastor to help keep the church from closing. The church averages between nine and twenty-two in attendance.

Barnstable United Methodist Church is located in the bootheel of Missouri in the town of Barnstable (population 1800). This area of the state is greatly influenced in attitude by Arkansas and Tennessee -- in other words, the South. The congregation is made up of approximately one-third retired, one-third age 18-55, and one-third children and youth. Barnstable has had an economic downturn recently with factories in neighboring cities closing and many members have been forced to either face an extended drive to work or move to the cities. Thirteen churches vie for the

1800 people in this town.

Main Street United Methodist Church is located in Henderson, Missouri. Located in north Missouri on the Mississippi River this community is fairly stable so far as population is concerned. The average worship attendance at Main Street is 158. The church, however, is currently working on a relocation project as the city changes around it. This church, in the heart of town, is located two blocks from a crack house center where gang activity and graffiti are common. In assessing their church, as they plan their move to the growing west end of the city, the congregation discovered that only three of its families live in the neighborhood of the church.

North Valley United Methodist Church located in south central Missouri is in a community of 10,000. The church is made up of the older long term members and many new constituents from "Generation X". There are more Baby Boomers in the church than any other group. The church currently has an average worship attendance of 290. North Valley is in an area of the state marked by a slow, steady

population increase and the church is reflecting that steady growth.

Agape United Methodist Church is a church in the rapidly growing north St. Louis area with a racially mixed congregation and a middle to upper-middle socio-economic group, with a wide mix of ages including young leadership. This is the largest of the churches represented in the interview group with average attendance of over 300.

### **Findings**

The first two interviews reported below represent pastors serving churches in the 1-99 attendance group. The next two interviews represent pastors from the 100-199 group and the last two interviews represent pastors of churches with attendance of 200 or more.

Pastor John Fox of the Dorsey United Methodist Church begins his sermon preparation process out of a deep spiritual center. John relates, "I see the time of prayer and reading and selection is part of my ministry and something I do on behalf of the people." He takes this role seriously spending anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours

in prayer every day. John considers his contact with God a very important part of his sermon preparation. He believes it enables him to be a "listener" and to speak from a spiritual focus. John enjoys taking the time to prepare and typically invests 12 to 16 hours on every sermon. John has preached for six years and has not yet had experience preaching in churches of medium or high attendance.

Kidron Valley United Methodist Church is served by a lay pastor, Martha Marston. Martha says her sermon preparation process has changed since becoming the pastor of Kidron Valley. She believes there is not much difference in the preaching demands of different size churches. For Martha, "knowing your people" is the key to preaching no matter where you are. She prepares a manuscript and practices it several times before preaching. Martha resources her sermons primarily from experience. She exclaimed, "I don't have the materials but I do have Barclay. I have the Gospel." Attendance is up at Martha's church.

Ralph Davis, pastor of the Barnstable United Methodist



Church, says that after reading, studying, praying, and meditating, the most difficult part of his sermon preparation is "getting to the point when it is there and a person's eyes are just opened and you say, 'Praise the Lord it's here and it's going to be okay'." Ralph calls this the "wonderful-wonderful thing about preaching. A person suddenly becomes enlightened." Although Ralph depends on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he feels the necessity for adequate sermon preparation. He points out sermon preparation "is something we must give our 100% best and then when the Lord actually does it for us it is a gift, but none the less it is part of us, too." While believing the preaching demands are different in various size churches, Ralph concurs that churches of every size expect and deserve a good sermon. Ralph sees prayer as the number one key to effective preaching today.

Marc Campbell also serves a church in the 100-199 attendance group. Marc plans his sermons several weeks ahead. He does a lot of "prayer work, just trying to figure out where God is leading me." "Waiting and listening to

what God wants" is the most difficult phase of sermon preparation for Marc. Comparing his Main Street experience with his previous experience at one of the conference's largest churches in St. Louis, Marc senses a great deal of difference in the preaching demands of different size churches. He considers, "Making the presence of God felt in the lives of people" one of the keys to good preaching today. Like others, Marc suggests prayer as central to the sermon preparation process.

North Valley United Methodist Church is served by pastor George Rosewood. Of all the pastors interviewed, George was the most disciplined in his approach to sermon preparation. Beginning his preparation two weeks ahead enables George to preach note free. He has served churches in all three attendance ranges and admits he didn't notice "any appreciable difference" in the preaching demands of the respective churches. George stressed that the great turn-around in his preaching came through the use of intercessory prayer. "I am prayed for every Sunday morning by several people. I kneel and they gather round me and lay hands on

me in my office prior to the worship time -- and I can't tell you how impressive it is." When asked what advice he would give to someone struggling with sermon preparation, George replied, "I think if you just ask people in the body of Christ to pray for you as a preaching minister, I think that can really give focus like nothing else. I think there are some pragmatic things to do ... but the prayer thing is most important."

Ben Davidson presently serves as District Superintendent of the Lancaster-Hayti District. The interview with Ben is based primarily on his experience at Agape United Methodist Church, his last appointment prior to his move to the superintendency. Early on in his pastoral experience Ben moved from manuscript preaching to preaching with notes. He now preaches from very scant notes. Ben incorporates three elements (linear, visual, and feeling) in most of his sermons; he believes that helps him speak to different personalities in the congregation. He points out:

I think for a long time Methodists were known as people who sat on the back row. Somebody once said there's evidence that would support that

backrow folks tend to like linear things: lectures, good academic treatises. Manuscript sermons tend to generate backrow attenders in some ways. It is suggested that folks who sit toward the middle want to see but they don't want to get too close, to be involved. Feeling kind of folk want to get right in on the action -- right up front. I think we can fill out our sanctuaries a little better if we can feed various kinds of folks at different times in our sermons.

Ben finds every church setting unique and each requires its own type of preparation, content, and delivery. He says the key to effective preaching is that the preaching must be Biblically based and "needs to have a sense of vision and hope and forward thinking."

The churches and the pastors interviewed were as varied as the confines of the conference. Yet numerous similarities seem to exist in the preparation practices among this group. First, all six of the pastors interviewed take sermon preparation very seriously. All of them feel that good preaching and good preparation go hand in hand in their ministries. Also, an undercurrent of deep spiritual life seemed to mark most of the pastors interviewed. Prayer was repeatedly mentioned as a key to effective preparation. A dependence upon the Spirit recurred as a theme also. However, no consensus appeared relating to different

preparation demands for churches in the three respective attendance groups.

### **Summarization**

The interviews along with the foregoing statistical analyses present evidence which overturns the initial expectations for this experiment, suggesting the pastor's sermon preparation methods insignificant in determining worship attendance. This result carries with it several implications for exploration in the chapter to follow.

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Conclusions

Wading through pages of research and commentary and emerging with a crystal clear idea of what it all means is a monumental task. Most of us easily see the trees, but how many are really skilled at seeing the forest? After a while, every number begins to look the same. Even with the help of some data analysis and interpretation of the statistics, gaining an objective view of the big picture remains a difficult task. Where do sermon preparation practices fit into the scenario? Do preparation methods have any bearing on increasing worship attendance and reaching people for the Lord?

I believed, when I began this dissertation process, that I would find a direct correlation between sermon preparation practices and worship attendance. I felt that the quantity and quality of the pastor's study and preparation habits would come to fruition in his or her sermons and ultimately effect the church's size. It may be that too many other variables intrude and effect worship attendance.

In my interviews, pastors mentioned location as a prime factor in attendance with the largest church represented located on a major thoroughfare on the way to the mall in one of the fastest growing areas of the state and the smallest in a community of retired persons in an area of the state suffering a long term population decline. For the complete transcripts of the interviews see Figure 14, Appendix B.

Visitors assert that preaching remains a major reason they return and join a church, but my research does not bear out the theory that sermon preparation has a significant impact on either church attendance or pastoral advancement. Life (and dissertation research) is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get. In this case I found no appreciable difference in scores between small, medium, and large church pastors. This does not indicate that churches will grow and pastors be promoted to larger churches regardless of sermon preparation; rather, it shows that pastors in churches of all sizes can prepare

their sermons with the same care whether they preach to congregations of 11 or 1100 on any given Sunday.

### **Unexpected Findings And Observations**

Unexpectedly, nearly all the pastors participating in this study indicated they make a strong sermon preparation effort. Discovering that the preparation methods of pastors in the largest churches varied in a minute degree from the preparation methods of the pastors in the smallest churches was surprising. As stated above, I found differences, but not to the anticipated degree.

Five of the six pastors interviewed made reference to the importance of the pastor's spiritual formation in the sermon preparation process. While all of these pastors felt *sermon* preparation important, they also found *preacher* preparation extremely vital. One of the pastors put it this way: "Increase you devotional life to feel connected. After you prepare the sermon -- work on preparing the preacher. I think that's really important. Let it grow out of you." Part of their emphasis on spiritual life involved preparation through prayer. Most of the pastors interviewed



expressed a heavy reliance on prayer in their sermon preparation. Two of the pastors practice this dependence on prayer by having members of their congregation pray for them just before beginning worship.

A majority (58%) of the pastors surveyed indicated they utilize either a computer or word processor in their sermon preparation. This number nearly doubles the estimated percentage of Americans with computers in their homes. This surprised me in light of the fact that three out of four of the pastors surveyed completed their education before the widespread availability and usage of computers we see today, indicating perhaps an interest in learning new skills and a willingness to improve their methods.

### **Conclusions**

How big a factor is sermon preparation? Though not causal, I believe the evidence points to preparation as a very important factor in church attendance. How long does it take the average person to notice whether a preacher does his or her homework? My District Superintendent, Murrell Cunningham and his spouse, Rebecca, visit churches

throughout the district and have witnessed a variety of sermon presentations. The Cunninghams visited our church recently. Following the service Rebecca remarked, "You prepared!" People notice the differences between the preparation practices of pastors.

Morris H. Chapman notes:

Preparation must be a priority for preaching. My study is at home where I spend three to four mornings a week. The entire day of Thursday is set aside for study. Monday is particularly given to administrative matters, including program staff meetings. I have discovered if I do not discipline my time, preparation for preaching easily can take a back seat to other demands and duties which are part and parcel of a pastor's life. Solutions are not easy to the time crunch which we face. The choices are often difficult. Yet our primary calling to "preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Preparation is a priority!

(Allen and Gregory 480-481)

While not the only key to church growth, sermon preparation remains an important factor. Jauncey, speaking perhaps of the readiness of the audience and the preacher, said, "If the preparation has been adequate, a single challenge may very well be all that is required to trigger the spiritual revolution." Sermon preparation is a church growth factor that the pastor can do something about.

The surveys and interviews uncovered a foundation of preachers in the Missouri East Conference who take their call to preach very seriously. Most of the pastors do take pains to plan and prepare their sermons. The pastors sincerely desire their preaching to be "a sacrifice of praise and an acceptable offering" to the Lord. My colleagues impressed me with their response to my need for research information as evidenced by both the number of surveys returned and their interest in requesting the results.

#### **Recommendations For Further Research**

The statistics upon which I have chosen to focus represent a handful of numbers that underscore the challenge facing pastors in the Missouri East Conference of the United Methodist Church today. This region is in the midst of wide-spread change. In this context of sociological and cultural transformation, where does the Christian faith fit? How adequately is the Church prepared to reach out to the increasing number of people in transition? How adequately are our pastors prepared to speak to the needs of the people

our churches reach? Is today's preaching of sufficient quality to help attract new people to the faith?

This study prompts a number of additional questions to answer: Would a study of a distinctive demographic area (e.g., with an increasing population) show greater attendance variations based on sermon preparation? What sermon preparation trends can one find in the preachers outside of the Missouri East Conference of the United Methodist Church? What relationship (if any) exists between church growth and preaching? How does good preaching aid the growth of the church? Is there a contemporary loss of priority with the preacher? Do pastors have enough uninterrupted study time? Do pastors have enough time and/or utilize that time for reading? What sociological changes effect preaching? Has the psyche of the people changed? Suggestions could be sought from the laity as to what they think helps produce better sermons.

Thomas Franklyn Hudson, who called preaching "the most magnificent task in the world", believed that: "If it [preaching] is worth doing at all, it must be done to the

very best of our abilities. It is the most arduous work in the world, but its reward is that of any job well done: the feeling that we have done our best unto Him who we call Lord" (19).

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# Appendix A

# How Do You Prepare Your Sermons?

## Sermon Preparation Survey

Crader 105

### Tell me about your sermon preparation techniques

1. Rank the following according to their importance to your sermon preparation with 1 as the most important and 8 as the least important.

- background reading
- finding illustrations
- studying the scripture passage
- outlining
- praying
- rehearsing
- researching
- writing

2. Which of the following best describes how you feel about sermon preparation? (please place an X by your choice)

- drudgery
- exhilarating
- joyful
- painful
- time-consuming
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you consider preaching one of your highest ministry gifts/talents?

- yes
- no

4. Is preaching one of your top three ministry priorities?

- yes
- no

5. How much time do you need to adequately prepare a sermon?

- up to one hour
- one to five hours
- six to ten hours
- eleven to fifteen hours
- more than fifteen hours

6. What day of the week do you normally begin your preparation for the Sunday sermon?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you utilize a computer or word processor in your sermon preparation?

- yes
- no

### Tell me about yourself and your church

I am

- male
- female

I am

- 35 or under
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66 or over

I am currently serving as

- Associate Pastor
- District Superintendent
- Lay Pastor
- Licensed Local Pastor
- Retired Pastor Under Appointment
- Senior Pastor
- Student Pastor

I am currently serving a church(es) with an average attendance of

- less than 100
- 100-200
- more than 200
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. How would you rate your system for filing sermon resource material (i.e. illustrations, stories, etc.)?

- always find what I need
- usually find what I need
- rarely find what I need
- never find what I need

9. How many sermon resource publications (Pulpit Digest, Homiletics, Dynamic Preaching, etc.) do you regularly utilize in preparation?

- none
- one
- two
- three to five
- more than five

10. Which of the following do you utilize when practicing sermon delivery? (please place an X by all that apply)

- audio recording
- friend or family audience
- practice alone
- read silently
- video recording
- wait for the Spirit's leading during delivery

Figure 6

11. What resources do you use to prepare your sermons? (please place an X by all that apply)

- Bible
- books
- commentaries
- concordance
- dictionary
- magazines
- newspapers
- on-line computer service
- sermon resource publications
- thesaurus
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. How does the importance of your sermon preparation methods compare today with your methods five years ago?

- no change
- less important now
- more important now

13. What style of preaching do you use the most?

- expository
- inductive
- narrative
- topical
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you ever find yourself doing "Saturday Night Special" sermon preparation?

- never
- once or twice
- sometimes
- frequently

15. How long do you normally preach?

- less than 15 minutes
- 16 to 20 minutes
- 21 to 25 minutes
- 26 to 30 minutes
- more than 30 minutes

16. What strategies do you employ to protect your sermon preparation time from distractions? (please place an X by all that apply)

- avoid church office by working elsewhere
- inform congregation of sermon preparation time slots
- rarely enjoy undisturbed sermon preparation time
- secretary screens calls and visitors
- use "day off" for sermon preparation

17. How many hours per week do you spend preparing your sermon?

- less than 1 hour
- 1 to 5 hours
- 6 to 10 hours
- 11 to 15 hours
- more than 15 hours

18. Rank the amount of time spent on each of the following with 1 as the most and 8 as the least time spent.

- \_\_\_ background reading
- \_\_\_ finding illustrations
- \_\_\_ outlining
- \_\_\_ praying
- \_\_\_ rehearsing
- \_\_\_ researching
- \_\_\_ studying the scripture passage
- \_\_\_ writing

19. How far in advance do you plan your sermons?

- one week
- one month
- three months
- six months
- one year
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. What effect does your scheduled absence from the pulpit have on attendance at your principal worship service?

- attendance noticeably lower
- attendance relatively unchanged
- attendance noticeably higher
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

If you would like to receive the results of this survey please check this box.



THANK YOU FOR TAKING YOUR TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. PLEASE RETURN THE SURVEY TO THE RESEARCHER IN THE ENCLOSED SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE OR MAIL TO 202 PEARL STREET, MACON, MO 63552.

Figure 6

## Interview Questions

1. How would you describe name of church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?
2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? If so, what?
3. Describe the area that surrounding the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.
4. Has the average worship attendance of name of church changed since you became pastor here? If so, how?
5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of name of church.
6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?
7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?<sup>1</sup>
8. The records indicate the average attendance of name of church is number. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance (state the ranges excluding the range of the interviewee's church)? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?
9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?
10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

Figure 7

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #6 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

Date, 1996

Dear *name*,

I am conducting a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am requesting your assistance in this project which will involve filling out an important confidential questionnaire about your sermon planning, preparation and delivery methods.

In this project I am studying sermon preparation and planning methods of pastors in the Missouri East Annual Conference. Your participation in this project will provide vital information for this dissertation. For the results to be a reliable reflection of the Conference I need a high rate of response. I'm counting on your help.

Your answers will be treated in absolute confidence and used only in combination with other respondents to form a composite picture of Missouri East Conference pastors. Please complete and return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. As you complete the questionnaire please attempt to answer the questions as is true of your current sermon preparation practices. There are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you very much for your help.

In Christ,

Lynn Crader



February, 1996

Dear

On February 1 I mailed a letter requesting your help in a research project I am conducting. At this time I have not received from you the survey that was enclosed in that letter.

I really need you to be a part of this project. If you still have your survey please take a moment to complete and return it to 202 Pearl, Macon, MO 63552. If you need a replacement survey please call 816-385-2156.

Thank you for your help.

In Christ,

Lynn Crader

[Script for telephone calls to those persons not returning surveys  
within three weeks of the original mailing]

--Hello, this is Lynn Crader, I recently sent a survey about  
sermon preparation to you. Did you receive my letter?

*If the answer is "no"*

I am conducting a sermon preparation survey for my  
Doctoral Dissertation at Asbury Seminary. I sent  
the survey to every pastor in our conference,  
since you did not get one it must have been lost  
in the mail. May I send one for you to complete?

*If the answer is "no"*

Sorry to bother you.

*If the answer is "yes"*

Let me get your address so you actually get  
this letter.

*If the answer is "yes"*

I know how hectic things can get at this time of  
year. Do you still have the questionnaire?

*If the answer is "yes"*

I'd really appreciate your taking a couple of  
minutes to fill it out and send it back.

*If the answer is "no"*

That's okay. If you're still willing to help me  
out -- I'd really appreciate it. I'll send  
another one to you today.

**Thanks so much for your help.  
God bless your work.**

*Date, 1996*

Dear

In our telephone conversation yesterday you agreed to an interview concerning your church and your sermon preparation practices. Enclosed are the questions we'll be discussing in the interview.

I just wanted to make sure everything was set for our interview on Date at time. If you need to change either the date or time please let me know.

As we spoke I mentioned that I will be taping our conversation when we go over these questions. I will need your permission to do that and hope you will complete and return the enclosed postcard granting that permission.

Thank you so much for your help with my Dissertation project.

In Christ,

Lynn Crader

Enc.

[Permission to tape interview postcard]

I       name       am aware that  
my interview with Lynn Crader on  
      date       at       time       is  
being taped and that this conversation  
may be used by Lynn in his Doctor of  
Ministry Dissertation at Asbury Theo-  
logical Seminary.

I hereby give my permission for  
the taping of the indicated interview.

(signed by interviewee)

signed by L. Crader

*Please sign and drop this card in the mail today.*

John Wesley's Suggested Reading List  
of  
34 Books and Compendiums

- Grammar: Kingswood's "English Grammar"  
Bishop Lowth's "Introduction"
- Arithmetic: Dilworth's "Arithmetic"
- Geography: Randal's "Geographical Grammar"  
Adams' Globes with "Instructions"
- Logic: Aldrich's "Logic"
- Ethics: Langbain's "Compendium"
- Natural Philosophy:  
"Survey of the Wisdom of God in the  
Creation"  
Jones' "Principles of Natural Philosophy"  
Mr. Hutchinson's Works  
Lord Forbes' Tracts  
Mr. Baker's "Treatise on the Microscope"
- History: Marshal's "Chronological Tables"  
Rollin's "Ancient History"  
Puffendorf's "Introduction to the History of  
Europe"  
"Concise Church History"  
Burnet's "History of the Reformation"  
"Concise History of England"  
Clarendon's "History of the Great Rebellion"  
Neal's "History of the Puritans"  
Neal's "History of New-England"  
Solis's "History of the Conquest of Mexico"
- Metaphysics: Whitby's "Compendium of Metaphysics"  
Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding"  
Bishop Browne's "Nature, Procedure, and  
Limits of Human Understanding"  
Malebranche's "Search After Truth"

John Wesley's Suggested Reading List  
of  
34 Books and Compendiums  
(continued)

Poetry:            Spencer's "Fairy Queen"  
                    Fairfax's or Hoole's "Godfrey of Bulloign"  
                    select parts of Shakespeare  
                    "Paradise Lost"  
                    "Night Thoughts"  
                    "Moral and Sacred Poems"

Divinity:         Bishop Pearson upon the Creed  
                    Mr. Nalson's "Sermons"  
                    "Christian Library"

From The Works of John Wesley Vol. XII, 261-262.

# Appendix B

### Interview With John Fox

1. How would you describe Dorsey & Martin United Methodist Churches? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*The Dorsey United Methodist Church—generally they lean to the older side. Average worship attendance is 45-50 at one of the churches. I'll describe them first. Of the 50 that come eight would be under the age of 10, three teenagers, about five or six in late 20's, early 30's, and all the rest would be in their 60's or there about. Social economics they are middle income. Pretty generally broken between balancing the two, good representation on that.*

*The other church is in Martin with average worship attendance of 18, two youth, one in 30's, and everyone else in their 60's. One-third are lower income—food stamps—the other ones are upper middle income, and we have a good distribution. There are more males than females—decidedly two-thirds, one-third.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*Yes, to both churches—Dorsey church the pastor before me was here a year and he got involved in a very controversial youth program. It split the church about in half. They lost about one-fourth to one-third of their average worship attendance that they really haven't regained. They were running about 60—it had gotten down to the lower 40's—and it's moved back up again now. Then the other church has a divorce that is happening. The pastor there was very charismatic and the church had a number of members there who came from the Assembly of God. The pastor was told to bring back a Methodist church because the church was too Pentecostal. Well, in the process of doing that, the church and the Assembly[of God Church] got a new pastor, the old one they didn't like got replaced, their membership went up. Of the two churches the Martin church has more of a spirit to it, more of a commitment to the church, that I see—they have gotten active in social work doing something for the poor. They put in a food pantry in the last year since I've been there, they've started a Bible study—the church is alive. I would say they are responding to my leadership.*



3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*Dorsey has a population that is declining but the long term trend is slightly down. It is a poor area in general--their income is based on forest products or retirement. People come back and retire, it is isolated, there is a Wal-Mart and fast food place 25-28 miles from where I live, the second restaurant I can go to is 25 miles away. Two radio signals at the parsonage--at Dorsey.*

*Deep in the valley, Martin is on the Swift River--I would say in the process of revitalization in that community. They got some highway money when they put a bridge in beside it and the town has been remaking (I think) their growth is in a transition of going up.*

4. Has the average worship attendance of Dorsey & Martin United Methodist Churches changed since you became pastor here? Is so, how?

*Already told you that.*

*One of the changes that I saw at Dorsey--the average attendance has gone up--the children, we have 8 young ones--the ones in their late 20's, the parents of them, they were infrequent coming to church--there's been a shift in the demographics, not the total number coming, but the demographics have shifted like it's of those eight, four of them were little babies--what is happening, younger parents are coming. They are related to long term members or some of them are new but the older folks are staying away. There's been that shift--the younger people like what they hear and their attendance average has been coming up faithfully. I attribute that to that they find the message challenging, they like the challenge, the older folks, I take it they don't want to be challenged, it's unsettling and they stay away. I don't know--I can't explain why it is happening, the previous church I served in it happened there too. Where I could get the young people in but the older folks they would not, they didn't want this Gospel.*

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of Dorsey & Martin Churches.<sup>1</sup>

*I guess the key thing I would say about my sermon process begins in my own ministry--begins out of a spiritual center. I see the time of prayer and reading and selection is part of my ministry and something I do on behalf of the people so I spend anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours in prayer every day and I see that enables me to*

#### **Figure 14 (1-b)**

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

*be a listener, it also enables me to speak from a center that has been in contact with God so I see that as a real important part of my sermon preparation. My preparation, I follow the lectionary. When I am at a new church, I will tend to follow the lectionary, the Gospel section, for the first year to two years. Then we will start branching out often to pull in either the Old Testament, Psalms or one of the Epistle readings. I begin by reading it generally the Monday before the Sunday. I will have glanced ahead, will have read it and picked out songs maybe four to six weeks ahead of time. So I'm always trying to publish for my music people, so that they can be practicing and they know what I'm going to be preaching on and so in that process I've already begun reading it and I have a general feel for the structure of the service. I begin by reading it several times and reflecting on the passage. I consult a wide variety of commentaries and I try to make sure that I look at it from a very conservative viewpoint to a very liberal viewpoint. I look at it from Wesley, our heritage and what has been taught there I try to look at how that passage has been interpreted in history—I read Greek—look at the Word. I put anywhere from 8 to 12 hours just exegetical and then will spend anywhere from 4 to 6 hours in actually mentally coming up with a sermon, the outline, putting it all together. I will rehearse it mentally. Before I moved here I'd go out and stand on the driveway, I had a vacant field and I could preach it there—I'd go up at times to the church and listen to myself. I believe I mentioned the value of the pastors own spirituality right behind that, I value preaching and teaching, those are the two things that are key and when I say teaching I get involved in Biblical teaching. I'm very aware my sermons are strongly Biblically based—that they are strongly conveyed or brought from the heritage, the tradition is brought into today's world with the application that goes into it. Generally it will follow a narration type format that I was taught in Seminary by E.G. Malory—where you identify the itch and you develop that one problem, one thing—go very forward, you are not jumping all over the place—you can focus the message; the songs, the liturgy and the prayers all support—are in harmony with—the sermon. So that when the people leave I've either touched them; the Word has touched them. It's not me, whether emotionally or intellectually I try to get the message through a lot of different ways. I take it very seriously—the music is a significant part of the service so I try to make sure that everything supports it.*

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*I happen to be one of those who enjoy it, taking the time. I'm very up front in telling my people that there are 16 hours, 12 to 16 hours behind every sermon. "Yeah", I like the quality when I do get to put in that time. Shepherding that time is the most difficult part, taking time not only for the preparation but also for the spirituality.*

**Figure 14 (1-c)**

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*Yeah, I changed my focus—I have changed in the last two years to this narrative type of delivery. I like it more—I think it touches—I can see the effectiveness of it.*

8. You have indicated the average attendance of Dorsey & Martin United Methodist Churches is 45-50 & 18 respectively. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance (state the ranges excluding the range of the interviewee's church)? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?

*I've only been in ministry now 6 years and they've all been under a hundred.*

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*I think it's got to be Biblically based, I think the pastor standing there has to have a tremendous amount of integrity—spirituality. I think this is a key, if they don't believe in the messenger then they are not going to hear the message. The interpretation and bringing it forward for today is a key term.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*I'd ask them how much time they are spending in prayer? In other words, are you letting the Spirit of God work? I rely on that basically—preparation, study, it's God's Spirit going to do this. If I do the work, the Spirit will help get it going.*

### Interview With Martha Marston

1. How would you describe Kidron Valley Church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*At the Kidron Valley Church we have a lot of retired-- mostly retired--lower income.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*Three years ago I went up there to try and help keep it open. Since that time attendance has elevated from 9 to 22.*

3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*The area is farming, 10 miles from town.*

4. Has the average worship attendance of Kidron Valley Church changed since you became pastor here? Is so, how?

*From 9 to 22 attendance.*

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of Kidron Valley Church.<sup>1</sup>

*It has changed quite a bit really since I started going out there. There were so few--and so I--I don't have the materials but I do have Barclay. I have the--Gospel. Someone me gave the Abingdon--quite frankly I go a lot by my experience. I try to be careful. Attendance is up--people have done calling programs, prayer--we try to do things with community to make ourselves known. Started a family night. Having a revival with Carl Fox, coming from Florida. Originally my profession was a teacher. I don't have a preaching background--have done lay speaking before moving here.*

#### Figure 14 (2-a)

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*Just getting started—scripture.*

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*Preaching demands are no different, some of the topics are different.*

8. You have indicated the average attendance of Kidron Valley Church is 9 to 22. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance (state the ranges excluding the range of the interviewee's church)? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?

*I have done lay speaking in different churches before I came here. I—a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. Then I came back—traveled to state of Michigan—I don't think there is any difference. I think that—some of the topics are different.*

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*I think knowing your people—I think that is the key because—I don't think the church is any different from any other churches. There are needs there for individual members. And just the fact they come and share that with me.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*Sometimes—I think it is very important to have material—if they could cut it off and not hammer something in the ground. I think—I think when you get your material together—go over it several times. I go over it several times and practice it myself. I write manuscript and like to go over it several times. I also, have a friend that I share material with and that helps.*

### Interview With Ralph Davis

1. How would you describe Barnstable United Methodist Church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*It's mostly a professionally oriented church -- many teachers and retired teachers. The age groups: 35% retired, 30-35% younger (18-55), fairly large group of youth around 15, very few babies or infants. Good intergenerational mix, socio-economic mix, business people, and middle class occupations.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*Yes. The pastor before me was here one year and it didn't really work out. This way it had some effect on the church. The attendance was down when I got here and it came up shortly after we had some fluctuation in it. We had a extenuating circumstance where the minister before married a parishioner. The factor is, there have been ramifications of her presence. But some of that has been positive. Very fortunate some of the pastoral care has been by previous pastors and other people too. I think it is okay.*

3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*The population now is 1800 people. The population in general fell in the last ten years. The area is regressing economically. We had some factories in Downey that have lost jobs. We have had a lot of economic down turn. In this area some people are moving to Cape Girardeau or close by. We have only 2 factories here that employ people. 1,848 population with 13 churches in this one town.*

4. Has the average worship attendance of Barnstable United Methodist Church changed since you became pastor here? Is so, how?

*Not tremendously one way or the other. We had a period when it is down, in the summer time, with low attendance. We have little church in Caseyville. It is a small town with all the retired people--eleven hundred people. The church has about twenty-five members or over. Barnstable church averages around seventy five each Sunday.*

**Figure 14 (3-a)**

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of Barnstable United Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

*For the most part it is about the same process, but I would like to try to be sensitive to the community where I am serving, and try to preach to the people in the context they find themselves. The boot heel would be different in that aspect to the north part of Missouri. This community has its own peculiarities like all communities have. I try to give a message to people I am talking to, and try to minister through sermons as well as other ways. A typical week sometimes -- depending on the week's emergencies -- I find myself at the last minute falling behind and in those cases I take a real close look at Scripture, and read it over and over. Hopefully, I start by Sunday or Monday to meditate on it throughout the week. Then the Saturday Night Special times come -- if I can find a theme or outline for more structure in my sermon preparation in those cases. I just go one, two, and three and go with it. Whereas normal situations, I take a different approach, sit back and meditate on it. Usually I try to start on Sunday or Monday by reading the scriptural passage, and praying about it. I keep it in mind and develop it as the week goes along. But sometimes it doesn't work that way. I use a computer with word perfect that 20 years ago would have been pretty difficult to do.*

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*Most difficult phase for me is reading, studying, praying, meditating, coming to a point, and I don't know if I can explain this explicitly, how it happens. There comes a point when it is there and a person's eyes are just opened and you say praise the Lord it's here and it's going to be okay. But until that point most of the time I am just struggling not knowing, and many times the worse it is in that respect, it looks like it is not going to happen, when it happens to become the most or the best. Which is for me a wonderful-wonderful thing about preaching. A person suddenly becomes enlightened.*

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*It was more mechanical several years, 5 years ago when first started. The sermons now--I try to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work in the sermon and preparation. The more at ease, the more faith I can draw on God's part of it, the better the process works. It seems many times when I take it upon myself to make something to happen it doesn't, but if I trust in the Lord to lead upon my own understanding--it falls*

### Figure 14 (3-b)

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

*together. But at the same time I feel the necessity to prepare. I don't think it is something we can neglect and say it will be done for us. It is something we must give our 100% best and then when the Lord actually does it for us it is a gift but none the less it is part of us too. It is more important what we put into it, it is gracious, the best thing we have and is an invocation, a calling to put our best into it and whatever ways we can innovate, be creative and do the best job. That is what we are called to do. Also using all the techniques, knowledge, and skills that we can acquire. I think that's just something that is also a gift to us for opportunity to do that.*

8. You have already indicated the average attendance of your churches. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance (state the ranges excluding the range of the interviewee's church)? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?

*Most of my churches have been in this range. Some churches like perhaps a little more professional approach, more educated approach, that sort of thing for sermonizing. But I think that would be the extent, not that smaller churches don't also expect a good sermon.*

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*Prayer, dependence on the Lord, scripture, reading scripture, reflecting on it and struggling with it, realizing it is the living Word of God and always has a message—meditate and pray about it. The key for me is to learn as much as we can and use what we have. And expect God to enhance whatever we do.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*I would advise a person just beginning in that struggle with sermon preparation, that it is a process of maturity and that over a period of years a person will learn the joys of it more and more. The acceleration of it more and more as one goes along and learns their amount of pain—there is no pain—there is no gain in some ways. A person will mature increasingly, enjoying sermon preparation and preaching itself. When I started out I was very introverted, very shy and afraid. It was very difficult for me to prepare. I fenced myself in by just doing manuscripts, sermons, and that sort of thing and that's good but you can also use many methods of preaching such as manuscript or outlining. All can be used for the Lord's preaching. It is like any other vocation where you have different styles. I just advise them to do their best at the point they are and realize they are growing in the grace of God.*

**Figure 14 (3-c)**



### Interview With Marc Campbell

1. How would you describe Main Street United Methodist Church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*The congregation is a good mix. We've taken in quite a few young families. Our greatest growth has been with young families and with children. A lot of comments on the children's time at both services. It's quite well attended. We're real pleased about that. Overall, Main Street is just like a whole lot of Methodist churches, it's predominately gray. Then we have the younger people, it seems we almost have a gap between the two. It's the older side of baby boomers that are not represented.*

*Economically, with few exceptions, we have predominately working class people at Main Street. Not a high level of education. Pretty much your average blue-collar, small town congregation.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*Yes. We've had a significant loss of people about a year before I got here. In fact, that's why I'm here. Because under a previous pastor there was quite a controversy and a ugly fight in the church and they lost, I guess you could say, a third of the congregation to the point where we've never gotten them back. And we lost them to the church not just in attendance. In any case it's quite a few and they tended to be the younger generation. It's just now probably – yeah, probably doing better than before the fight took place – just now, after 3 years, have we got new members.*

*The congregation decided to believe in themselves. I do believe that seemed to help them more than anything. About a year after I got here they decided to break off from the circuit and become a station church. When they did that is when the real growth started because you know as well as I do that the church at that time was about 135 in worship and needed a full time pastor and then they got one and slowly they've seen the benefits. Our step of faith paid off. But it was a big jump! We went from about a \$93,000 annual budget up to about \$133,000 – so it was quite a jump.*

*I could only do so much when I moved here. I kind of bristled under the term preacher. The people would call me preacher. I didn't like it but I came to understand why. It's that it is all I could do here, because I literally wasn't even here for the beginning of the service. You know they'd have to start without me cause by the time I got here from the middle church (I had three) it had already started and much of the time I wasn't here at all for the first service. They had a first service with no pastoral leadership at all and that's where our real growth has taken place. We were averaging*

**Figure 14 (4-a)**

*15-20 at that first service when they had no pastor and now we average in the 60s. Our average attendance -- that's how much it's grown -- that 40 to 50 in that first service. Our second service hasn't changed hardly at all.*

3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*One of the main reasons that Main Street is looking at moving is because the neighborhood has completely deteriorated. I mean that as far as numbers -- people moving out. I mean that as far as safety. It's becoming quite dangerous -- about two blocks up the road is the main crack house section of town. We've had gang warfare. We've had shootings just up the road and the police have identified that as the main problem in Henderson and that's coming up the road, so it won't be too far from us here. We're also seeing deterioration in the physical surroundings, that a poorer class of people are coming here and now it's almost exclusively rental property which is just going to pot quick and it's just not a good situation at all. [In spite of that you're still growing.] Yeah. [That's great! Get in the right place and you can really do something.] Well, that's what we're hoping. At first it concerned me a great deal because the population around this church is, I wouldn't say predominately, but I would say at least even black and white. And yet we only have one black family attending Main Street and they don't live in this neighborhood. When we started doing our demographic study in working up the relocation we came to find out we had only three families in the church in reasonable walking distance from the church. We are really not ministering to this neighborhood at all. So we decided to do something about it and worked really hard at it for about a year with absolutely no results whatsoever. So everybody who comes here-- drives here. So it's not going to matter to the church, they're going to drive here, they'll drive to the new location just as easily. And probably more easily because it'll alleviate one problem that we have which is parking.*

4. Has the average worship attendance at Main Street changed since you became pastor here? If so, how?

[Answer given above.]

**Figure 14 (4-b)**

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of Main Street.<sup>1</sup>

*What I normally do is work several weeks ahead of time with the lectionary readings and I'll read them and just study them. I'll do a lot of prayer work, just trying to figure out where God is leading me. And normally, what happens, you know as well as I do, that different things happen at different times—but normally what happens is God gives me these wonderful illustrations and what-not around a week ahead I'd say.*

*Probably three to four weeks ahead I do the readings coming up and then, a little bit at a time I'll just shove some stuff, maybe an outline on the word processor and if something comes along it's like a big light bulb — boy, that'll go great! Shove that in there! Build it a little bit at a time and then the week prior to preaching it, I polish it up and take these different ideas, put them into a sequence and polish up the manuscript — I preach from the manuscript. I don't read it. I have it there because I tend to wander and get off on tangents and things that aren't even close to the topic so I have to keep myself in the right direction. It's a sort of a crutch — but I do need that crutch. I don't like getting up there and winging it. I was forced to do it in seminary without a manuscript and I didn't do well.*

[Sounds like you do a pretty thorough preparation. You work at it for a long time.]

*Yeah. That's the only way I can do it. I frankly cannot do a Saturday Night Special for my own sake. I just . . . I don't rest until I know that what I have prepared is acceptable because to me that's an integral part of what I do — I take very seriously that part. I think that for the majority of the congregation that is the major way that I touch their lives. Of course I'm there when they have tragedies, but within the week to week schedule most people don't see me, unless they're involved in the church, except in the pulpit, so I think it's a vitally important aspect of my job. So it probably takes me . . . I know it takes more time than any other part of my job.*

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*Doing what I just said. Waiting and listening to what God wants. Weeks of listening is sometimes very difficult.*

#### Figure 14 (4-c)

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*Yes, they are. In previous appointments . . . I've really only had one official appointment prior to coming here. It was at St. Louis . . . and I only preached, oh gosh, once every six to eight weeks. So I did not have this regular working ahead. He'd turn to me and say, "You want to preach this week?" And I'd kind of throw something together. So I didn't have a set way of doing it before and so this thing of looking way ahead has made me aware of the fact that I'm here every week.*

*I also subscribe to a couple of resources such as Homiletics and use them and quite frequently I'll use a story or illustration from them that's very helpful. I use modern day storytelling techniques. I think stories are great. Also, the content takes a good deal of effort. I tend to preach more grassroots here and I don't mean to imply . . . At St. Louis there was a very -- almost uppity, white collar congregation and I didn't talk to them so much as I prepared a discourse for them that was intellectual, dry . . . that was the style there. Here it's much more emotional. Here it is much more -- I wouldn't say Baptist in approach -- thundering and pounding on the pulpit. But I mean more emotion, more drama, more animation. That's very different from St. Louis.*

8. You have indicated the average attendance of Main Street United Methodist Church is in the 100-199 range. Have you served churches with average worship attendances of 1-99 or 200+? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?

*Yes, a great deal. But again, that's because I was an associate there so I had very limited preaching opportunities. I was in charge of youth and education. That took a predominant part of my time. Sermon preparation wasn't a big issue. [Expectations were different when you did preach?] Right -- very much so. I had some friends up from St. Louis a couple of weeks ago and they commented on how different my preaching was. I guess I wasn't even that certain I was aware of it until they brought it to my attention. So it is very interesting talking about it because they're the ones who pointed it out to me. And they liked it. Maybe I was wrong with my approach at St. Louis. Also, I was fresh out of seminary -- doing it the way you were supposed to instead of doing it from the people's perspective in the pew. To me this wasn't something I purposefully did. It just evolved and maybe not so much the different congregation as the fact that I'm doing it every week and I do have my way of doing it now and I've settled into my style.*

**Figure 14 (4-d)**

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*Making the presence of God felt in the lives of the people. Also, a Scriptural witness and true relevance to 1996. It is not just a story that happened there and then but it's a story that is happening to us now; that Jesus does make a difference in our lives and it does make a difference when you follow Him.*

*Before every worship service I have people meet with me in the office and pray that God will reveal Himself in what I have to say and speak through me and make His presence manifest to my people. I think that's mostly what we can do is make God real to them, make God present, let them know that God is not just some theological, philosophical ideal but God is real and a present help.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*Prayer. And listening to God speak. It's amazing to me how God will only give me something to say when I ask. Praying over which text I should choose I ask God, "What do you want me to say? Open my eyes." And sure enough, God does. My Holy Spirit is with me more than just on Sunday mornings.*

## Interview With George Rosewood

1. How would you describe North Valley United Methodist Church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*The church is a traditional downtown church in a community of about 10,000 people. Economically, at one time, not too long ago the church had a considerable number of the town's wealthy people. Quite frankly the church has built a significant group of new constituents, most of whom are not professional people. We reach a good number of Generation X people. People who are now in their 20s and early 30s. The biggest group in the church are the Baby Boomers. We've got basically every generation represented with a pretty fair balance.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*Several. When I came here in 1988, the church averaged right at 200 in worship. We continued the additional early worship service that had previously been for only part of the year. We now offer several choices of worship. We have three worship alternatives. Two on Sunday and one on Saturday night. We not only have a choice of worship but we also offer a choice of music. Last year we added a Saturday night service. Saturday night is very contemporary. The 8:30 service is informal. It is sort of a traditional, southern camp meeting style. No bulletin. There's a handout that's common to all three services. Neither the Saturday night nor the 8:30 morning have a bulletin. The 10:30 would be the more so called traditional liturgy.*

3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*We have a community marked by changes. We are in transition economically as well as other ways. We have steady growth of about 2.8% a year. The area between the church and the university is changing. The land is being bought out by people who are using it for business. We are four blocks from the County Court House square. There's a lot of change in this area, too. The area is transitioning from rental, residential property to being either church or university. The area is in transition.*

**Figure 14 (5-a)**

4. Has the average worship attendance of North Valley United Methodist Church changed since you became pastor here? Is so, how?

*Yes. It was right at 200 when my predecessor was here. He brought it up 20 or so per Sunday. We're probably just shy of 290 in average. Last year we were at 284.*

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of North Valley United Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

*I try to keep a fairly disciplined approach .*

*Monday: Just exegetical work on the scripture.*

*Tuesday: I just take pen in hand and start doing rough notes, just anything I feel the Spirit's leading me to.*

*Wednesday: I get an outline together.*

*Thursday: I'll have a final outline done, it'll be basically the wording that I want and need. Key transitions and things like that-- now that's it for several days, and the following Monday, a week from today [Monday 2 weeks before delivery] I'll work to internalize about a third of that, and on Tuesday I'll internalize another third, and on Wednesday have the entire message fairly well. I use no notes so this--what it's about trying to do this free of notes, and then on Thursday we video tape the sermon to be broadcast on T.V. and this just provides me an occasion with my cameraman to see how it looks and sounds initially and how it's going to come across there, and kind of do some analytic stuff with that and by Saturday night it needs to be ready to go so it's kind of a two week process.*

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*I guess probably moving from my stage of rough notes to an outline only because my tendency there, if I'm not careful, is to force a story or allusion or something that links the scripture to experience rather than letting it happen. I sometimes rush that and I think sometimes the Spirit wants to put a little more time to gel rather than me forcing something on it. I think that's the difficulty there, that I'll make it too artificial instead of letting it--I think sermon preparation properly understood is like the birthing process. My tendency is to make it too mechanistic and I have to watch that and not force something to happen that shouldn't.*

#### Figure 14 (5-b)

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*Not a whole lot, the use of the computer has helped a great deal as far as playing with wordings and correcting, filing and things like that—so I'm doing it that way and not by typewriter—and by hand has kind of helped me I think with content—but basically this is a method I've been developing and just kind of refining for close—oh, to 20 years now—it hasn't changed much.*

8. You have indicated the average attendance of North Valley United Methodist Church is 290. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance (state the ranges excluding the range of the interviewee's church)? Were the preaching demands any different in that size of church?

*Had a 2 point charge when I was first out of seminary—averaged probably 20-30 people, the smaller church and the larger one was just over 100. The second one I had, while I was there went from about 120 to 170.*

*I don't know that I noticed any appreciable difference in the preaching demands in the little churches I had when I started—and I would say the expectation was probably less there. The second one was in Jefferson City—a lot of state workers and government folks and I think, probably, the expectations were higher there. I particularly remember people who were pretty accustomed to a fairly lecture style format which I don't use but I don't think they ever resisted. They became accustomed to the way I do things which is more narrative and scriptural based. So I don't notice a great deal of different demand. There probably is and I just don't perceive it.*

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*I think far and away Biblically based rather than come up with a subject and force a scripture to fit it. Going to the Word first and letting the Word dictate what the message is—definitely what works for me real well is narrative experiential preaching. I feel like if I can allow the scripture to speak to a story or a foreign event or a common circumstance or something that brings it home for most people they tend to retain and internalize and allow the word to transform them.*

*The other thing I really want to stress is that the great turn-around or enhancement of my preaching has been the use of intercessory prayer for me. I am prayed for every Sunday morning by several people. I kneel and they gather round me and lay hands on me in my office prior to the worship time—and I can't tell you how impressive it is—it's great, you have people pray for you. You say pray for your preacher, pray for yourself—but to be prayed for in that way, it becomes very specific. Like if my voice is having trouble we pray for that or a bad hair day. I've had people*

**Figure 14 (5-c)**



*pray for the P.A. System because we've had problems with that. It becomes very situation specific and even if they know which direction the message is going they can pray about that and sometimes that--like I wouldn't have thought yesterday's message was a message for salvation and we had a couple come forward and give their lives to Christ. I don't think I would have picked up on that, but the interceders had sort of sensed that, so that has really enhanced my preaching and it's not something I came up with, it's something people offered.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*I think if you just ask people in the body of Christ to pray for you as a preaching minister, I think that can really give focus like nothing else. I think there are some pragmatic things to do. My personality lends itself to a fairly disciplined approach to things and not everybody's does, but I guess I could say if you discipline yourself fairly well in certain preparation--you eliminate the Saturday night stuff. But the prayer thing is most important.*

### Interview With Ben Davidson

1. How would you describe Agape United Methodist Church? What is the demographic make up of the church's members (age, socio-economics, etc.)?

*Agape UMC in Flasco, Missouri – north part of St. Louis area – a suburb. It had a good range of age groupings: active children, youth, young adult in each of those categories as well as kind of middle adult and older adult. I think its the most balanced, certainly that I've pastored, that I've seen in many churches as often today many churches have more older persons. A lot of that had to do with good youth programming that had been going on and a strong music program for a number of years that continued to keep younger people staying with the church. We had a 31 year old finance chairperson that was just really sharp as a tack. Which was kind of unusual – a good young adult in essence – I'd call it young adult still – young adult leadership in some key positions. Another factor that was unique to Agape was that it's probably the Missouri East Conference's strongest and most likely to be defined as a multi-cultural congregation. About 15-18% African-American population within the membership and those African-Americans who were members most all of them were very active too. So it in contrast really seemed to demonstrate more than even 15% or so. Many were in positions of leadership of Administrative Board Chairperson and Pastor Parish Relations Chairperson and other committees and administrative positions.*

*It was socio-economically – I'd say middle – maybe a little middle-upper in some ways. We had health care folks, professionals, McDonnell-Douglas folks, teachers, administrators. We had a number of people too who were in more of salaried kind of positions. In that way it was kind of a nice cross section too, I think. It wasn't an elitist church by any means – with a lot of upper economic folk – but just a pretty good middle of the economic spectrum group of folks – a number of professionals and others – kind of blue collar folks too.*

2. Were there special circumstances surrounding the church's history during your pastorate or in the past five years that you think would have a major impact on the average worship attendance? Is so, what?

*The congregation when I arrived was about 25 years old. It had several eras of success and then plateaued and tapered off some. Upon my arriving they had kind of had a slump. A few years before that – well maybe 5 or so years before that they had gotten up in the upper 300s in attendance – it had dropped off – the average was 333 when I arrived. There was talk and a plan to build, but the congregation was not really strong and able to do that. They had entered into some financial binds – it was just kind*

**Figure 14 (6-a)**

*of sagging a bit. Upon arriving – over a year we began to reactivate the new building plan and in the next year went ahead and built the family life center and went into debt for about a million dollars – it was a million two. But folks kind of got energized. But we ended up buying some property next to the church to give us some more parking in time and just made some very good decisions with some faith to move forward and that's postured the church. I think it's in a really good place now. It's on a main thoroughfare that's going to be a busy place for a long time. Highway 35 is thoroughfare to a mall – Roanoke Mall – shopping areas and schools and all kinds of stuff – so it's in a good location. One of the other significant things we did was put a new sign out front – it was about a \$17,000 dollar sign. It had some art work to it as well as some marquee features to it where you could announce things. Because of the passerbys we had thousands of cars going by every day because of the busyness of this highway – an innerlit sign – just a really attractive sign. Then we built the family life center – a combination gymnasium – stage – education – big basement – even has a garage you can pull into – really kind of neat – the scout trailer can back right into the basement garage and a big kitchen and we renovated most of the rest of the building in that project too. So, that was significant change. And in the process we were growing our attendance and got up to 401. Another significant thing – that I thought was really important was to move in the direction of having an ethnic minority pastor also and so we were able in my third year to arrange for Mary Jackson, a local pastor, to become the associate pastor and so for two years while I was there she complimented the ministry – being female and African-American – it became another good role model for the kids and the community to see that multi-cultural nature. The congregation also served a need for blended families: white and black or families that had black children or white children where someone in the family was African-American. Often times in a black church those families don't feel as well received – or in a white church they don't. In this setting it seemed a good place to be. We had a number of families like that too. That was an additional kind of benefit of the dynamics of that congregation.*

3. Describe the area that surrounds the church in terms of its population growth, decline, stability, or transition.

*I would call it a transition changing community, specifically with ethnicity. I think the African-American population is continuing to increase. I would call it a fluid – it's growing in one sense: more people are coming in but others are going out. So it's flowing. It doesn't show in numbers drastic growth, but I think that's deceiving because there's quite a bit of change with new people coming in and others going out. So it's kind of fluid.*

**Figure 14 (6-b)**

4. Has the average worship attendance of Agape United Methodist Church changed since you became pastor here? If so, how?

Answer previously given in question #1.

5. Describe your sermon preparation process since you have become the pastor of Agape United Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

*My style is fairly personal. It emerged from my previous appointment. I was pastor at a congregation – Christ the Lamb – in another suburban area – of St. Louis. That setting was in the round – contemporary – it availed me to be creative and I moved fairly early on in my pastorate there away from manuscript to some notes and gradually moved to more scant notes as time went by. I like that style. Now I don't use manuscript at all. There are times that's very good and very important, but I've just developed a different kind of style. Sometimes it's generated out of story. I find myself often working out of the scriptures around stories because that really works better in a narrative – sort of expressive way when you're not using a manuscript specifically. I tend to use neuro-linguistic skills with an awareness that people think and hear differently. I think some folks are kind of linear thinkers. Then others are more visual and pictures seem to speak to them. I'm probably more visual like that. And folks are kind of kinesthetic or feeling oriented too. I try to incorporate those three elements in most of my sermons in different ways to speak to different persons – perceptions in the congregation. I think for a long time Methodists were known as people who sat on the back row. Somebody once said there's evidence that would support that backrow folks tend to like linear things: lectures, good academic treatises. Manuscript sermons tend to generate backrow attenders in some ways. It is suggested that folks who sit toward the middle want to see but they don't want to get too close to be involved. Feeling kind of folk want to get right in on the action - right up front. I think we can fill out our sanctuaries a little better if we can feed various kind of folks at different times in our sermons. So I try to build in my sermons some different ways in which I can sort of touch those different kind of ways in which people hear. The story does that a lot for me. Because of story I tend to dwell in the gospels – probably too much in a way! I really like to preach the stories of Jesus and the experiences of Jesus – probably to a fault – although I like Paul, I may stay away from him more than I should just because of the style of preaching. I'm*

**Figure 14 (6-c)**

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<sup>1</sup>Questions #1 - #5 adapted from "The Impact Of Pastoral Leadership Style On Growth In The Churches With An Average Worship Attendance Of 200-350 In The Holston Annual Conference Of The United Methodist Church" by Dwight S. Kilbourne, D. Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1994.

*more a visual person and experiential. I want to get into the story. I do that and I line out progressive thoughts of the faith from time to time, but that's not what I probably enjoy the most. I try to honor that though because that's definitely how some folks work and think.*

6. What do you consider the most difficult phase of sermon preparation?

*That's a good question. This may not answer your question, but I wrestle always with trying not to let my own . . . I want to listen to myself and my own perceptions. I trust my perceptions. But I also want to be a little suspicious that I might just preach on what I like the most and might leave out some stuff that others need to hear. The difficulty is risking and forcing myself to get into the Pauline stuff a little more or the Old Testament stuff a little more, although there's some great stories there I love. There's no better folk to preach about than folks like Jacob who's a real rascal most of the time that you can really identify with. I sort of love covering the so called pseudo-sainthood that a lot of the Old Testament folks have. When people start actually getting into it they say, "You mean those people really did that?"*

7. Are your sermon preparation methods different now than in previous appointments? If so, how?

*I think it emerged from Christ the Lamb – my previous appointment. And then I just refined it pretty much. I don't think they changed much. Maybe in one sense – the African-American dimension to the congregation freed me all the more to move in that direction. It was a strong feeling – an expressive feeling of spiritually – more so there than in probably most churches. That's great to be able to preach in a setting where you get that kind of responsiveness.*

8. You have indicated the average attendance of Agape is in the 200+ range. Have you served churches with the following ranges of average worship attendance of under 100 or 100-199? Were the preaching demands any different in churches of those size?

*I remember the first church that I served out of seminary – they were saints because all I was doing was regurgitating the stuff I got in seminary. It was terrible. I don't know how they survived. I've preached to small groups of 50 or less in various settings. Each setting is unique.*

9. What do you think is the key to effective preaching today?

*I think that it needs to be biblically based. It needs to have a sense of vision and hope and forward thinking. I think preaching always needs to be relevant but not trite. Not too contemporary that it does disservice to tradition. It should embody the best of our tradition. I think it should have inclusive language. I think it should be user friendly language. We sometimes throw around theological terms and maybe we posture ourselves as being educated that way among others. I think Luther said that when he preached he wasn't preaching to the seminary professors he was preaching to the common folk. That's what I think we need to make our aim. Especially in our church. We're primarily a middle-class church and that's great. But we can be reaching more to a lot of folks who are not necessarily considered socio-economically middle-class. [I think it's harder work to be simple.] I do too. I really do. When I hear people bragging on about how eloquent a person is – if they mean by that touting around a lot of academic terms – I'm not impressed too much. I think the story can capture people from a lot of different places and that's partly why I lean on story – because people can enter into it in their own life experience in different places. Have you ever had folks go out when you preach a sermon and say, "Oh, that reminded me of such and such" and that wasn't what you were talking about at all! But they can connect. The Spirit works that way.*

10. What advice would you give to someone struggling with sermon preparation?

*A Moravian told John Wesley "preach faith until you have faith." Struggle with it. Keep preaching until it begins to feel like your own. Make it your own and don't try to preach somebody else's sermon. Talk to other preachers. Increase your devotional life to feel connected. After you prepare the sermon – work on preparing the preacher. I think that's really important. Let it grow out of you.*

# Appendix C

## Survey Results by Question

**Note:** Since some questions may allow for multiple responses, totals may not equal 100%. Unless otherwise indicated the numbers in parenthesis are the raw scores.

Question #1 - Rank the following according to their importance to your sermon preparation with 1 as the most important and 8 as the least important.

|                        | <i>Church Size</i> |          |          |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|
|                        | 1-99               | 100-199  | 200+     |
| background reading     | .41(4th)           | .33(3rd) | .32(3rd) |
| finding illustrations  | .27(5th)           | .30(5th) | .16(5th) |
| studying the scripture | .57(1st)           | .65(1st) | .62(1st) |
| outlining              | .30(6th)           | .23(6th) | .24(6th) |
| praying                | .32(2nd)           | .26(2nd) | .22(2nd) |
| rehearsing             | .46(8th)           | .54(8th) | .49(8th) |
| researching            | .19(3rd)           | .28(4th) | .19(4th) |
| writing                | .49(7th)           | .37(7th) | .27(7th) |

**Note:** The percentages represent the pastors in each respective group that gave that activity its rank (e.g. 41% of pastors in the 1-99 attendance group ranked background reading fourth in importance).

Question #2 - Which of the following best describes how you feel about sermon preparation?

|                | 1-99    | 100-199 | 200+    |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| drudgery       | .00(0)  | .07(3)  | .03(1)  |
| exhilarating   | .22(8)  | .44(19) | .32(12) |
| joyful         | .41(15) | .30(13) | .27(10) |
| painful        | .00(0)  | .00(0)  | .00(0)  |
| time-consuming | .08(3)  | .00(0)  | .08(3)  |
| other          | .19(7)  | .12(5)  | .19(7)  |
| all            | .05(2)  | .05(2)  | .11(4)  |
| no response    | .05(2)  | .02(1)  | .00(0)  |

Question #3 - Do you consider preaching one of your highest ministry gifts/talents?

|     | 1-99    | 100-199 | 200+    |
|-----|---------|---------|---------|
| yes | .87(32) | .91(39) | .95(35) |
| no  | .13(5)  | .09(4)  | .05(2)  |



Question #4 - Is preaching one of your top three ministry priorities?

|     | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|
| yes | .97 (36) | 100 (43) | 100 (37) |
| no  | .03 (1)  | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  |

Question #5 - How much time do you need to adequately prepare a sermon?

|                         | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| up to one hour          | .00 (0)  | .02 (1)  | .00 (0)  |
| one to five hours       | .24 (9)  | .28 (12) | .11 (4)  |
| six to ten hours        | .43 (16) | .40 (17) | .41 (15) |
| eleven to fifteen hours | .19 (7)  | .21 (9)  | .27 (10) |
| more than fifteen hours | .14 (5)  | .09 (4)  | .19 (7)  |

Question #6 - What day of the week do you normally begin your preparation for the Sunday sermon?

|                 | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Sunday          | .19 (7)  | .09 (4)  | .14 (5)  |
| Monday          | .41 (15) | .63 (27) | .46 (17) |
| Tuesday         | .31 (5)  | .09 (4)  | .08 (3)  |
| Wednesday       | .11 (4)  | .00 (0)  | .11 (4)  |
| Thursday        | .05 (2)  | .07 (3)  | .00 (0)  |
| Friday          | .03 (1)  | .02 (1)  | .00 (0)  |
| Saturday        | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  |
| 10 days before  | .00 (0)  | .02 (1)  | .08 (3)  |
| 2 weeks before  | .05 (2)  | .05 (2)  | .05 (2)  |
| 2 months before | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  | .03 (1)  |

Question #7 - Do you utilize a computer or word processor in your sermon preparation?

|     | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|
| yes | .54 (20) | .51 (22) | .70 (26) |
| no  | .46 (17) | .49 (21) | .30 (11) |

Question #8 - How would you rate your system for filing sermon resource material (i.e. illustrations, stories, etc.)?

|                          | 1-99    | 100-199 | 200+    |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| always find what I need  | .08(3)  | .09(4)  | .11(4)  |
| usually find what I need | .84(31) | .81(35) | .81(30) |
| rarely find what I need  | .05(2)  | .07(3)  | .05(2)  |
| never find what I need   | .00(0)  | .00(0)  | .00(0)  |

Question #9 - How many sermon resource publications (Pulpit Digest, Homiletics, Dynamic Preaching, etc.) do you regularly utilize in preparation?

|                | 1-99    | 100-199 | 200+    |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| none           | .30(11) | .23(10) | .24(9)  |
| one            | .27(10) | .16(7)  | .11(4)  |
| two            | .22(8)  | .23(10) | .22(8)  |
| three to five  | .16(6)  | .35(15) | .38(14) |
| more than five | .05(2)  | .02(1)  | .05(2)  |

Question #10 - Which of the following do you utilize when practicing sermon delivery?

|                           | 1-99    | 100-199 | 200+    |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| audio recording           | .11(4)  | .12(5)  | .14(5)  |
| friend or family audience | .07(3)  | .07(3)  | .05(2)  |
| practice alone            | .57(21) | .65(28) | .68(25) |
| read silently             | .78(29) | .67(29) | .70(26) |
| video recording           | .03(1)  | .05(2)  | .11(4)  |
| wait for the Spirit...    | .38(14) | .14(6)  | .24(9)  |

Question #11 -What resources do you use to prepare you sermons?

|                              | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Bible                        | 100 (37) | 100 (43) | 100 (37) |
| books                        | .81 (30) | .91 (39) | .92 (34) |
| commentaries                 | .97 (36) | .93 (40) | .97 (36) |
| concordance                  | .76 (28) | .72 (31) | .65 (24) |
| dictionary                   | .65 (24) | .49 (21) | .49 (18) |
| magazines                    | .65 (24) | .61 (26) | .70 (26) |
| newspapers                   | .60 (22) | .56 (24) | .78 (29) |
| on-line computer service     | .08 (3)  | .05 (2)  | .08 (3)  |
| sermon resource publications | .65 (24) | .72 (31) | .76 (28) |
| thesaurus                    | .38 (14) | .30 (13) | .24 (9)  |
| other                        | .32 (12) | .16 (7)  | .27 (10) |

Question #12 - How does the importance of your sermon preparation methods compare today with you methods compare today with your methods five years ago?

|                    | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| no change          | .35 (13) | .40 (17) | .30 (11) |
| less important now | .08 (3)  | .09 (4)  | .03 (1)  |
| more important now | .57 (21) | .51 (22) | .68 (25) |

Question #13 - What style of preaching do you use the most?

|            | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| expository | .35 (13) | .35 (15) | .32 (12) |
| inductive  | .05 (2)  | .14 (6)  | .11 (4)  |
| narrative  | .32 (12) | .30 (13) | .32 (12) |
| topical    | .16 (6)  | .14 (6)  | .14 (5)  |
| other      | .11 (4)  | .07 (3)  | .11 (4)  |

Question #14 - Do you ever find yourself doing "Saturday Night Special" sermon preparation?

|               | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
| never         | .27 (10) | .30 (13) | .41 (15) |
| once or twice | .08 (3)  | .23 (10) | .30 (11) |
| sometimes     | .59 (22) | .42 (18) | .24 (9)  |
| frequently    | .05 (2)  | .05 (2)  | .03 (1)  |

Question #15 - How long do you normally preach?

|                      | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| less than 15 minutes | .22 (8)  | .16 (7)  | .05 (2)  |
| 16 to 20 minutes     | .57 (21) | .65 (28) | .65 (24) |
| 21 to 25 minutes     | .14 (5)  | .14 (6)  | .24 (9)  |
| 26 to 30 minutes     | .08 (3)  | .02 (1)  | .05 (2)  |
| more than 30 minutes | .00 (0)  | .02 (1)  | .00 (0)  |

Question #16 - What strategies do you employ to protect your sermon preparation time from distractions?

|                        | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| avoid...office         | .51 (19) | .58 (25) | .43 (16) |
| inform congregation... | .00 (0)  | .07 (3)  | .14 (5)  |
| rarely...undisturbed   | .41 (15) | .30 (13) | .27 (10) |
| secretary screens...   | .11 (4)  | .30 (13) | .49 (18) |
| use day off...         | .14 (5)  | .21 (9)  | .11 (4)  |
| other                  | .05 (2)  | .07 (3)  | .05 (2)  |

Question #17 - How many hours per week do you spend preparing your sermon?

|                    | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| less than 1 hour   | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  |
| 1 to 5 hours       | .24 (9)  | .26 (11) | .19 (7)  |
| 6 to 10 hours      | .51 (19) | .47 (20) | .35 (13) |
| 11 to 15 hours     | .16 (6)  | .21 (9)  | .30 (11) |
| more than 15 hours | .08 (3)  | .07 (3)  | .16 (6)  |

Question #18 - Rank the amount of time spent on each of the following with 1 as the most and 8 as the least time spent.

|                        | 1-99      | 100-199   | 200+      |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| background reading     | .27 (3rd) | .33 (3rd) | .22 (2nd) |
| finding illustrations  | .08 (5th) | .28 (4th) | .24 (4th) |
| outlining              | .16 (6th) | .28 (6th) | .16 (5th) |
| praying                | .14 (2nd) | .16 (2nd) | .32 (6th) |
| rehearsing             | .38 (8th) | .54 (8th) | .46 (8th) |
| researching            | .16 (4th) | .16 (5th) | .22 (3rd) |
| studying the scripture | .32 (1st) | .35 (1st) | .46 (1st) |
| writing                | .19 (7th) | .19 (7th) | .16 (7th) |

Note: The percentages represent the pastors in each respective group that gave that activity its rank (e.g. 27% of pastors in the 1-99 attendance group ranked background reading third in time spent).

Question #19 - How far in advance do you plan your sermons?

|              | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+    |
|--------------|----------|----------|---------|
| one week     | .62 (23) | .40 (17) | .24 (9) |
| one month    | .24 (9)  | .28 (12) | .22 (8) |
| three months | .03 (1)  | .19 (8)  | .16 (6) |
| six months   | .03 (1)  | .07 (3)  | .11 (4) |
| one year     | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  | .08 (3) |
| other        | .08 (3)  | .07 (3)  | .19 (7) |

Question #20 - What effect does your scheduled absence from the pulpit have on attendance at your principal worship service?

|                      | 1-99     | 100-199  | 200+     |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| noticeably lower     | .43 (16) | .67 (29) | .68 (25) |
| relatively unchanged | .49 (18) | .33 (14) | .19 (7)  |
| noticeably higher    | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  | .00 (0)  |
| other                | .08 (3)  | .00 (0)  | .14 (5)  |



