ABSTRACT

FROM COMMITTEES AND CHOIRS TO COMMUNITIES

by

J. David Trawick

Many church people volunteer to serve in hopes of developing relationships they are missing in the rest of their lives. Sadly, they often end up serving in relational isolation and so are disappointed in their serving experience and may be more prone to burnout.

For this study a researcher-designed curriculum of sharing questions was employed among task groups for seven weeks. Pre- and posttest surveys were taken to determine the subjective sense of relational closeness and job satisfaction among participants. A comparison group was also surveyed.
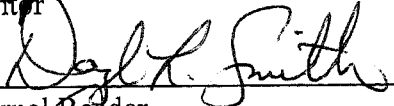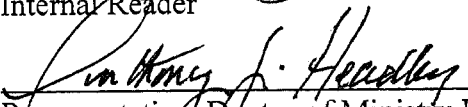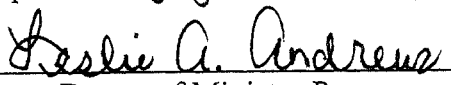
Employment of the curriculum for seven weeks did not result in a statistically significant change in feelings of relational closeness. The lack of change was most likely due to insufficient time in the course of the experiment. Because relational closeness was not sufficiently affected by employing the curriculum, the question of the correlation between relational closeness and job satisfaction could not be answered. A longer treatment period would probably have a better possibility of revealing a change in relational closeness and, therefore, a positive correlation between relational closeness and job satisfaction.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

FROM COMMITTEES AND CHOIRS TO COMMUNITIES

presented by

J. David Trawick

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

April 23, 2007

Internal Reader

April 23, 2007

Date

Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

April 23, 2007

Date

Dean, Doctor of Ministry Program

April 23, 2007

Date

FROM COMMITTEES AND CHOIRS TO COMMUNITIES

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Presented to the Faculty of

Asbury Theological Seminary

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Of the Requirements for the Degree

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May 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendixes

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my deepest appreciation to,

Dr. Leslie Andrews. Your enthusiasm for and encyclopedic knowledge of the dissertation process breathed life into Church research.

Dr. Jack Connell. Your comments and suggestions in the development of this dissertation reflected the heart of a pastor and the wisdom of a scholar.

Dr. Daryl Smith. Your desire to make this something useable for others encouraged me to finish this endurance test.

My friends and fellow students in the doctoral process. Though we were only together for a while, you inspired me with the sense of community we so quickly experienced because of our shared faith in Christ and love for the Church.

Northwest Hills United Methodist Church. You were more than guinea pigs for this project but fellow seekers of deeper dimensions of true kingdom living. I pray that you were enriched as much as I was.

My Congregational Reflection Group, David Castillo, Mike Turner, Carita DeVilbiss, and Frank and Karen Montgomery. Your questions, insights, and suggestions were indispensable in shaping and carrying out this experiment. Carita, your statistical analysis and assistance in writing Chapter 4 earned you extra stars in your crown.

My family, Jill, Jenny, and Anna. Sometimes I was away at a class, and sometimes I was physically present at home but mentally still involved in my doctoral work. You never complained. When I was not so lovable, you loved me. When I was frustrated, you encouraged me. When I got bogged down in the workload, you gave me the time and space I needed. You were a picture of sacrificial love.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

"What is his name?" I was asking my wife about a neighbor who lived just a few

houses from us. Our suburban neighborhood is not a true neighborhood but a collection

of disconnected habitations. Almost all of us are two-career families or single parents.

We drive home after a long day at work feeling too exhausted to engage actively with

anyone. We wave at one another as we drive up the street, but that is the extent of our

interaction. The garage door opens automatically, the car is pulled in, and the garage door

closes automatically. Once indoors, people may not even engage meaningfully with

family members, instead disengaging in front of the television or computer screen. We

live in a land of socially isolated people who rarely, if ever, delve deeply in relationships.

We feel a hunger for meaningful relationships but take little productive action in pursuit

of such connections.

Joseph R. Myers chronicles the historical changes in the shape of Western society

from rural to urban and suburban, from front porches to no front porches, the advent of

air conditioning, driving instead of walking, television, geographic mobility and the loss

of extended families, and other influences that have led to a society starving for

relationships (121-26). Many observers point out that the accelerating pace of life causes

people to "skim" over relationships; rarely do people "go deep" (Ortberg 86-87). Randy

Frazee describes contemporary lives as fragmented and divided among multiple

responsibilities, tugged and pulled by family, work, school, children's activities, friends,

etc., thus not feeling fully connected in any one place. Even multiple church

involvements tend to add to this fragmentation. Frazee insists, "*In order to extract a*

deeper sense of belonging, we must consolidate our worlds into one [original emphasis]"

(34-35). The causes of social isolation are many and complex, but the human need is

clear: the need for meaningful relationships.

This lack of deep relationships can also be found in the Christian Church. While

such disconnectedness might be expected among guests and new members who have yet

to find their way into relationships, it is also present among people who are much more

involved in the life of many congregations. Writers in the areas of church health and

growth cite loneliness as a societal need that churches should be, but are often not,

equipped to meet (e.g., Easum; George; Warren). Conversations dwell on surface matters

of "news, weather, and sports," often covered with a thin veneer of propriety, rarely

going deep into hopes, dreams, fears, failures, and struggles. Study group participants

focus on the Bible or a topic but reveal little of themselves.

This lack of relational intimacy is manifested in a variety of ways, such as a sense

of loneliness and distrust between people who do not know each other well. Distrust may

lead to questioning the motivations of others, sometimes leading to all-out church fights.

A lack of close relationships can reinforce an over-dependence on the pastor to be "the

minister" who is expected to meet all needs because fellow church members are not

deeply known and trusted, do not know of the needs of others, and, therefore, are not

ministering where help is needed. Finally, lack of close relationships results in a high rate

of member dropout. While a great Sunday morning experience might lure someone to

join a congregation, friendships keep people in the church. Common proverbial wisdom

among church health and growth consultants says that of new members who get involved

in a small group, about 80 percent will still be involved in the life of the church one year

later. Among new members who do not get involved in a small group, about 80 percent will be absent from the life of the church one year later.

Given the importance of involvement in a small relational group, mere participation in a group is not sufficient to experience fulfilling life in community. Physical proximity alone is not sufficient for the development of close relationships. Sunday school classess and Bible studies may be focused on gaining information but do little to foster interpersonal relationships. Many committees and choirs can be focused on accomplishing a task without participants knowing each other well. Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad suggest, "People leave churches all the time because they don't feel connected. They may be serving on half a dozen committees or ministry teams, but they don't have the relationships that go beyond the boundaries of the work the committee does together" (101). Task groups were the focus of this study because many church members are involved in task groups but may still be relationally disconnected. Task groups are those that gather for the purpose of accomplishing a particular concrete task beyond the life of the group, as opposed to groups that gather for fellowship, prayer, recovery, or Bible study. While these other groups are inwardly focused, task groups can have an exclusively outward focus, to the neglect of interpersonal relationships in the group.

Patrick Lencioni makes the case that this relational disconnect may hinder the objective effectiveness of the group in its work and, on the subjective side, create a low sense of ministry task satisfaction relative to the group's task. When a group is pursuing a task, a lack of close relationships produces a low trust level. A low trust level may lead to a variety of risk-aversion behaviors, particularly a hesitance to share relevant questions, thoughts, and feelings, and a hesitance to innovate in pursuit of greater effectiveness in

the task. Innovation always runs the risk of failure. People prefer to avoid failure in the presence of people who are not trusted; therefore, innovation is avoided. Such behaviors inevitably lead to a sense of dissatisfaction regarding participation in the group and the work accomplished (or not) by the group.

In contrast, close relationships within a task group would probably build mutual trust, better communication, a greater willingness to share relevant questions, thoughts, and feelings, and a greater willingness to innovate in pursuit of the task. These behaviors would increase the effectiveness of the group and the sense of ministry task satisfaction among participants. Several authors specifically urge the development of closer relationships within task groups for many such reasons (e.g., Hestenes; Hybels; Osborne). An operative hypothesis of this study was that a positive correlation can be seen between the feeling of interpersonal closeness and a sense of ministry task satisfaction among task group participants. This study evaluated one possible method of increasing relational intimacy and, therefore, ministry task satisfaction among task group participants.

Theological Reflection

Paul addressed the believers in Corinth who were struggling with fragmentation of their faith community, reminding them that their corporate identity is foundational to being a follower of Jesus. "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:14, 27, NIV). Paul understood Christian identity not in an individualistic sense but always as the individual in community (Banks 1). Interestingly, in this and other passages Paul explicitly links the unity of the body (relationships in the church) with the variety of body parts and their

functions (ministry tasks). Paul's understanding of life in community has its foundation

deep in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The corporate identity of the people of God finds its roots in the very nature of

God. While hints and shadows of community within the nature of God can be found in

the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament makes several clear references to the Holy

Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Godhead (e.g., Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor.

12:14) and many implied references (Luke 3:21-22; Rom. 1:1-4; Eph. 4:4-6). Rather than

a simple monotheism, the New Testament reveals a divine community of three Persons in

perfect unity and community. Father, Son, and Spirit dwell in the most intimate mutual

love, each one serving the others, sharing the same will and purpose, perfectly one, yet

three. Gilbert Bilezikian, Jurgen Moltmann, John D. Zizioulas, and other theologians

point to the divine community as the foundation for the human community of the people

of God. Bilezikian, for example, writes, "God is presented as the tri-unity of divine

entities existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the eternal community of oneness from

whom all other communities derive life and meaning" (17). Not only does God exist in

the community of the Trinity, but God works in and through this divine community.

Father, Son, and Spirit work together in creating, sustaining, redeeming, judging, and

blessing. All that God does is in and through this divine community. God's work

becomes an outward expression of that community.

The creation account provides a foundation for the biblical emphasis on human

community. Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). While the image

of God undoubtedly means many things, that humans are stewards of God's creation, that

humans have free will, creativity, and spirit, which transcends the physical body, it also

certainly indicates human nature is relational and the human person needs to be in

community if humanity is to live out its created nature and potential. In Genesis 2 God

speaks of the condition of the solitary human: "It is not good for the human to be alone"

(Gen. 2:18). Here is the implication of the need for male and female to be united in

marriage, and a broader reference to the human social nature in general. No one should

be alone. Because of this social nature, God creates a partner for the first person. God

shapes them into different but complementary genders. Then God gives the task of

tending the garden to the man and woman together (Gen. 1:28; 2:15, 20). Their work of

stewardship of the earth is to be carried out in community. Ministry task and relationships

are linked.

God's desire for humans to live in community is reflected in God's choosing not

just an individual but a people to be his. While Abram is called out individually, he is the

representative head of a larger group including his wife Sarai and an unspecified number

of others in his household (Gen. 12:1-5). The covenant was passed on to Isaac and then

Jacob, also known as Israel, the father of the nation Israel, whose twelve sons represent

the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49). Throughout the patriarchal period, the story is about

more than God and the individual patriarch. It is about God and the community, which is

headed and represented by the patriarch.

The Hebrew Law, presented in the literary context of the post-patriarchal period,

aims at defining and defending this unique Hebrew community. The Law defines a

framework of behavioral expectations, a set of values that are to be shared by God's

chosen people. It sets the parameters within which their life in community can thrive. The

Law deepens the expression of God's desire that his people live in meaningful

community. Later rabbinic interpreters, including Jesus, summed up the Law with the words, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40). The sum of the Law is positive, committed relationships or community.

The wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures points to benefits of the human social nature. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). The context of relationships is where human persons are most likely to learn and grow. In the context of relationships help for the weak or wounded can be found:

> Two are better than one... If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Eccles. 4:9-12)

Hebrew wisdom literature affirms that human beings move toward multiple dimensions of health and can rise to their fullest potential only when living in rich community. This need for community is intuitively sensed by all people, religious or not:

> Each one of us hides an awful secret. Buried deep within every human soul throbs a muted pain that never goes away. It is a lifelong yearning for that one love that will never be found. The silent churning at the core of our beings is the tormenting need to know and to be known, to understand and to be understood, to possess and to be possessed, to belong unconditionally and forever without fear of loss, betrayal, or rejection. (Bilezikian 15)

Human beings were created for life in community. It follows that human health and fulfillment is found only when living in meaningful relationships with others.

While this longing is present in all people, many people today are not enjoying such life in community. The necessity of laws shows that community has always been threatened and in need of protection. The root of this difficulty is seen in the biblical portrayal of the very first human relationship, that of the first man and the first woman, being crippled by the effects of sin. After sinning they were aware of their nakedness and covered themselves with leaves, symbolic of alienation from self, each other, and God. When God came walking in the garden, they hid, indicating further alienation from God. When God interrogated them, the man blamed the woman, and their relationship was further strained. Finally, the curse obliterated the once equal partnership of the man and woman and replaced it with a hierarchical relationship in which the woman is subordinate to the man (Gen. 3). Once they decided to go their own way rather than remaining faithful to God, the oneness of their relationships was a thing of the past. They were alienated from God, from self, and from one another.

The presence of sin and its effects casts a shadow on all of human history and are evident in the fractured relationships that pervade the Christian Church today. Bilezikian describes the organizational results:

> Because of its refusal to pattern itself on the model of oneness provided by the Trinity, the church now vacillates between the worldly extreme of oppressive institutionalism on the one hand and radical individualism on the other, that is, massive totalitarianism or frenzied fragmentation. In either case, the church fails to model and to provide community on behalf of God to a world deprived of it. (50)

When misbehavior occurs in a human organization or community, reactions tend toward two extremes. Sometimes the misbehavior is treated lightly or totally ignored, leading to the community disintegrating and falling into chaos. Behaviors are likely to become more divergent and potentially more destructive. A more subtle but serious consequence of

ignoring misbehavior diminishes community at a deeper level. To treat a person's

behavior as unimportant is to treat the person as unimportant, so relationships with the

person are degraded. At the other extreme, misbehavior may be met with an increasing

number of rules and laws, making the life of the community increasingly bureaucratic,

oppressive, even totalitarian. The group depends more on coercion than on relationship

for its cohesion and can hardly be called community. Both reactions, lawlessness and

oppression, are ways to avoid the emotionally threatening act of dealing with the

offending individual on a personal basis. These two opposite reactions occur in societies

and in the Church. The Church is infected and affected by sin and its consequences, the

chief consequence being the breakdown of relationships and all that flows from the loss

of community.

Nevertheless, the Church is called to be the vanguard of the kingdom of God,

which is marked above all else by loving community. The Church is to be a

countercultural community in the midst of a sinful, fragmented world. Jesus commanded

his followers, "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be

made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled

by men" (Matt. 5:13). If the Church would have anything to offer the world, it is to be

different from the world around it. Part of that difference is how its members live in

relationship with one another. Paul's instruction to the Church was, "Do not conform any

longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

(Rom. 12:2). He goes on to describe how people with renewed minds live in loving

community. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above

yourselves. Share with God's people who are in need" (Rom. 12:10, 13). Paul's

prescription for the Church portrays a loving community like that of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian community is called to answer the prayer Jesus himself prayed to his heavenly Father for his followers, "that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:22).

Toward that end, followers of Jesus must come to know one another at a deeper, more personal level. Conversation must include matters of heart-level importance such as core convictions, hopes and fears, victories and struggles, even confessing sin to one another. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's comments are suggestive of the transparency that is required:

> The final break-through to fellowship with one another does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship allows no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we *are* [original emphasis] sinners! (110)

People conceal certain parts of their lives for fear others would not accept or love them if the whole truth was known. This "image management" shows others what is most acceptable and lovable in themselves, hiding the rest of themselves from view. Ironically, because this secrecy allows others to know only in part, people continue to feel unloved. They are unrejected but also unknown. Here is the general thought process: "If they knew the real me, they would not love the real me. So they love what they see. But they don't know the real me, so they don't love the real me." The thought process and relational dynamic is a circle with no way out, except through the risk of self-exposure. The risk of transparency and rejection keeps them paralyzed in isolation. Only when people come to know and accept one another as sinners do they truly become as one in community. The

importance of avoiding such isolation may be part of the reason James instructs the Church, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (Jas. 5:16). Though his instruction has to do with physical healing, it is certainly applicable to the healing of broken community.

Paul's discussion of the Church as the body of Christ implies relational connectedness as an essential characteristic of the Church. Body parts are necessarily connected in order to be whole and healthy. In this context Paul also suggests a positive correlation between close relationships and productivity in ministry. Each member of the body has its particular function. No single member or function is self-sufficient. All are interdependent, each member having something to contribute to the whole, each member needing the contributions of the others, all members realizing their full potential only when living in unity and operating in harmony (1 Cor. 12:14-26). The positive correlation between close relationships and productivity in ministry leads to the purpose of this study.

The Purpose Stated

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether using a six-week Community Building Curriculum including a one-day retreat, sharing-questions, and prayer could generate feelings of closeness and friendship among ministry task group participants and evaluate whether that feeling of closeness promotes a greater sense of job satisfaction regarding the ministry task of the group.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, four research questions have been identified.

1.   What are the current feelings of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction in ministry task group participants?

2.   What is the impact of the researcher-designed curriculum on the ministry task group participants' feeling of relational closeness?

3.   What part of the curriculum has the greatest impact on the feeling of relational closeness?

4.   Does an increased sense of relational closeness lead to an increased sense of ministry task satisfaction?

Definition of Terms

Ministry task group is any group that meets regularly for the purpose of accomplishing some ministry-related goal or task external to the group, something other than relationship building or personal growth. The focus of this study was on choirs and committees that meet at least monthly.

Relational closeness refers to the subjective sense of knowing and being known, loving and being loved. It is, essentially, the sense of friendship. Closeness does not refer to any objective measure of actual knowledge of the details of other lives but only the subjective feeling.

Ministry task satisfaction is defined as a subjective feeling that time and energy devoted to the task group are well spent, that group discussion is productive, that decision-making processes are good, and that most members contribute to rather than detract from the work. This project does not allow any generalization from the subjective feeling to any objective measure of group dynamics or productivity.

Context of the Study

The study was carried out in Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, San Antonio, Texas. Northwest Hills is located in the northwest suburbs of the city. The community, well reflected in the makeup of the congregation, is largely single-parent and two income families, mostly lower middle and middle income. The largest age groups are Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) with teenage and college-age children and GenXers with younger children. Boomers and Xers each constitute 35 percent of the total population in a five-mile radius. They generally lead very busy lives, working long hours, then take children to sports, music, dance, and other activities, leaving them exhausted in the little time they are home. Frazee describes the situation as typical in much of America:

> One of the underlying problems ... in the average American suburb ... is that they have too many worlds to manage. There are too many sets of relationships that do not connect with each other but all require time to maintain. [They] do not have enough time and energy to invest in each world of relationships in order to extract a sense of belonging and meaning for their lives. (33)

With very few adults at home during the day to keep a home clean, many children to keep a home messy, little disposable income to spend on housekeepers, and overly busy lives leaving people physically and emotionally drained when they are home people do very little in-home entertaining in this community.

Myers writes of his own similar experience and suggests the lack of in-home entertaining is even truer of younger generations:

> My wife and I rarely invite others over to our house to eat. We are not alone in this. Many no longer feel comfortable offering this social invitation. We do not have the time or interest to keep up the house as our grandparents did. And many have not furnished their homes to provide

social interaction. Most homes have intimate space and public spaces. (129)

This experience has made the development of home-based small groups a futile effort at Northwest Hills. Though home groups are almost universally lifted up by church consultants as most desirable, they have been almost universally (though passively) resisted by members of Northwest Hills. Other congregations in the area have met with similar resistance, yet, as Frazee says, "You can have a small group and not experience community–but you cannot have community apart from a small group experience" (22). For this reason we have refused to abandon the search for some form of small group ministry that fits our community and our church but realize it will probably not be in the often-promoted model of home groups. We have been pressed to consider the development of more small group life on the church campus and at times when church participants are already present, for instance, during music rehearsals and committee meetings.

Description of the Project

The project began with the distribution of a questionnaire to all ministry task group participants to evaluate the depth of the relationships within task groups and the level of ministry task satisfaction. The distribution and completion of the questionnaire was in the setting of a retreat on the church campus. After completion and return of the questionnaires, comparison group members were dismissed while experimental group members stayed for a day of relationship-building exercises.

Immediately after the retreat, one discussion leader was recruited from each treatment ministry task group. Recruitment was on the basis of certain characteristics desirable in discussion leaders, particularly skills in listening and drawing others into

conversation. I selected leaders in consultation with other pastors and members who had

knowledge of the character of group participants. A two-hour discussion leader training

event reinforced basic skills in listening, drawing quiet people into conversation, quieting

overly talkative people so they do not dominate conversation, and facilitating group

prayer. Each discussion leader was given a Community Building Curriculum of questions

designed to lead to personal sharing. This curriculum was employed in leading a brief

time of personal sharing and prayer in a weekly meeting.

All ministry task groups were asked to have weekly meetings for the six weeks of

the treatment period in order to accelerate the formation of relationships. While all the

musical groups already met on a weekly basis, the committees met on a monthly basis for

business. Therefore, all committee members, both comparison and treatment, were asked

to meet for weekly leader training for six weeks. The training was held on Wednesday

evenings when we already hold Bible studies available for all ages, including children

and youth. This schedule provided care for the families, particularly the children, of the

committee members. The leader training consisted of viewing DVDs of presentations

from various Willow Creek Leadership Summits. Though not all people present were

leaders of their groups, they all had leadership influence in the congregation and so could

benefit from the training. Committee members in the comparison group were dismissed

after the leader training. Committees in the treatment group used the sharing-questions

curriculum immediately after the leader training. Choirs in the treatment group used the

curriculum in their weekly rehearsals throughout the experimental period. Discussion and

prayer was done in groups of no more than six people, requiring the choirs and

committees to subdivide during small group time. Each small group maintained the same composition during the six weeks.

Comparison group choirs continued meeting in their usual format and schedule during the entire treatment period. In order to control for the possible effect of simply spending weekly time together, comparison group committee participants were encouraged to participate together in weekly leader training and were assured they would later have the opportunity to use the Community Building Curriculum if they so desired.

A post-treatment questionnaire was distributed to all ministry task group participants. Data analysis allowed comparisons of pre- and posttest responses and examination of the relationship between any changes in feelings of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction.

Methodology

This was an evaluative study using the nonequivalent (pretest-posttest) control group model. More closely defined, the control group was a comparison group:

$$O1 \longrightarrow X \longrightarrow O2$$

$$O1 \longrightarrow O2$$

$$O1 \longrightarrow X1 \longrightarrow O2$$

$$O1 \longrightarrow X2 \longrightarrow O2$$
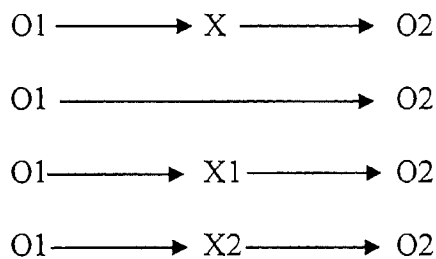
In all four lines O1 (observation #1) indicates the administration of the pretest survey, while O2 (observation #2) is the administration of the posttest survey. The posttest survey is like the pretest survey but with a few additional questions regarding the impact of the curriculum. The top line represents the treatment choir group with X representing their use of the Community Building Curriculum (CBC). The second line represents the

comparison choir group with no intervention of any kind. The third line represents the comparison committee group, with X1 being their participation in weekly leader training. The bottom line represents the treatment committee group, and X2 is their participation in the weekly leader training and the leader's retreat and sharing questions from the CBC.

Population and Sample

For this study, the general population includes the participants in task groups at Northwest Hills United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. The sample included all ministry task group participants whose groups met at least once a month. These groups were the adult vocal choir, the handbell choir, the praise band, finance committee, board of trustees, building committee, and pastor-parish relations committee. The comparison groups were the adult vocal choir, finance committee, and building committee. The treatment groups were the handbell choir, the praise band, the board of trustees, and the pastor-parish relations committee. Comparison and treatment groups were selected in an effort to have comparably sized samples and for both comparison and treatment groups to include both administrative committees and choirs, including all members of each committee and choir in the sample. The total number of participants in these groups was seventy-six.

Instrumentation

Pretest and posttest questionnaires were the same, except that the posttest questionnaire included a few questions about the influence of spending more time together, attending the one-day leaders' retreat, employing the weekly sharing questions, sharing prayer concerns, and praying for one another. Ministry task satisfaction was gauged using elements from the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), an accepted job

satisfaction questionnaire used in studies of secular businesses. Feelings of relational closeness were measured using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale (PRQC). The vocabulary of both instruments was very slightly modified in order to fit a church context. A few questions from each instrument were dropped as inappropriate for the church context. The two instruments were combined into one form for this study. Additional questions elicited information about respondent age, gender, length of time active in the church, length of time active in the ministry task group, and frequency of attendance in task group meetings during the treatment period.

Confidentiality was insured by the use of respondent-created codes. At the administration of each questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to recreate the same code. This encoding allowed me to track changes in individual respondents over time as well as the composite scores of the entire sample.

Data Collection

The pretest questionnaire was distributed and completed in a retreat setting at the church facility, with additional questionnaires distributed by mail to those who did not attend the retreat. The pretest responses served as a baseline of the participants' subjective sense of relational intimacy within their group and their feeling of ministry task satisfaction.

The same questionnaire, with the few additional questions, was distributed and completed at an evening dessert meeting at the church after six weeks of ministry task groups employing the Community Building Curriculum. Additional questionnaires were distributed by mail to those who did not attend the meeting.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the experimental intervention of the Community Building Curriculum, which included the initial retreat and the sharing questions for weekly group meetings. The CBC was designed for the sole purpose of facilitating deeper relationships. The curriculum included a one-day leaders' retreat and weekly sharing questions that gradually move from safe, surface, even light-hearted issues to more personal, emotional, and spiritual issues. A time of sharing prayer concerns and praying for one another at each weekly meeting was the other component of the curriculum.

The dependent variables of this study were the subjective feelings of relational closeness with other group members and the subjective feeling of ministry task satisfaction relative to the tasks of their groups.

Intervening variables that might influence outcomes included introverted or extroverted personalities, skills of discussion leaders, and prior relationships between participants. Also considered was the possibility of members of treatment groups talking with members of comparison groups about their experiences, which might affect outcomes. This possibility was addressed by a verbal and written request to all participants that they not discuss their experiences until the treatment period was completed. Additional intervening variables accounted for in the questionnaire were age, gender, participation in a committee versus a choir, length of participation in the congregation, length of participation in the ministry task group, and frequency of attendance at group meetings.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This study was limited to Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, and more specifically to ministry task group participants whose groups meet at least once a month. At the time of the study, the congregation was evangelical, suburban, growing, and generally healthy. The research provides actual data to an area of church life filled with hypotheses and anecdotal information but little or no systematic study. The results of the study might be generalized to ministry task group participants in other congregations of similar character but not to participants in other types of church groups or churches in different socioeconomic settings.

The researcher-developed curriculum was the chosen method of promoting the growth of closer relationships. While many published small group curriculums are available, most include a substantial Bible study component and require one to two hours for each meeting. The time constraints of the already busy lives of church members made these curricula impractical for the purposes of this study. The focus of existing curricula on content over process also made them unsuitable. A few published resources offering discussion questions that elicit sharing of personal information can be found; however, the questions are not arranged in such a way as to take a group gradually from surface to deeper levels of sharing. The researcher-developed curriculum drew from several of these published resources, arranging sharing questions in an intentional move toward deeper interpersonal sharing. No attempt was made to study the effectiveness of other possible formats for relationship development.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this work reviews selected literature pertinent to the topic of relationships and ministry task satisfaction. The review ranges widely from biblical interpretation and theology to church health, church leadership, small groups, and even literature from the business world. Chapter 3 presents the methodology. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of the research findings and offers suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

This study sought to examine the correlation between close relationships and ministry task satisfaction among task group participants in the church. Such an investigation required a wide-ranging literature review to discover dominant and developing themes from both business and church-related literature. Pertinent church literature includes biblical and theological literature, general church health literature, examinations of more specific areas of various church ministries, and the rapidly growing body of literature about small groups. The business literature addresses issues of job satisfaction and effective working groups. The literature review ends with a brief mention of current thinking in the field of research methodology.

The Need for Relationships and Community

The need for relationships and community is inherent in the human being and felt by everyone at some level. Whether one feels the pain of broken relationships, a hunger to have a relationship, or a sense of fulfillment found in a relationship, human experience says people need to be connected to other people; people need a place where they feel they belong. Breen and Kallestad express the human need for relationships clearly and simply: "God created us as social beings.... Life should come with a warning label: Do Not Attempt This By Yourself!" (95). The social sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics) are founded on the common understanding of human beings as social beings and seek to explain various human social interactions. The social sciences attempt to explain this social nature by environmental,

biological, and evolutionary mechanisms. The Christian faith proclaims a theological

foundation for this social nature.

Theological Foundations

Theological literature gives attention to group life, relational intimacy, and

belonging as essential to the life of God's people together, with its foundation in the very

nature of God. The theology of the Trinity has been pursued by several theologians in

recent years, with the community of the Trinity presented as foundational for the

community of the faithful (Moltmann; Zizioulas). These authors and others give attention

to the cooperative and interdependent nature of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

each deferring to the others, each person of the Trinity loving the others, each one serving

the others, fully united in purpose. The Spirit points to the Son, while the Son points to

the Father. The Holy Spirit fills and empowers the Son for his earthly ministry. The

Father and the Son send forth the Spirit, to guide and empower the Church in its ministry.

The Spirit is often referred to as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ. At every turn the

emphasis is on the unity found in the Trinity. These authors often point from the

Trinitarian nature of God to the social nature of human beings created in the image of

God but leave the development of an exhaustive theological anthropology to others.

Some contemporary attempts at inclusive language regarding the persons of God

equate "Father, Son, and Spirit" with "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer." A United

Methodist curriculum called Words That Hurt and Words That Heal uncritically offers

the substitute "Trinitarian" formula as an option for those who are concerned with

masculine references to God. The suggestions of the curriculum reflect ideas similar to

those being promoted in many mainline seminaries, by many mainline scholars, and by a

study paper recently received by the Presbyterian Church USA. Biblical-theological

investigations of the Trinity show this reframing of the Trinity to be a false equation

driven more by concerns for gender inclusivity than for a truly biblical theology,

neglecting the great unity and cooperation of the Divine community in all aspects of the

Divine work. These inclusive language formulas fall short of biblical thought in which

Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in the works of creation, redemption, and

sustaining, working together in perfectly harmonious unity. Some attempts at inclusive

language appears to be related to a monotheism or Unitarianism that politely ignores the

personhood of the members of the Trinity, reducing persons to functions, thus falling

short of biblical orthodoxy. Such a language revision provides no foundation for a

theological anthropology that emphasizes the social nature of human beings.

Another body of biblical-theological literature is more focused on ecclesiology,

the theology of the Church community (Banks; Bilezikian; Bonhoeffer; Ortberg). These

authors lay claim to the community of the Trinity as the basis for the human social nature

and the nature of the Church community. They explore the multitude of biblical images

of the Church that illustrate its corporate nature, delving into the implications of those

images. These authors sometimes reflect on relational dynamics that can hinder or enrich

the sense of community in the Church to bring it in line with its biblical-theological

potential.

Relationship Dynamics

Any corporate gathering consists of relationships but not necessarily relationships

of significant depth and meaning. Myers describes four "spaces" of relational connection

that he calls public, social, personal, and intimate belonging. "Public belonging happens

when we connect through outside influences. It isn't about connecting person to person; it is about sharing a common experience" (41). A crowd at a football game would fit this description, where most people do not even know each other's names but are united in the experience of the game and rooting for the team. "Social belonging is the 'small talk' of our relationships" (45). These are the next door neighbors who know each other's names, talk for a moment in the front yard, and share small favors. "Personal space is where we connect through sharing private – although not 'naked' – experiences, feelings, and thoughts" (47). These are the friends with whom there are shared values and convictions, the people sought out for shared activities, the ones talked with about things that really matter. "In intimate space, we share 'naked' experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Very few relationships are intimate. Intimate relationships are those in which another person knows the 'naked truth' about us and yet the two of us are 'not ashamed'" (50). This relationship is marked by extreme openness, honesty, and vulnerability. Myers says most people have only one or two relationships in the intimate space, probably a spouse or someone similarly close. Personal space may be occupied by three to five people. Social space becomes much larger, while public belonging can be as large as any shared event or experience. Finally, Myers says, "Healthy community … is achieved when we hold harmonious connections within all four spaces" (51). No single relational space marks healthy community as much as an appropriate mix of all four spaces.

In the life of a local congregation, those who gather for worship might constitute public space, particularly in the larger congregation where no one can know everyone else. While such a connection has its own significance, it is not sufficient in and of itself for relational health and a strong sense of belonging. The person whose only involvement

in a congregation is participating in the public setting of corporate worship is not strongly

connected to that congregation and can easily be disconnected from it. A congregation's

social space might be a Sunday school class, committee, or choir with twenty

participants. They know each other's names and perhaps a little bit of personal

information, but the relationship does not constitute a close and strong bond. Participants

at this level might describe a congregation as "friendly" but do not find in it close

"friends." Reggie McNeal describes the kind of relationships for which many people

seem to be searching: "Effective groups where people grow allow people to declare to

each other what is going on in their lives, what they'd like to see going on in their lives,

and what kind of help and accountability they need to move toward their hopes and away

from their frustrations" (86). Bonhoeffer likewise describes relationships in which

persons are vulnerable enough to engage in confession of sin. He insists community is

not based on knowing each other as "the righteous." Until people know each other as

sinners they do not really know each other (110). These descriptions illustrate

relationships Myers calls "personal" space. The church should provide opportunities for

all four "spaces" but must be particularly intentional about developing strategies for the

development of "personal" relationships. As Rick Warren says, "While some

relationships will spontaneously develop, the friendship factor in assimilation is too

crucial to leave to chance" (324). The strategy most often pursued today for developing

personal space is that of small groups.

Small Groups

Small group ministry is much studied, written about, prescribed, and sought.

While this emphasis is currently very popular, small groups is not a new ministry model.

A Historical Precedent

The first generation of the church gathered in large groups in the temple courts

and in small groups in private homes. "Every day they continued to meet together in the

temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere

hearts" (Acts 2:46). More recent history reveals small groups to have been a critical

element in the Wesleyan revival in eighteenth century England. A body of small group

literature focusing on the Wesley class meetings as a model from which to build today

links this "new" emphasis on small groups to a centuries-old denominational heritage.

This literature is represented by D. Michael Henderson's John Wesley's Class Meetings

and David Lowes Watson's Accountable Discipleship and The Early Methodist Class

Meetings. Each author provides a brief history of the class meeting and its place in the

Wesleyan revival. While the revival that swept England was not just the work of the

Wesleys and their coworkers, the Wesleyan wing of the movement had a deeper and

longer-lasting impact than any other segment of the revival. A strong case can be made

that Wesley's class meetings made the difference, sustaining and building up the

newfound faith of thousands of people through the experience of deep Christian

community. Henderson describes Wesley's system of interlocking groups as promoting

change in individual lives from a variety of approaches. The society was a relatively large

group that focused on biblical teaching, bringing change at the cognitive level. The class

was a smaller group, addressing the behavioral level of participants' lives. Smaller and

more intimate, the band addressed the affective level (83-112). The classes are the closest

parallel to today's small groups. Started as a method of fund-raising, Wesley soon saw

the potential of the class for pastoral oversight of new converts. He decided all who

claimed the name "Methodist" should meet in groups of about twelve on a weekly basis

for advice, accountability, and encouragement. The class leader inquired of each person,

"How is it with your soul?" (Watson, Early Methodist 108)and could follow up with

more specific questions. The questioning would often follow from Wesley's General

Rules, which stipulated three criteria for behavior. Watson describes these criteria with

quotes from Wesley.

> First, members were enjoined to do no harm, and to avoid "evil of every
> kind." Second, they were to do good "of every possible sort, and as far as
> possible to all Men." Third, they were to attend upon "all the ordinances
> of God: Suchb are The publick Worship of God; the Ministry of the Word,
> either read or expounded; The Supper of the Lord; Private Prayer;
> Searching the Scriptures; and Fasting or Abstinence." (Early Methodist,
> 108)

The ordinances including Bible reading and teaching, communion, prayer, fasting, and

abstinence. Each member told the others of their faith experience during the past week, to

include joys and sorrows, successes and failures, their faithfulness and their sins. Each

member's self-disclosure would be followed by advice, correction, or encouragement

from the leader, then some hymn singing, and finally prayers would be lifted up. In

contrast to today's small group model, the class leader was the central and authoritative

figure. Therefore, they were carefully chosen by Wesley and his assistants, based on

Christian character and leadership ability. The class leaders met weekly under the

supervision and authority of one of Wesley's preachers.

In Wesley's time people were not considered to be Methodists unless they were

members of a class. To become a class member the individual displayed full engagement

during a probationary period. After a successful probation, they were issued a class ticket.

Half-hearted participation and repeated absences was not an option but would result in

the ticket being taken away. They could reapply for membership with a repentant attitude but had to undergo another successful probationary period (Watson, Early Methodist 100-107). The Wesleyan literature examines the mechanics of the weekly class meeting, particularly the interpersonal accountability, support, and encouragement that was intentionally structured into the meetings. These Wesleyan small group authors propose adopting and revising major elements of the eighteenth century class meetings for today.

In examining and explaining the effectiveness of the Wesley classes, Henderson points to the underlying principles of Wesley's educational philosophy. These principles include the belief that human nature is perfectible by God's grace, learning comes by doing the will of God and, most importantly for this study, human nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals (128). This final principle arose from Wesley's own experiences in group settings, starting with the Oxford Holy Club, and led him to develop the class meeting. Wesley's methodological principles guided the life of the class meeting. One of these principles was that different groups were developed to serve the readiness of individuals to go deeper in their spiritual journey. One type of group cannot meet the needs of varying individuals. Another principle was participation. Every member was expected to speak at every meeting every week. Little is gained by passively observing and much may be gained by active participation (142).

Watson advises today's church to follow Wesley's lead by forming Covenant Discipleship Groups. Each group devises its own covenant, which should include Wesley's General Rules as well as any additional commitments desired by participants. The written covenant is signed by all members and is understood to be a lifelong

commitment. Watson recommends the choice of leadership of these groups be flexible, each group starting with someone chosen by the pastor but then allowing the group to choose its own leader(s). In the weekly meetings each member tells the others of their efforts, successful and unsuccessful, to live up to the terms of the covenant. This self-disclosure is followed by advice, correction, and encouragement from the leader. Watson's model retains the central role of the class leader, with most of the communication in the meeting being dialogues between each member and the group leader (Accountable Discipleship 61-72).

Dick Wills cites the employment of Wesley small groups as a key in the renewal and health of a congregation he led in Florida (35-47). Disturbed by the prevalence of "cultural Christians" in his congregation and convinced that small groups such as the Wesley classes could make the difference, he led his congregation to hire a new staff person with extensive experience with Wesley classes. They formed Wesley Fellowship Groups, which met in homes 1½ - 2 hours every week. They enjoy casual fellowship, then engage in Bible study, discussion guided by accountability questions, worship, and prayer. The groups often serve together in mission or outreach projects. Group leaders are trained to function more as facilitators than teachers. Wills describes the experience of Wesley group in his congregation as providing fellowship, interpersonal care, and a transformation of persons from "cultural Christians" to real followers of Jesus.

Those drawing on the legacy of Wesleyan small groups make a strong case that small group ministry is not a new thing but a very "Methodist" practice, a point that can be helpful in addressing the questions of some church members who may be reluctant to participate in this "new" thing.

General Church Health Literature

General church health literature has long pointed to the importance of group life

within the larger congregation for the health of the overall congregation. Kennon L.

Callahan, writing about general church health, devotes substantial space to the discussion

of the church's need for relational groups. His comments are representative of much of

the church health literature of the 1980s:

> People search for community, not committees. People will put up with
> being on committees to the extent that they have discovered community.
> Frequently, the most lively times are before and after the committee
> meeting as people stand around and share with one another the sense of
> community. Generally speaking, within the first six months, and in some
> instances within the first year and a half, people will need to discover such
> a group or they will be likely to join that great Sunday School class in the
> sky called inactive members. One of the key factors that increases
> newcomers' interest in the life and mission of a congregation is their
> ability to find a sense of roots, place, and belonging in a meaningful
> group. A congregation is a collection of groups. There is, finally, no such
> thing as a large church. What we call a large church is a collection of
> small congregations who have enough in common to share the same
> centralized space and facilities and the same pastor and pastoral staff. The
> art of serving a large church is, in fact, the art of serving a cooperative
> parish. With the exception of small congregations that are, in themselves,
> primary significant relational groups, most local churches are collections
> of groups. (35-36)

Likewise, William M. Easum indicates that small groups are essential to assimilating

people into the life of a congregation and cutting down the dropout rate. He suggests a

definition of a small group as fewer than forty people but says fewer than seventeen is

best (37). This group is much larger than prescribed in early small group literature and

later church health literature.

Most of the literature of this era recognizes the importance of small groups for the

development of a sense of community; however, many of the discussions tend to be

general in nature, presenting standard Sunday school classes, choirs, and committees as

providing adequate small group life. Suggested group sizes are generally larger than is

promoted in more recent literature, and deep relational intimacy is not usually discussed.

Callahan, Easum, Lyle Schaller, and others were advocating the importance of "social

space" while early small group and later church health literature placed greater emphasis

on "personal space." General church health literature of this era did not, for the most part,

give many specifics about how to craft groups for the specific purpose of community

building. The more specific small group literature, on the other hand, provided many

practical details that gradually began to find their way into later general church health

literature (e.g., George, Hestenes).

Focused attention on the development of truly intimate group life becomes

prominent in more recent general church health literature. This literature often offers

more specific and practical ideas about group size, dynamics, formats, and leadership,

reflecting the refinements in the more focused small group literature that is described

later in this study (e.g., Hybels and Hybels; Warren; Wills).

Church health literature generally gives most attention to the benefits gained from

small groups, including life change, member retention, pastoral care, and life application

of biblical lessons. For example, George G. Hunter, III studied the common

characteristics of numerous effective congregations to determine what made them healthy

and effective. He found a key characteristic to be small groups that create a sense of

community and relational connectedness:

> There are compelling reasons for churches to take another look at "small
> groups," specifically at several of the many agendas that are best pursued
> (or only pursued) in the small group. The apostolic congregations all
> feature small groups prominently. They have discovered a transformative
> power in the small group revolution that many other churches still need to
> discover. (Church 82)

Lynn and Bill Hybels, in describing the ministry of Willow Creek Church, indicate the importance of small groups where people can be open, real, vulnerable, and broken with one another, "a small group of believers in which they can be encouraged, supported, challenged, and lovingly held accountable" (199). Bob Russell, Schaller, Warren, Frazee, and others, addressing general church health, all lift up small group life as a key, often using phrases such as, "The church must get smaller as it gets bigger." Writers with a Wesleyan heritage, such as Howard Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon and Wills, concur and often point back to the Wesley class meetings as a prototype.

Some of the most recent church health books go beyond simply advocating the importance of small groups to provide some detailed small group practical "how tos," following the lead of the increasing body of small group literature. The reason for the growing emphasis, clarity, and detail in general church health books is explained by Carl F. George:

> I believe that the smaller group within the whole—called by dozens of terms, including the small group or the cell group—is a crucial but underdeveloped resource in most churches. It is, I contend, the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation, for evangelism and leadership development, for the most essential functions that God has called for in the church. (41)

This "underdeveloped resource" must be intentionally structured and harnessed to deepen relationships, in order that the church might be more effective in its various ministries.

This emphasis on relationships and group life promises to remain vital for some time to come. In a world that continues to raise expectations for productivity, add new communications technologies that bypass the necessity for face-to-face time, and increase the pace of life, people find themselves relationally starved and searching. The church is uniquely positioned to address this hunger. In describing the church for the twenty-first

century, Leonard Sweet insists relationships will be the primary setting for all meaningful

ministry:

> In the modern world, people sought meaningful relationships. In the
> postmodern world, meaning IS [original emphasis] relationships.... The
> biggest factors determining whether new members will dig in or drop out
> are answers to these three questions: "Can I make friends in this church?"
> "Is there a place where I will fit in?" "Does this church need me?" (195-
> 96)

Sweet rightly contends that if the Church is truly the Church, the answer to those

questions will be an emphatic "yes." The effective church will be a community of

friendship, of belonging, where everyone can make their unique contribution.

Small Group Literature

Small groups are being recognized as a powerful tool for almost every ministry

area to which a church might be called. The existing literature is teeming with ideas and

procedures that appear to be intuitive common sense. The literature presents a great

volume of anecdotal evidence. Largely missing is any reference to systematic study with

experimental and control groups and surveys. The most systematic study of small groups

is found in the work of Robert Wuthnow reported in I Come Away Stronger and Sharing

the Journey. He reports perhaps the most exhaustive studies of small group life to date.

His studies, however, are descriptive, not experimental, and do not focus only on small

groups in the church but on the larger realm of small groups in all of American society,

including special interest, support, and recovery groups. His work, instructive as it is,

does not address the issues of concern in the project. We are left with church-related

small group literature that provides some tantalizing anecdotes and observations and

many worthwhile thoughts and suggestions but little or no objective study and

measurement.

The growing body of small group literature is the source upon which general church health literature has drawn and is marked by a general consensus (with some variety) regarding the "how tos" of small groups, including group size, leadership needed for groups, small group meeting formats, different types of groups, and the support structure necessary for maintaining a small group ministry. The pioneering efforts of Roberta Hestenes and the writing of Lyman Coleman, who popularized the small group movement, displayed many of these themes early on, themes that can be found throughout more recent literature (e.g., Donahue, Donahue and Robinson).

George's description of a small group's core functions is representative of the now widespread literature:

> What, then, does a cell accomplish? Each one addresses four dimensions of ministry: loving (pastoral care), learning (Bible knowledge), deciding (internal administration), and doing (duties that serve those outside the group). Each type of cell, however, embodies a different mix of majors and minors on these emphases. Each, however, will generally fit under one of two headings: nurture groups or task groups. (89)

Most of the literature suggests all four of these functions must be present in a healthy small group, though the functions will receive differing emphases according to the design of each group. For the purposes of this study, the primary effort was to incorporate "loving" into groups that had focused almost solely on "doing." Choir groups did incorporate "loving" into their weekly rehearsals. The experiment included an added element of "learning" among committee members, as both treatment and comparison committee groups were asked to participate in six weeks of leadership training, viewing DVDs of the Willow Creek Leadership Summits. After the leadership training members of comparison groups were released, while members of treatment groups stayed and employed the Community Building Curriculum aimed at facilitating "loving." All groups

participated in leadership training so all participants would be in physical proximity with others in their groups with the same frequency; therefore, the only variable would be the use of the curriculum. Most choir participants were already involved in Sunday school and/or Bible study, so that often-prescribed learning dimension of small group ministry was already being fulfilled in another setting.

The particular emphasis of a group often leads to that group being designated as a nurture, community, discipleship, recovery, support, seeker, or task group. The groups for this study were existing task groups. The aim of the design was to build into the groups a stronger community component. It was one step toward the "ideal" fourfold functions prescribed in the literature.

The literature suggests the task of recruiting group members requires designating a "target" audience. Not every group can meet the needs of every person. Not every personality will gel well with every other personality. The preferred method of group member selection suggested in the literature is most often described in terms similar to the practice at Saddleback Church:

> Saddleback especially believes in encouraging groups to organize around "affinities" and they give their "affinity groups" a lot of freedom in what they study and do. The reason for the "affinity" and "freedom" themes relates to the group's "energy." Saddleback's leaders have learned that if you do not group people by affinity (based on a common culture, concern, crisis, or commitment), then the leader has to provide most of the glue that holds the group together! (Hunter, Church 91)

While integrating a wide variety of people (ages, races, life situations) into one group might seem to be desirable in an era of inclusivity, the literature suggests that it is incredibly difficult. A more effective use of available time and energy is to focus on the purpose(s) of the group and recruit members accordingly. For this study, participants

were already self-selected by their participation in specific task groups. With many possible differences in these participants, they have at least this one point of affinity.

Small group writers generally suggest group sizes of ten or fewer participants in order to limit the number of person-to-person dynamics that must be managed and to make each group small enough to feel like a safe place for seemingly risky self-revelation. As noted earlier, Myers and others discuss the importance of developing larger groups for less intimate relationships. These larger groups provide a sense of belonging for those who will probably never join a small group (18). Larger groups can also be places where people make initial connections they could later form into smaller, more intimate groups. Small group writers observe that even Jesus limited his group to twelve. In this project, all committees met this size limitation. Choirs had larger numbers of participants, and so were divided into small groups for the community component of their time together. Consistency in small group membership rather than mixing into new small groups each time allowed relationships to grow more intimate over time.

Another relatively common theme in small group literature is to have an "open chair" in the room to encourage group members to think and pray about whom they could invite to join them. As a group adds members and grows, the relational dynamics will change. At a certain point the group will become too large to continue to build intimacy, personal sharing will decrease, and group discussion is likely to be dominated by more extroverted personalities. Before that point is reached, the apprentice (a person who has served as an "understudy" of the group leader) and one or two others leave the existing group and "birth" a new group. Some of the newer literature suggests the group leader should lead the new group, while the apprentice takes the role of leadership in the

original group. This move is never called "splitting," a negative term to be avoided at all costs, but "birthing," a positive term and something to be joyfully anticipated and celebrated. Birthing is not appropriate for most committees but could be adopted by choirs, which could subdivide as new members are added. However, this dynamic was not pertinent to the subject under study, and so was not incorporated into the project.

All the small group literature insists on the importance of training for small group leaders, starting with a modest amount of classroom training and following up with generous amounts of on-the-job coaching. As small group leaders gain experience, they become more aware of what they do not yet know and are more ready to learn through continuing training. The goal is to build a structure of "coaches" who each supervise, coach, and nurture about five small group leaders. Once a small group ministry has been launched, future small group leaders are those who receive on-the-job training as "apprentices" to current group leaders. For this project, a two-hour training was provided for group leaders, and I served as the coach to all group leaders during the experimental period. In the future we may develop coaches and apprentices, though they were not necessary for the limited duration of this project.

Finally, the small group literature all insists on the importance of the senior pastor as the champion of small group ministry. The senior pastor is the most visible bearer of congregation-wide values. The importance of the pastor for small group ministries may be due to the radical change such ministry means for most traditional congregations. "They will succeed only if the senior pastor stands in the middle of the movement to empower it, give it vision, and make it a key thrust as important as the worship service (and supportive of it)" (George 60). Though this project did not call for a radical overhaul

of the entire congregational life, it did require substantial change in the routines of

committee and choir members, so pastoral support was a relevant issue. This requirement

was easily met at Northwest Hills because the importation of small group dynamics into

choirs and committees was my project, and I regularly make statements in sermons and

newsletter articles about my personal participation in a small group.

Some of the small group and church health literature contains comments that are

directly suggestive of this project and some of its details. George writes, "The

organizational structure of most churches is loaded with groups, but the typical pastor

doesn't recognize them as such. In my opinion, the membership accomplishes almost all

its real work through cell-sized groups" (88). An appropriate setting is present for

developing close relationships but is too often not leveraged toward that end. He says, "If

a group focuses on doing and deciding and fails to blend in loving and learning, its

people's behavior will fall apart. They'll radiate everything but care" (93). Hestenes

concurs with George's evaluation:

> However, new small-group programs often overlook one important type of
> small group that is already present in most all congregations. This small
> group is called a committee. Unfortunately, committees are seldom seen as
> communities of caring people who build each other up as they accomplish
> significant work. (3-4)

Hestenes and George uncover the possibility of and need for developing rich small group

life without having to launch new groups but by transforming existing groups. Such

transformation was the goal of this project. Hestenes and Larry W. Osborne offer a

variety of practical suggestions (an initial retreat, meeting format, the use of sharing

questions and conversational prayer, etc.) that helped shape the design of the Community

Building Curriculum, including the one-day retreat, weekly discussion questions, and

sharing prayer concerns, in this project. Also helpful in developing the Community

Building Curriculum were several published collections of small group discussion

questions that aimed at facilitating personal disclosure (Coleman; Jones; Sheely). Some

discussion questions were drawn directly from these resources, while other questions

were inspired by them.

A Critique of the Small Group Movement

Myers insists the emphasis on small group ministries as the only way for

Christians to be in community is not warranted. His contention is based on his own

experience and that of others who have given extreme effort to developing and promoting

small groups but have met with very limited success in their congregations. Myers

concludes small groups should not receive the emphasis they do; congregations should

seek to provide numerous opportunities for involvement in groups of all sizes and shapes

and allow individuals to choose their own level of connection. All church participants

will find public spheres; most will seek out social belonging; fewer will move deeper to

personal belonging. Rarest of all is someone finding an intimate relationship in the

congregation. He challenges prevailing thoughts regarding small groups: "The secret is to

see *all* [original emphasis] connections as significant. We need to validate what people

themselves count as valid" (63). Following on his assertion Myers says, "In all four

spaces, community emerges. And in all four spaces, people hope to connect

spontaneously.... So often our small group models encourage *forced belonging* [original

emphasis]" (68). He suggests intimate connections are not necessarily the most important

to the life of the church or the individual: "Most join the group hoping for a significant

social [original emphasis] connection.... People are searching for those who will care for

them, but at an appropriate distance" (69). Church leaders should consider his question, "Do you trust people enough to allow them to belong in the space they choose?" (57). Myers' challenge to mainstream discussion of small group ministry give much to ponder.

While church participants are ultimately free to choose their level of involvement, and congregations can offer a variety of group sizes, Myers' contention that church leaders should take a hands-off approach to relationships and group involvements in the church is highly debatable. Given the generally poor relational health of western society, a laissez-faire approach may not be adequate. Church leaders must take seriously the sin nature and the human tendency for "image management," in which people reveal only the parts of themselves they think will be most acceptable to others. Everyone tends to cover up with a fig leaf. Some people spend every waking moment behind a fig leaf. The poor relational health of most people is the reason Myers and others experienced difficulty trying to involve large portions of their congregations in small groups. People are opting for the fig leaf. If church leaders do not invite and even challenge people to seek relationships of openness and vulnerability and intentionally create groups in which those relationships can be formed, the church will continue to be filled with shallow, superficial relationships, and the hunger for real connections will go unfulfilled.

Myers' suggested alternative to the typical small group ministry is to create environments in which people will naturally connect and to train people in the competencies needed for developing healthy relationships in each relational sphere (73-75). However, he does not spell out what this "environment" might look like. Many people leading small group ministries might think "creating environments" and "training in relational competencies" is exactly what they are doing. In the final analysis, the

shaping of the environment and training people in the necessary competencies is the most any church leader can do. Actual involvement in a small group is ultimately dependent on the choice of the individual.

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Positive Effects of Positive Relationships

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Increasingly, literature focusing on effectiveness in specialized areas of church life and ministry is identifying important keys for those specific ministry areas in the development of a sense of community in small groups. The early Church found the power of God working in and through them as they met in the temple courts and in households. The Wesleyan revival's power for life change was rooted in the group life of Wesley's classes. Today many writers are taking note of the positive effects of positive relationships in a variety of different ministry areas.

Evangelism

Willow Creek Church used to point to spiritual seekers' need for anonymity as they observed, listened, and thought their way toward faith. Willow now advocates the use of "seeker small groups" as a highly effective evangelism tool (Hybels and Hybels 191). In a small group seekers find warm relationships and a safe place to ask questions and express doubts. They find themselves loved toward faith. Though some seekers do not choose to participate in such a group, a very high conversion rate is reported among those who do participate.

Hunter, describing the ministry of St. Patrick, suggests the "Celtic way" of evangelism and discipling is one that can be adapted for use today. This Celtic way centered on the experience of close Christian community. "The apostolic band would probably welcome responsive people into their group fellowship to worship with them,

pray with them, minister to them, converse with them, and break bread together" (Celtic

Way 21-22). Hunter accurately describes most churches as doing evangelism the way it

was done in the mid-twentieth century, by importing an outside evangelist or by church

members individually venturing out to explain the gospel to the nonbeliever. This model

is a one-way monologue presenting information rather than a dialogue in a relationship.

The Celtic way of team ministry holds much greater promise in the twenty-first century

(120). In today's relationally starved world, evangelism will be most effective if it is

more relational and dialogic. The message of God's love can best be communicated in a

community reflecting that love. When nonbelievers feel as if they have been heard by

believers, they feel valued and respected and are then more ready to hear what believers

have to say.

The need for group life in effective evangelism is likely to become even greater in

the years ahead. Robert E. Webber quotes one of the "younger evangelicals:" "Our God

is a welcoming God. The only way our guests will know that God is a welcoming God is

if we are a welcoming community" (220). The younger generation is hungry for

relationships and finds meaning in belonging.

Discipleship

Similar emphasis on small groups can be found in specialized literature focusing

on discipleship (Watson; Henderson), the process of a Christ follower growing closer to

Christ and becoming more like him in character and lifestyle. McNeal writes, "I believe

in the power of community learning, particularly in helping us make behavioral

applications of what we have learned" (86). To address learning not simply as mastery of

particular content but of its application in life is to address discipleship, which best

occurs in the context of community. McNeal roots his conviction regarding discipleship in his broader conviction regarding the whole of the Christian life:

> Christianity was never intended to be a private affair. Community is something we find in the nature of God himself (the Trinity). God's designs for humanity include family, and he is building a family to enjoy for eternity. Part of spiritual formation is learning to be part of this family, including committing energy to other family members and sharing possessions, giving money to the cause, doing family chores. (82-83)

McNeal describes this learning community as necessarily marked by deep personal relationships. Such relationships are necessary for followers of Christ to be able to hold each other accountable, to lend support, and encourage one another. Breen and Kallestad prescribe the same dynamic for life change: "If a plan is to be effective, then we need at least one person to hold us accountable to it. Change doesn't happen in private. The repentance process that began internally becomes external through faith. We cannot skip accountability and still say we are disciples of Christ" (54-55).

In the past much literature on spiritual growth focused on solitary and individual spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, meditation, and journaling. While these disciplines will always be of great value, Christians have a growing appreciation for relationships of honesty and vulnerability between Christ followers. In these relationships the dynamics of "positive peer pressure" can be leveraged for real and lasting change in personal character and lifestyle. Webber suggests the desire for close relationships as a tool for personal growth will not be a passing fad but a growing trend, as it is highly valued by the younger generation: "The younger evangelical knows that community has the power not only to lead people into conversion, it also has the power to disciple and train new converts to be witnesses" (220).

Emotional Healing

Increasingly expressed in church-related literature is the recognition that emotional healing is best found in the context of community. Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step recovery groups have always based their work in relationships between those seeking recovery from their various addictions. Alcoholics Anonymous drew its twelve steps from the Christian faith, then neutralized the explicit faith aspect to "a higher power" in order to broaden its reach to non-Christians. In recent years Christian organizations have reclaimed these dynamics for Christian recovery ministries. One such reclamation is seen in Saddleback Church's highly successful Celebrate Recovery curriculum, designed for use with a significant small group component. Other recovery resources include recovery Bibles, complete with inserted paragraphs making explicit connections between Bible verses and the traditional recovery twelve steps, and suggestions for group discussion.

Larry Crabb finds the theological foundation for churches offering help in healing relationships in the human social nature being created in the image of the triune God (35). God is relational, so the human being is relational, created for relationships with each other and with God (55). For this reason, he says, human beings experience emotional problems because of a lack of "connectedness" and find emotional healing and wholeness not in good advice (psychological and otherwise) but only in the context of community (40). Crabb describes healing relational dynamics as reflecting Christ's way of relating to others:

> We can impact others by: letting people know we delight in them as Christ does; eagerly looking for the goodness in someone's heart and identifying the passions that are prompting loving, strong choices; exposing the darkness in someone's heart, their sin and pain, in order to engage them more convincingly with the Savior's kindness; it's the kindness of God that leads to repentance. (21)

Crabb describes and prescribes these relationships and how they bring emotional healing in great depth but does not develop a plan for building them into the life of the church. If such close relationships between believers have such healing potential, their development should not be left to chance. In the absence of a better plan, the intentional and systematic development of small groups should be considered.

Nurturing Leaders

Hybels brings a focus on the development of community to an area of ministry not usually known for such an emphasis. Writing on leadership, once widely considered a solitary function ("It's lonely at the top"), Hybels devotes an entire chapter to "Building a Kingdom Dream Team" of leaders, with his emphasis being on the team. He writes wistfully, "If only more leaders understood the distinction between 'just working with other people' and 'doing life deeply with one another as we serve together'" (Courageous Leadership 74). He makes the point that has been heard in the literature of other ministry areas that such relationships do not develop by accident or naturally because of proximity but must be developed by intentional design and effort. The development of community, he insists, is one of the most important roles of the leader. Hybels prescribes the regular use of community-enhancing discussion questions and exercises (87). Some of his examples were influential in the development of the Community Building Curriculum in this study.

McNeal agrees with Hybels: "Apostolic leaders prefer to work in teams. They plant churches in teams. They give leadership to existing churches in teams. They are not Lone Rangers" (126). While skill training relevant to ministry tasks is helpful to leaders and servants, the development of close relationships is more important. McNeal urges

pastors to bring a small group setting to the highest levels of congregational leadership. "This means that you turn your board into a small group learning community first. Secondarily, they have responsibility for board decisions" (138). McNeal is calling for a radically different way of thinking among church leaders, which will only be accomplished through leaders experiencing rich community over an extended period of time, to the extent that they pursue those relationships even when no "church work" is pressing for completion.

Recent literature on secular business leadership shows a growing recognition of the importance of healthy relationships and teamwork for effective organizations, good business, and job satisfaction. Research into job satisfaction, the most studied aspect of organizational life, usually includes some investigation into the role of relationships with supervisors and coworkers in job satisfaction (Spector, Job Satisfaction 8, 12). The research shows a positive correlation between good relationships and job satisfaction. This research has no parallel in church literature. The present work seeks to address this gap.

The specific shape of desirable work relationships appears to be changing, with the hierarchical top-down chain of command no longer working as well as it once did. Peter M. Senge writes about the importance of "team learning" in organizations. He points to relational factors such as what he calls "alignment," open and honest dialogue, "deep listening," dealing well with conflict, and developing trust. He contends that organizations marked by these qualities are more creative, more productive, and better able to take risks in order to achieve their goals (233-69). James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner describe many similar desirable qualities for effective organizations including the

relational dynamics of collaboration, the development of cooperative goals, reciprocity,

trust, vulnerability, and careful listening (152-68). William A. Cohen indicates the four

primary building blocks for "a winning organization" as cohesion, teamwork, high

morale, and esprit de corps (121). While these authors indicate numerous institutional

policy strategies for developing these qualities in a business environment, they omit the

most logical strategy of all: intentionally building close personal relationships. This

omission might be excused as they write largely from the perspective of military

command or business structure, and a focus on interpersonal relationships is contrary to

the standard operating procedure of their realms. In the church, however, personal

relationships are essential to all that the church is and does. All these authors may, on the

other hand, assume relationships happen naturally. Natural relationship development,

however, is not a good assumption in today's world, in which the increasing speed of life

leads to skimming over the surface of most relationships. Relationships take

intentionality, time, and effort.

Business consultant Lencioni pays greater attention to the importance of the

development of close relationships as the key to effective business functioning:

> Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the
> ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.
> The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of human beings,
> are inherently dysfunctional. (vii)

He then describes in a fable the foundational dysfunction as an absence of trust and the

antidote as vulnerability learned through developing personal relationships among team

members. When trust is developed in a team, team members can overcome the second

dysfunction, the fear of conflict. Because they trust each other's character and motives,

team members are able and willing to speak up when they have a difference of opinion.

The airing of such differences leads to more constructive discussions and better decision

making. "Two heads (or more) are better than one." Because they have dealt with their

differences, they can then avoid the third dysfunction, a lack of commitment to decisions

made by the team. They are more likely to own and act upon the team's decisions

because they actively participated in the shaping of those decisions. With such ownership

in place, the fourth dysfunction, avoidance of accountability, can be overcome.

Ownership means responsibility. The fifth dysfunction, inattention to results, falls as

accountable team members act on the team's decisions in pursuit of results. In short,

Lencioni suggests that developing closer relationships among team members lays the

foundation for better team functioning. Better team functioning can help shape a sense of

job satisfaction. Lencioni contends that while close relationships are an integral part of

what the church ought to be and therefore have inherent value, such relationships also

have practical value because they could benefit the functioning and productivity of the

church and other organizations, such as secular businesses.

Church Task Groups

Lencioni's description of the positive practical results of good relationships

among leaders can be assumed true in church task groups, such as choirs, and

committees. Several authors write in broad terms of the importance of those in positions

of leadership and hands-on ministry alike being involved in little communities. Hybels

devotes an entire chapter of his Courageous Leadership to the importance of not only

leaders but also servants not in leadership positions being involved in small groups. He

insists elsewhere that one of the keys for volunteer longevity is serving within the context

of community and says one of his own life goals is to "do the work God calls me to do *in*

community with people I love [emphasis mine]" (Hybels, <u>Volunteer Revolution</u> 122-23).

Nancy Beach describes the same thing with reference to volunteers serving in the

worship arts (88-101). Easum suggests the building of relationships empowers leadership

and decision making:

> In most churches the people who exercise power are those who take time
> to build up the relationships that result within small groups. They achieve
> credibility by relating to other people. The trust built up over the years in
> small-group relationships allows significant corporate decisions to be
> hammered out by a diverse congregation. (38)

Hestenes suggests a specific practical plan that could be particularly beneficial to the

efficient working of a task group:

> Generally, if you spend time sharing at the beginning of the meeting, the
> speeches later on will be more brief, and the time of the meeting will not
> be extended. In fact, a time of sharing shortens the meeting, because
> committee and board members often feel a need to register their presence
> or to make a speech. If they've had a chance to make a speech in a sharing
> time, they very often do not have to work out their need to be heard by
> making long speeches on agenda items later in the meeting. (29)

Easum, George, Hestenes, Hybels, and others suggest the building of relationships makes

task groups more effective and pleasant in completing their tasks. This correlation of

closer relationships and the perceived effectiveness of the group was a focus of the

project that was measured through the administration of questionnaires before and after

the employment of the Community Building Curriculum.

Hybels and Hybels make a strong call for those involved in doing hands-on

ministry to be involved in small group communities, not for any utilitarian purpose but

simply for the sake of community itself:

> In recent years I've decided that being in loving relationships is the best
> revenge I can have against the exceedingly difficult aspects of church life
> that will inevitably take big chunks out of my hide... The truth is that we
> ought to be as concerned with the *process* [original emphasis] of doing

> tasks in the church as we are with the tasks themselves. So nowadays before a person mows the grass, he sits down with a few other volunteers, and they spend time together in community, praying for each other, encouraging each other, and sharing each other's lives. Pretty soon they're deep friends. The mowing becomes secondary—which is the way it ought to be. (190)

The development of rich and satisfying relationships was a possible positive outcome of the project, valuable in and of itself, wholly apart from the feeling of job satisfaction and the actual effectiveness of the group, and was measured through the pretest and posttest surveys.

The Future

This emphasis on small groups appears to not be just the latest church growth/health fad. Webber suggests this emphasis is a trend that will only grow stronger as the upcoming generation rises to prominence in society and the church, "The younger evangelicals yearn to *belong to a community* [original emphasis]. They do not embrace the individualism birthed out of the Enlightenment and dominant in the twentieth century" (51). Webber identifies community as more important to "younger evangelicals" in their approach to almost every ministry of the church. Dan Kimball suggests the "emerging church" puts more emphasis on community in the way it goes about evangelism. Where the modern church sees evangelism as "an event that you invite people to," the emerging church sees it as "a process that occurs through relationship, trust, and example" (281). Likewise, the modern church sees discipleship as an individual experience, while the emerging church sees it as a communal experience (215). These and other writers insist the need for community will only become more conscious and pronounced, and the church must prepare itself to provide explicitly Christian community in some form, or the next generation will find its community elsewhere. To date, some

form of small group ministry is the only method being suggested and experimented with in the church. While critiques of small group ministries raise some valid questions, no replacement has been suggested.

Research Methodology

William Wiersma describes quasi-experimental research as "similar to experimental research in that one or more experimental variables are involved; however, instead of having participants randomly assigned to experimental treatments, 'naturally' assembled groups, such as classes, are used in the research" (14). True experimental research is very rare in the church and often not necessary to get the desired information. This project employed the quasi-experimental method, surveying people who were already involved in ministry task groups in the church. More specifically, it used what Wiersma calls the "pretest-posttest, nonequivalent control group design" (132-34). A simple study design would have the comparison group receive no intervention, and the treatment group receive the experimental treatment. This study design was a bit more complex but still fitting in the general model. The choirs were divided into control and treatment groups, with only the treatment group receiving any intervention. The committees, however, presented a different situation, because they did not naturally meet on a weekly basis. In order to provide both comparison and treatment groups with equal amounts of physical togetherness, both the comparison and treatment groups were required to meet for leader training every week. Nevertheless, only the treatment group received the treatment of participation in the Community Building Curriculum. All groups were surveyed before and after the treatment period.

Surveys and questionnaires are some of the most widely used research tools today (Wiersma 157). Wiersma and George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay provide similar outlines for the survey methodology followed in this project (Wiersma 164-83; Gallup and Lindsay 24-170). First, the survey problem was clearly defined. Then the survey was designed to address that specific problem. Each question was carefully crafted to gain information that was truly relevant to the survey problem. A sampling plan was developed to create a sample that was representative of the population. so survey results can be inferred to that population. Most surveys rely on multiple choice or closed-ended questions because they are easy to use, score, and code (Wiersma 170). A useful closed-ended format, which was employed in this project, is the Likert scale, which uses a number of points providing an ordinal scale of measurement (171). This study's questionnaire made use of a six-point Likert scale.

Once a questionnaire is designed, it should be tested with a small group to reveal misunderstandings, ambiguities, and needless items. Best response will be received if the survey takes less than thirty minutes to complete. This study made use of two existing questionnaires that have already been tested and refined in non-church settings. Slight alterations of vocabulary, in order to make questions specific to the church setting, were too insignificant to make such small group pretesting necessary.

The rest of the survey process included data collection methods, statistical and cross-tabulation analysis of the data, and a report of the findings. Gallup and Lindsay rightly insist the findings should then be explored for implications and included in future actions regarding church policy and practice. The report of results should not gather dust on a shelf but bring benefit to the church (170).

Bias must be carefully avoided in survey questions and sample selection, but the concern with bias does not mean the researcher must be without personal investment in the project. Gallup and Lindsay say, "We believe that the most profound purpose of modern scientific surveys is to try to shed light on the responses of humans to God and, in so doing, gain a sense of God's purposes for humankind" (17). The survey can be more than disinterested measuring. It can be a tool to help better serve God through the Church. At the same time, limitations to the survey tool must be recognized: (1) A survey only provides clear-cut answers if it is testing something very specific; surveys are more effective as problem identifiers; (2) survey results do not automatically dictate church policy; the church must ultimately be guided by earnestly seeking God's will; and, (3) surveys cannot guarantee success in future ministry efforts; many elements, both human and supernatural, may not be taken into account by a particular survey tool (19). Despite these limitations, the survey can be a vital tool in efforts to build healthy churches. They can eliminate many presumptions and much guesswork, providing the necessary information to understand conditions accurately at the time of the survey.

Conclusion

An increasing recognition of the importance of healthy relationships and group dynamics is reflected in many realms of literature. Writers addressing business and leadership, which were in the past very hierarchical and top-down, are now recognizing interpersonal alienation as a major obstacle to good business and are calling for the development of interpersonal trust and open and honest communication (e.g., Cohen; Kouzes and Posner; Lencioni). Though much of this literature is short on practical

suggestions, rarely recognizing the development of intimate friendships as the solution, at least it reflects a growing recognition of the problem.

Most contemporary church literature, whether general church health, specialized ministry, or small group literature, places a major emphasis on small group life as the best place for the development of intimate, spiritually based friendships. Relationship development is so important that it cannot be left to chance. The literature sounds a clarion call for intentionally structuring small group life to envelop the entire congregation. The literature shows a general consensus, with some variations, on more specific matters such as preferred group size, group-life formats, and maintenance structures of small group leaders, apprentices, and coaches. Small group curriculum is now a flourishing industry. Consistent mentions of the need for small group life among leaders and workers in the church emphasize the need to ensure leaders and workers are cared for and ministered to properly. Some specifics of how task groups carry out their group life have been described. Suggested positive side effects of people participating in these groups experiencing small group life include less conflict in task groups, greater productivity, and greater job satisfaction. The suggested positive side effects are supported by logic and numerous anecdotes. Little or no systematic study or actual experimentation in this area is available. This project addressed that gap.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A sense of loneliness marks Western society and the church, including participants in the church who are regularly involved in ministry task groups. In the midst of multitudes of people and constant interactions with them, many people go through life with few truly close friendships. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether using a six-week Community Building Curriculum including a one-day retreat, sharing questions, and prayer could generate feelings of closeness and friendship among ministry task group participants and evaluate whether that feeling of closeness promotes a greater sense of job satisfaction regarding the ministry task of the group.

Research Questions Operationalized

The nature of this study requires an evaluation of (1) the effectiveness of the researcher-developed Community Building Curriculum in creating a feeling of relational closeness and (2) the correlation between the feeling of closeness and the feeling of job satisfaction. The research questions that guide the study address these two areas of evaluation. The first and fourth questions focus on the correlation between feelings of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction. The second and third questions focus on the immediate effect of the curriculum.

Research Question #1

What are the current feelings of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction in ministry task group participants?

The answer to this question provides a baseline of subjective feelings in ministry task group participants before the introduction of the Community Building Curriculum.

The baseline makes possible the evaluation of how much, if any, change occurs in their feelings during the treatment period. The survey instrument provides a measure of purely subjective feelings of closeness, not an objective measure of their knowledge of facts about one another or observations of actual interpersonal interactions. The instrument also provides a measure of purely subjective feelings of ministry task satisfaction, not an objective measure of the actual performance of ministry task groups. While these more objective items could have been measured by different means, the subjective feelings were measured because affect may be more influential than objective facts in the willingness and morale of church volunteers.

Research Question #2

What is the impact of the researcher-designed curriculum on the ministry task group participants' feeling of relational closeness?

The project design was based on the hypothesis that the employment of a Community Building Curriculum can increase feelings of closeness in a relatively short period of time. The curriculum was designed to elicit personal information, convictions, and attitudes, starting at a relatively nonthreatening level and going gradually deeper. The goals of the curriculum are to facilitate self-disclosure, mutual knowledge, trust, and caring in the group setting. Merely spending more time together could increase feelings of closeness. In order to control for this possibility, committee comparison group participants were asked to participate together with the committee treatment group in weekly leader training but without employing the curriculum's sharing questions and prayer. All choir groups, both comparison and treatment, already met on a weekly basis, so no other meetings were required of them.

Research Question #3

What part of the curriculum has the greatest impact on the feeling of relational closeness?

The curriculum included an initial one-day retreat, sharing questions used at weekly meetings, and guidelines for sharing prayer concerns and praying for one another at those weekly meetings. While any of these parts hold the potential for increasing closeness, one component may be more influential than another. Evaluation of individual components could be useful information for a ministry task group running short on time but still desiring to nurture better relationships. Rather than employing the entire curriculum, they could choose the element(s) with the strongest effect. This question was answered by several items included in the posttest questionnaire. These questions employed a six-point Likert scale (no importance, very little importance, moderately weak importance, moderate importance, moderately strong importance, great importance). Respondents rated the influence of spending regular time together, participating in leader training together, using sharing questions to stimulate discussion, sharing prayer concerns and praying together, and the initial leaders' retreat in creating feelings of closeness among group members.

Research Question #4

Does an increased sense of relational closeness lead to an increased sense of ministry task satisfaction?

The survey results allowed for a pretest-posttest comparison of the two subjective feelings and the correlation of any changes that took place during the treatment period. Any measurable correlation suggests the possibility of causation.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included ministry task group participants at Northwest Hills United Methodist Church. This was a quasi-experimental study, not employing true random samples, because all participants chose their involvement in various ministry task groups (Wiersma 128). The sample was chosen from the total population by selecting all ministry task groups that meet at least once a month. Monthly meeting frequency was the only known difference between the total population and the sample. The study employed comparison and treatment groups in order to discern whether any observed changes were due to the mere passage of time or due to participation in the experimental treatment. The selection of which task groups would be treatment and which would be comparison was not random but intentional; therefore there is no true control group but a comparison group. Comparison and treatment group participants were selected to ensure the presence of committees in both the comparison and treatment groups and the presence of musical groups (usually called "choirs" in this study, though one group was a praise band) in both the comparison and treatment groups. Nonrandom selection was employed because of the possibility of relevant and significant differences in people choosing to serve in committees as opposed to people choosing to perform in choirs. This possible difference was examined through statistical analysis of the pre- and posttest responses. Nonrandom selection also allowed for the establishment of roughly equal numbers of participants in comparison and treatment groups.

The total number of respondents was forty-two, with twenty-one in the comparison group and twenty-one in the treatment group, and with twenty participants in musical groups and twenty-two participants in committees. The treatment groups had ten

music group resondents (handbell choir and praise band) and eleven committee members

(Board of Trustees and Pastor Parish Relations Committee). Comparison groups had ten

music group respondents (adult vocal choir) and eleven committee members (Building

Committee and Finance Committee).

Instrumentation

Ministry task satisfaction was measured through the use of selected and slightly

modified questions from the Job Satisfaction Survey developed by Paul E. Spector. The

JSS was developed for use in studying employee job satisfaction in the secular

workplace. Its thirty-six questions assess nine facets of job satisfaction and give a

composite score for overall satisfaction. All responses are on a six-point Likert scale: (1)

disagree very much, (2) disagree moderately, (3) disagree slightly, (4) agree slightly, (5)

agree moderately, (6) agree very much (Job Satisfaction, 47-51). Some items are scaled

in a positive and some in a negative direction to minimize a directional tendency in

individual responses. Scoring the responses requires reversing numerical values of all

items scaled negatively. Test-retest reliability of the JSS is reported as very high, the

various subscales ranging from .37 to .74 and the total scale scoring .71. Validity,

determined by comparing results from different scales taken by the same employees, is

good at .61 to .80 ("Measurement" 700-01).

The JSS includes four items addressing each of nine job satisfaction dimensions:

pay, promotions, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, working conditions,

coworkers, the nature of the work itself, and communication. Because the JSS was

developed for use with paid employees in the secular workplace and this study was with

unpaid volunteers in the church, questions related to pay, fringe benefits, and promotions

were deleted, and the vocabulary of other questions were slightly modified (e.g.,

"supervisor" becomes "group leader").

Relational closeness was measured by using elements of the Perceived

Relationship Quality Component Scale (Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas, "Measurement"

340-54; "Ideals, Perceptions, and Evaluations" 933-40). This scale contains twenty-one

items assessing seven relationship constructs: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust,

passion, love, and romance. The passion, love, and romance constructs were omitted

from this study as inappropriate for this setting, leaving a total of twelve items, three

addressing each of the remaining four relationship constructs of satisfaction,

commitment, intimacy, and trust. Sample items include, "How satisfied are you with your

relationship?" and "How much do you trust your partner?" For this study some of the

wording was slightly altered to fit the setting but not in ways that would affect answers

(e.g., "partner" becomes "group members"). The PRQC responses are on a seven-point

Likert scale: 1 = not at all, 2 = getting there, 3 = not as much as other people, 4 = not

sure, 5 = a little bit, 6 = a lot, 7 = extremely. For this study the "not sure" score was

omitted, leaving it as a six-point Likert scale, forcing respondents to choose either

positive or negative directions. The reliability coefficients of the scale are high, ranging

from .74 to .94 ("Measurement" 340-54).

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable in this study was the application or non-application of

the Community Building Curriculum, which includes the one-day retreat, weekly

sharing-questions, and instructions for praying for one another. The dependent variables,

those influenced by that application, were the subjective feelings of relational closeness with group members and job satisfaction relative to the ministry task of the group.

Intervening Variables

Possible intervening variables in this study include the choice of participation in a committee versus a choir, gender, age, number of years of participation in the congregation, number of years of participation in the ministry task group, and frequency of attendance in the group during the experiment. These variables have been controlled for by their placement in the pretest and posttest questionnaires. Other possible intervening variables could be prior relationships between participants and introverted or extroverted personalities, which could affect results of the experimental treatment.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was a longitudinal design with pretest and posttest surveys taken to discern changes in attitudes and feelings over the span of seven weeks. It fits the description of a panel study because the sample of ministry task-group participants remained constant. Each respondent marked their surveys (both pretest and posttest) with an individual code but not their name. The use of codes maintained a measure of anonymity and confidentiality but enabled the examination of attitudinal changes (or lack thereof) in individuals, as well as changes seen in composite scores of entire groups (Wiersma 162).

I distributed pretest survey questionnaires to all participants in the selected ministry task groups, both experimental and comparison, at a one-day retreat at the church. I solicited participation in the retreat by invitation letters and follow-up phone calls, with a free breakfast offered as incentive. The retreat participants completed their

questionnaires on site. I did not explain the study in great detail at this point to minimize a possible Hawthorne effect in responses. The Hawthorne effect is a tendency for subjects under study to change behaviors and/or attitudes simply because they are being studied (Franke and Kaul, 43) The only explanation given to participants in this study was that the study was an essential part of a doctoral dissertation, that it was an investigation of the relationships of leaders and workers in the church, and that could be of future benefit to this and other congregations. I collected the questionnaires upon completion. After completion of the questionnaires and breakfast, I told comparison group participants they would later have the opportunity to engage in the exercises the others would be employing, but not during the experimental phase of the study. I encouraged all participants not to talk with those in other groups about what they were experiencing in order to avoid possible contamination of results. I then dismissed the comparison group participants. (Their invitation letter made clear that they would be leaving early.) Experimental group participants stayed and participated in a day of community-building exercises. Those from both comparison and experimental groups who were unable to participate in the retreat received in the mail an identical questionnaire with a letter of explanation and a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope. These questionnaires were marked so the responses could be differentiated from those who attended the retreat.

At the end of the experimental period, I sent invitations to all participants to attend an evening dessert at the church, at which time they would complete a posttest survey and receive further explanation of the experiment. At the dessert I distributed posttest survey questionnaires to all participants, which they completed on site, and then handed in. Then, over the appreciation dessert, I explained the study in some detail. They

were asked not to discuss the study for two more weeks, to allow time for absentees to complete and return questionnaires by mail without their responses being skewed by any new information. Those unable to attend the meeting were mailed questionnaires with a letter of explanation and a self-addressed, return envelope.

Here is an abbreviated timeline of events:

Leaders' Retreat

Pretest survey

Release of comparison group

Relationship building exercises with treatment group

Selection and training of small group discussion leaders

Weekly meetings (6 weeks)

Treatment choirs employ discussion questions in rehearsals

All committee participants view leader training DVDs

Release of comparison committees

Discussion questions and prayer in treatment committees

Evening dessert

Posttest survey.

Data Analysis Procedures

Computer tabulation and analysis was carried out by a professional actuary/statistician. She employed descriptive statistics to present mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of pre- and posttest responses. She applied descriptive statistics to total numerical scores for ministry task satisfaction and relational closeness, as well as to selected individual items from the questionnaires. Correlation analysis determined the

relationship between overall job satisfaction and overall relational closeness scores, as well as selected items from each part of the questionnaire. T-tests determined the statistical significance of all differences in pre- and posttest scores under consideration.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The Church is called to be a community in ministry. The Church does not exist

simply to be in community, or to simply be in ministry, but to be a community in

ministry. Each Christ follower is to be in ministry, but not in isolation. Community and

ministry go hand in hand. The two dimensions of community and ministry do not happen

automatically or naturally but must be intentionally nurtured. Today's world presents

special challenges to the development of both community and ministry. The increasing

pace of life encourages people to settle for shallow relationships and creates difficulty in

their attempts carve out time to serve in volunteer ministry. If they could do ministry in a

community of close relationships, the effort might seem more worthwhile to them. Some

people get involved in committees, ministry teams, and choirs not because they have a

burning desire to accomplish the work of the group but because they are looking for

relationships. Anecdotal evidence suggests task group participants find greater

satisfaction in the work of the group when they experience rich relationships within the

group, but little actual research in this area exists. The purpose of this study was an

attempt to address that gap in research, investigating the relationship of feelings of

relational closeness and feelings of job/ministry satisfaction in task group participants in

Northwest Hills United Methodist Church.

Profile of Subjects

Because the focus of this research study was on group dynamics, whole ministry

task groups (rather than individual members) were assigned either to the treatment or

comparison groups. Surveys were distributed to seventy-six task group participants, all

adult members of Northwest Hills United Methodist Church. Forty-two task group

members completed and returned both the pre- and posttest surveys, for an overall

participation rate of 55.2 percent. Table 4.1 details task group membership and

participation rates.

Table 4.1. Membership and Participation Rates for Task Groups in the Study

	Total Membership	n	Response Rate
Comparison Groups			
Adult vocal choir	21	9	47.6
Finance	9	7	77.8
Building	6	4	66.7
Total	**36**	**20**	**55.5**
Treatment Groups			
Handbell choir	16	6	37.5
Praise band	6	5	66.7
Trustees	9	5	55.6
Parish-pastor relations	9	6	66.7
Total	**40**	**22**	**55.0**
Grand total	**76**	**42**	**55.2**

Twenty people were in the comparison group and twenty-two were in the

treatment group. Of these participants, half were male and half were female. Eleven men

were in the comparison group and ten were in the treatment group. Nine women were in

the comparison group and twelve were in the treatment group. The majority of

participants (83.3 percent) were between the ages of 35 and 60, with only 7.1 percent

being younger than 35 and 9.5 percent being older than 60.

Participants reported being actively involved in Northwest Hills for a mean of

10.2 years. The minimum involvement was 1.5 years, with 14 percent (6 of 42) of the

participants being actively involved in the church for two years or less. The maximum

involvement in the congregation was 24 years (the age of the church itself at the time of

this study), with 14 percent (6 of 42) being actively involved for twenty or more years.

On mean, the participants have been involved in their respective task groups for 4 1/2

years, ranging from less than one year to sixteen years.

Research Question #1 Analysis

The first question addressed by this research was, "What are the current feelings

of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction in ministry task group participants?"

Table 4.2 presents the relevant descriptive statistics (i.e., mean value and standard

deviation) for both the relational closeness and job satisfaction scores reported on the

pretest survey. Comparison and treatment groups scored similarly on both relational

closeness and ministry task satisfaction. The relational closeness difference between

comparison and treatment groups is negligible at .25. With a relational closeness

maximum possible score of 72, the treatment group mean score was 54.18 and the

comparison group mean score was 54.43. The maximum possible score for ministry task

satisfaction was 126. The treatment group mean score was 112.34, while the comparison

group mean score was 110.10. The ministry satisfaction difference between comparison

and treatment groups was 2.24, also not significant.

Table 4.2. Pretest Feelings of Relational Closeness and Job Satisfaction

	N	Relational Closeness		Job Satisfaction	
		M	SD	M	SD
Comparison	20	54.43	8.558	110.10	12.624
Treatment	22	54.18	8.889	112.34	9.120
Difference		.25		2.24	
p≤ .05*		.866		.547	

indicates statistical significance

Research Question #2 Analysis

The second question was, "What is the impact of the researcher-designed curriculum on the ministry task group participants' feeling of relational closeness?"

Analysis focused on the amount of change between pre- and posttest scores. The change variable was computed by subtracting a participant's pretest score from the posttest score. Therefore, large positive values of change would support the hypothesis that the curriculum had a positive impact, and large negative values of change would indicate a negative impact. Relational closeness change scores around the zero point (i.e., ranging between - 5 and + 5) are considered statistically insignificant, associated with normal variability rather than actual change. The ± 5 limits represent approximately 10 percent of the overall average value (i.e., 54.80). The results are displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Change in Relational Closeness

	N	Pretest Relational Closeness		Posttest Relational Closeness		Change
		M	SD	M	SD	
Comparison	20	54.43	8.558	56.61	8.152	+2.18
Treatment	22	54.18	8.889	57.63	58.64	+3.45
	ANOVA test $F_{(1, 36)}$ = 0.435; p = 0.5136					

Both the comparison and treatment groups reported higher relationship scores on the posttest (2.18 and 3.45, respectively). Participants reported an average increase of 7 percent (a maximum of four points) in relational closeness scores. While the treatment group score rose more than the comparison group score, the very small change values indicate that the curriculum did not have a statistically significant impact on feelings of relational closeness. An ANOVA test, comparing the different levels of change for comparison and treatment groups, produced a score of 0.5136, below the level of statistical significance.

Examination of the individual components of the relational closeness scores (satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and trust) did not reveal any significant variances among components or between comparison and treatment group scores on any particular component.

Research Question #3 Analysis

The third question was, "What part of the curriculum has the greatest impact on the feeling of relational closeness?"

The posttest survey asked participants to rate the various elements of the curriculum regarding their perceived importance in developing feelings of relational

closeness within the groups. All groups could respond to the importance of "spending regular time together." Only committee members (both treatment and comparison) could respond to "participating in the leader training together," as they were the only ones to participate in leader training. While musical groups already met on a weekly basis, committee members did not. As a way to have them in physical proximity with one another as frequently as choir members, committee members were invited to a weekly viewing of a DVD from the Willow Creek Leadership Summit. All treatment groups could respond to the remaining questions.

Table 4.4 presents the percentile of scores given by respondents. The highest rated element was sharing prayer concerns and praying together, while the lowest rated element was the initial leaders' retreat.

Table 4.4. Importance of Curriculum Elements in Promoting Feelings of Closeness

	N	Great	Moderately Strong	Moderately	Moderately Weak	Very Little	None
"Spending regular time together"							
Treatment	22	50	18.2	22.7	4.5	0.0	4.5
Comparison	20	15	45	25	5	0.0	10
"Participating in leader training together"							
Treatment Committee	11	36.4	45.5	18.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Comparison Committee	8	12.5	25.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	12.5
"Using sharing questions to stimulate discussions"							
Treatment	20	30.0	40.0	25.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
"Sharing prayer concerns and praying together"							
Treatment	20	55.0	20.0	15.0	5.0	5.0	0.0
"Initial leaders retreat"							
Treatment	13	23.1	46.1	23.1	7.7	0.0	0.0

Treatment and comparison groups are noticeably different in their evaluations of the two elements of their experience, which they both rated. The treatment groups ranked both "spending regular time together" and "participating in leader training together" significantly higher than the comparison groups. The respondent size was smaller for the question about leader training, as it could only be answered by committee members. However, the difference between treatment group and comparison group ratings of leader training is consistent with that seen in the larger respondent pool that rated "spending regular time together." The difference between comparison group and treatment group ratings of these two elements of their experience raises the possibility of a positive effect of the rest of the curriculum on the experience and perception of the treatment group participants in these other activities, which they shared with comparison group participants.

Research Question #4 Analysis

The fourth and final question was, "Does an increased sense of relational closeness lead to an increased sense of ministry task satisfaction?"

Table 4.5 presents the pretest, posttest, and change scores for job satisfaction. No significant difference between treatment and comparison group job satisfaction changes is revealed. Despite slightly increased (though statistically insignificant) posttest relational closeness scores, both treatment and comparison groups yielded slightly lower posttest scores than the pretest (decreases of -0.591 and -0.575, respectively). These decreases in job satisfaction were not statistically significant at the .05 level. There was no statistically significant difference between the comparison and treatment groups.

Table 4.5. Change in Job Satisfaction

		Pretest Job Satisfaction		Posttest Job Satisfaction		Change
	N	M	SD	M	SD	
Comparison	20	110.10	12.624	109.53	10.713	-0.575
Treatment	22	112.34	9.120	111.75	10.504	-0.591
			ANOVA test $F_{(1, 36)}$ = 0.000079; p = 0.9929			

Even if a significant increase in job satisfaction had been indicated by the data, the absence of an increase in relational closeness would not have allowed a positive answer to the fourth research question. In short, the data lends no support to the theory that increasing feelings of relational closeness leads to an increase in feelings of job satisfaction.

Analysis of the average change in the six job satisfaction subcategories yielded no helpful insights but only reflected trends of the composite scores. The treatment choirs and committees offered mixed score changes among the subcategories. The comparison choir scored decreases in all subcategories, while the comparison committee scored increases in all subcategories. The total comparison score reflected only a nominal change.

Summary of Significant Findings

The following list summarizes the findings of this research:

1. A very weak positive change in feelings of relational closeness was noted among those who participated in using the Community Building Curriculum; however, the change was statistically insignificant, as was the difference in change between

treatment and comparison groups. This provides no objective support for the thesis that employing the CBC over a short period of time results in feelings of relational closeness.

2. Of the various components of the treatment period experience, sharing prayer concerns and praying for one another received the highest rating for its impact on feelings of relational closeness. The second highest rating was given to spending regular time together. The lowest rating was given to the initial leaders' retreat.

3. Treatment group members, those who participated in using the full range of the curriculum, tended to perceive a more positive influence in other activities in creating feelings of closeness than members of the comparison group. Their more positive view indicates a possible positive effect from the use of the Community Building Curriculum.

4. The weak indications of a negative movement in feelings of job satisfaction were statistically insignificant. Even if the survey results indicated a significant positive trend in job satisfaction, the absence of a significant increase in relational closeness would not have allowed the suggestion of a correlation between feelings of relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This research project was born out of a local congregation's need for a greater sense of community. Situated in a busy, rapidly growing community, Northwest Hills United Methodist Church repeatedly experimented, struggled, and fell short in trying to help people develop meaningful relationships in small groups within the congregation. The difficulty in building relationships was most evident in trying to connect newcomers to the church. Extroverted and outgoing people generally found places for relationships, but quieter, more introverted people could drift in and out without ever being touched by another person. While acquaintances may have been many, true and deep friendships were few and far between. Further examination led to an awareness that many people who appeared to be well-incorporated in the life of the church, even people actively involved in ministry task groups, did not have close friendships within the congregation. While participants in these groups may have served side by side, in many cases they did not count each other as close friends. George, Hestenes, McNeal, and others suggest the relational potential such existing groups has been overlooked. The shallowness of relationships could diminish the effectiveness of their ministries. The lack of relationships certainly withheld from task group participants what could have been one of the greatest rewards of doing ministry together. It also indicates that the experience of these participants falls short of the New Testament portrait of the Church as a community in ministry.

This project sought to address the relational deficit among core church members involved in doing ministry, increasing their feelings of closeness, with the expectation that better relationships would cause a positive impact on their sense of job/ministry satisfaction. More specifically, this study sought to investigate whether the subjective feeling of relational closeness could be positively affected by employing a Community Building Curriculum over a relatively short period of time and whether an increased sense of relational closeness resulted in an increased sense of satisfaction with the ministry task in which they were engaged. The results of the study indicate the curriculum did not facilitate a statistically significant increase in feelings of relational closeness. The evidence regarding feelings of ministry task satisfaction is mixed and statistically insignificant, and the implications are not entirely clear.

Response Rate

The response rate of 52.5 percent was lower than anticipated and must be addressed. While 52 percent would be a good response rate for a survey of a more generalized population, this response is a low rate for such a setting as this one. The response rate was particularly puzzling as I have generally good relationships with the nonrespondents and expected their support and cooperation in this effort. Nonrespondents may not have been aware of the importance of a doctoral dissertation, because the vast majority of members of Northwest Hills, and specifically the nonrespondents, do not hold advanced degrees. Though the place of the dissertation project in the doctoral process was explained to them, the explanation was not sufficient to motivate participation.

The low response rate may also be a reflection of overly busy lives and a reluctance to complicate their lives further by being involved in any additional activities.

Filling out a survey could have appeared to be "just one more thing to do" and perhaps as an implied commitment to even more involvements that were not yet made explicit. In this regard, most committee members who did not complete the surveys also did not participate in the initial retreat, leader training, or small group discussions. Several nonrespondents did, in fact, comment in conversation that they were "too busy with other things." Indeed, as suggested by Frazee, fragmentation, busyness and fatigue appear to be major factors in the lack of community this study sought to address.

Building Relationships Over Time

After the treatment groups participated in a one-day retreat and six weekly meetings designed to deepen relationships the impact was minimal. The posttest survey results revealed that all groups saw a slight increase in their total relational closeness scores through the course of the treatment period, but the increases did not rise to the level of statistical significance. The score of the treatment group did increase a bit more than that of the comparison group, though the difference was not significant.

The lack of a statistically significant response to the Community Building Curriculum was disappointing. Scores of all groups increased very slightly, but nothing of statistical significance was revealed. After employing the CBC for seven weeks, treatment group participants did not indicate feeling significantly closer to one another. The difference in score increase between the treatment and comparison groups was not statistically significant. The only reason to think a trend was beginning was that the very small increases were consistent among all the individual treatment group participants and throughout all the various subcategories in the relational closeness scale. However, the statistics do not offer sufficient evidence to make any claims of a trend beginning.

While disappointing, the absence of evidentiary support for the hypothesis does not prohibit learning valuable lessons. Those lessons can be found in seeking possible explanations for the lack of change in relational closeness.

One category of possible reasons for the lack of increase in relational closeness has to do with the Community Building Curriculum itself. Perhaps the sharing questions did not dig deep enough, or perhaps they were not sequenced appropriately to elicit increasing trust, deeper sharing, and hence increased closeness. A reexamination of the sharing questions does not point to such a conclusion. The questions begin with relatively safe exercises, such as drawing a family crest and then describing the family by features present on the crest, and gradually move on to promote conversation around issues that are potentially more sensitive, spiritual, and emotional, such as significant childhood memories and the highs and lows of one's spiritual journey. Comments from participants offered in unsolicited conversation indicated these questions elicited sharing and information that was previously unknown between people who had been acquainted for some time. The curriculum did generate conversations marked by new information sharing. It did not, however, generate an increased sense of relational closeness.

Another issue related to the curriculum is that discussion questions alone cannot force anyone to share openly. A question can be resisted; the answers given can remain shallow and safe. An experienced, sensitive, and active discussion facilitator can sometimes draw people further into the discussion. A less gifted facilitator can fail to do so. The sensitivity with which other group members respond to sharing can greatly influence the depth of future sharing. Acceptance and confidentiality within the group provide a safe atmosphere for further sharing. If, on the other hand, someone responds

with an outward show of shock, disapproval, or disgust, participants will be inhibited from sharing sensitive information in the future. If confidences are betrayed, future sharing will be muted. Posttest conversations with participants do not provide evidence that any of these possibilities were an issue in the treatment period. Conversations and survey results provide no evidence, statistical or anecdotal, to indicate that resistance to the curriculum questions was an issue.

Individual interviews might have elicited qualitative data that the survey questionnaires were not able to uncover in a quantitative response. The questionnaires were established and distributed without regard to anecdotal evidence or intuitions. Interviews would have allowed follow-up questions to dig deeper. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data might have been optimal.

A possible hindrance to increasing relational closeness could be a lack of natural affinity among group members, an element Hunter and others mention as important in forming groups. If group members had nothing in common besides the desire to accomplish the group's task, they could be very different in other significant ways. The relatively high pretest relational closeness scores, however, argue against this possibility.

The relatively high pretest scores could also provide a different explanation for the lack of significant change in relational closeness. With both the comparison and treatment groups delivering a mean score just over 54 out of a possible maximum 72 points, the pretest relationships were apparently fairly positive. Making generally good relationships even better may prove to be a difficult challenge.

Another way of explaining the absence of a statistically significant change in feelings of relational closeness in response to employing the Community Building

Curriculum is the brevity of the treatment period. Human relationships are formed and shaped not in a moment, but gradually. The development of trust, vulnerability, and intimacy takes significant amounts of time. One person "tests" another by sharing certain information and observing what the other person does with that information. If it is received with openness, acceptance, and care, more and more sensitive information may be shared. Further "testing" and positive responses may lead to deeper relationships. Seven weeks of treatment may not be sufficient for relational closeness to be significantly affected.

In addition, the relationships of participants in the ministry task groups in this study had been shaped over varying spans of time prior to the treatment period of this project. Some participants had known each other for many years, while others had been acquainted for only one or two years; however, none of them entered into the treatment period with a blank relational slate. All participants had some level of established relationships within their ministry task groups. To establish a relationship takes a significant amount of time together. To change an existing relationship may require even more time, as past patterns, perceptions, and affections must be overcome before new patterns, perceptions, and affections can be shaped.

Some evidence supports this hypothesis, seen in the unique scores of the comparison choir, which was the adult vocal choir. While all other groups saw statistically insignificant increases in feelings of relational closeness, the adult choir saw almost no increase at all. The uniqueness of the choir is illustrated in Figure 5.1. Just prior to the treatment period, the worship minister was fired and a new one hired, which caused some consternation among members of the adult choir. Theirs was the only

musical group with which the old worship minister had experienced significant success

and bonding. The other music groups (handbells and praise band, both included in the

treatment group) had a less than satisfactory experience with him and so were not as

bothered by the staff change. This experience may have marked the responses of the

treatment (adult vocal) choir, with feelings of hurt and distress not being affected by only

seven weeks of employing the curriculum.
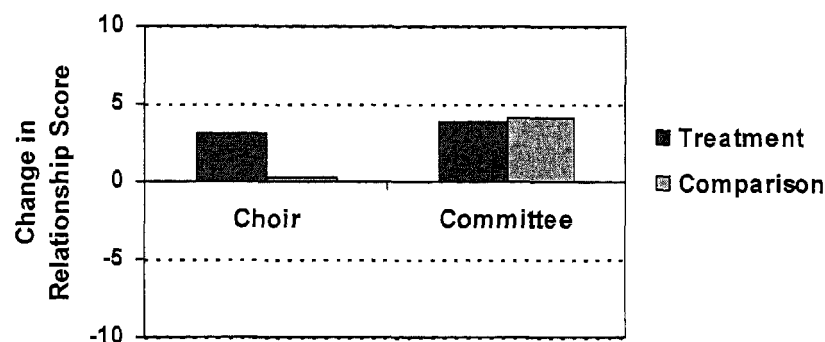
Figure 5.1. Change in feelings of relational closeness.

A seven-week treatment, marked only by weekly interactions, is not a significant

time period. To hope that relationships would be significantly influenced in such a short

period of time may be unrealistic. If the church is to seek the building of relationships, it

must commit to long-term efforts, not a "quick fix."

A final possible explanation for the lack of change in personal relationships is

suggested by Myers' description of four spaces of relational connections, particularly his

claim that personal space, the level of relationships measured in this study, is most often

occupied by only three to five people. Though the survey instrument did not elicit

information about preexisting relationships, my own knowledge of the participants would

suggest they were already at or near capacity in their personal space. If Myers' claim holds true, it would explain why participants reported a positive experience in their group discussions but did not register a significant increase in feelings of relational closeness.

The possible limits on the human capacity for personal space carries implications for the church. First, the most effective effort to create small groups will be with newcomers to the church who do not already have a network of personal relationships. Members with more tenure are more likely already relationally connected and less likely to have capacity for another relational group. Second, a more fruitful effort among task group members may be the development of greater trust rather than relational closeness. The development of greater trust will facilitate a more positive experience in their group life and more effectiveness in their ministry, as suggested by Easum, Kouzes and Posner, Lencioni, and Spector.

Given the results of the study, the very small positive change in relational closeness scores, though statistically insignificant, was spread through almost all treatment group participants. Perhaps these small changes will be enough to encourage someone to carry out a similar experiment over a much longer period of time to determine if the results would rise to the level of statistical significance.

Experiencing the Curriculum

Participant ratings of the various elements of the Community Building Curriculum indicated simply spending time together as the most significant building block for the development of relationships. Clearly physical proximity is necessary to the development of relationships; however, closer examination reveals the treatment group providing a significantly higher rating than the comparison group for spending time

together. The higher rating of spending time together was true of both committee and choir members. Using the Community Building Curriculum may have increased the perceived value of spending time together among treatment group participants. Increased mutual sharing of information drawn from employing the curriculum may have enriched the overall experience of time spent together.

The question regarding the impact of the weekly leader training applied only to committee members, as choir members did not participate in leader training. Therefore there was a smaller respondent pool for this rating. The treatment committee group scored the importance of the leader training in building their relationships significantly higher than the comparison committee group. The higher rating would, again, suggest that use of the CBC positively influenced their perception of the relational value of another activity, in this case leader training. There is a possibility that employing the CBC or other similar curricula might raise the perceived relational value of any number of other group activities. The curriculum itself might not receive a high rating but could generate positive perceptions of other shared experiences, suggesting that short-term use of a Community Building Curriculum may have real value for the life of a task group, even if it does not increase their sense of relational closeness in the short term.

The highest rated element of the Community Building Curriculum among committee participants was sharing prayer concerns and praying for each other, giving this element the most credit for deepening relationships. This result is not surprising, as shared prayer is an expected opportunity for vulnerability in most Christian gatherings, even if the stated purpose for gathering is to fulfill another task. Task groups pressed for time and unwilling or unable to make time for other community building exercises might

still be well served to take time at every meeting to share prayer concerns and pray together.

The initial one-day leaders' retreat received the lowest score of any CBC element. While such a retreat is recommended by Hestenes, Hybels, Osbourne, and others as a method of building relationships among task group participants, it apparently should not be viewed as a stand-alone tool for relationship building.

Interestingly, among the various elements of the Community Building Curriculum, the use of the weekly sharing questions scored relatively moderately, with only the initial leaders' retreat scoring lower. One might wonder whether the use of the sharing questions is actually less influential or if it was only perceived so, with its true influence in how it affected experiences and perceptions of other activities, such as simply spending regular time together and leader training, as previously noted.

Ministry Task Satisfaction

Given the lack of a statistically significant increase in ministry task satisfaction scores, the hypothesis of a correlation between relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction remains unsupported by the data. Even with a significant increase in ministry task satisfaction, the absence of an increase in relational closeness would have allowed no correlation between relational closeness and ministry task satisfaction. An increase in ministry task satisfaction would have to be explained in other ways, perhaps because of an increase in trust levels among participants.

If a significantly longer period than seven weeks is required to alter feelings of relational closeness, an even longer time would be necessary for those feelings of closeness to have a significant effect on feelings of ministry task satisfaction. Feelings of

relational closeness would be a primary result of employing the curriculum, while changed feelings of ministry task satisfaction would be a secondary result. Additional time would be required for the effect to trickle down from curriculum to closeness to ministry task satisfaction.

The time required for this trickle down does not mean, however, that no changes in feelings of ministry task satisfaction took place during the treatment period. The total Job Satisfaction Survey scores did remain level throughout the treatment period for both the comparison and treatment groups. Nevertheless, when examined according to different ministry tasks, the choir score actually decreased while the committee score increased. When broken down further, the comparison choir (adult vocal choir) score decreased substantially, while the treatment choir (handbells and praise band) score decreased only slightly. In fact, all but one member of the adult vocal choir produced a negative composite score trend on the JSS.

The uniqueness of the responses from the comparison choir (the adult vocal choir) leads to a discussion on a complicating factor of this study.

Committees Versus Choirs

The survey questionnaires included attention to the existence of both committees and choirs in the treatment and comparison groups. The distinction of committee versus choir was included in the questionnaires because of the possibility of inherent differences in the personalities and dynamics of those two ministry task groups. Differences could be due to the distinct tasks drawing different personalities to those groups, due to the musical groups meeting weekly for rehearsals while committees usually met only

monthly, the different ways in which they carried out their work, or a combination of these factors.

In fact, differences were detected between committee and choir responses in several aspects of the survey, as illustrated in Table 5.1. The feelings of relational closeness were measured by questions from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale. The total PRQC scores of comparison and treatment participants were statistically indistinguishable; however, the beginning total PRQC score of those participating in choirs was a bit higher than those participating in committees.

The feelings of job or ministry task satisfaction were measured by questions from the Job Satisfaction Survey. The total JSS scores of comparison and treatment groups were quite close at the beginning of the treatment period; nevertheless, the total JSS for committee participants was significantly lower than that of choir participants. An examination of the JSS subcategories reveals that all groups scored similarly on supervision, coworkers, and communications. The difference between committee and choir scores was found in contingent rewards, operating conditions, and nature of work, with choir scores higher in each instance.

Table 5.1. Pretest Feelings of Relational Closeness and Job Satisfaction

	N	Relational Closeness		Job Satisfaction	
		M	SD	M	SD
Comparison	20	54.43	8.558	110.10	12.624
Treatment	22	54.18	8.889	112.34	9.120
Choir	21	55.83	8.209	114.56	8.754
Committee	21	52.81	8.773	107.95	11.897
Comparison choir	10	56.25	10.449	115.00	9.522
Treatment choir	11	55.64	5.988	114.23	8.448
Comparison committee	10	52.60	6.168	105.20	13.871
Treatment committee	11	53.00	10.936	110.46	9.771

In summary, both the PRQC and JSS scores revealed no significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups at the beginning of the treatment period; however, noticeable (though slight) differences did show up between choir participants and committee participants in both their sense of relational closeness and their sense of ministry task satisfaction, with choir participants consistently scoring higher in both areas. This difference might be explained by a difference in personalities of those who choose to participate in each type of group, by their frequency of meeting, or by an interplay between these factors.

A Change in Staff

While none of the intervening variables accounted for in the questionnaires appeared to influence responses, a major change in church staff appeared to make a noticeable difference in the responses of participants in the comparison choir (the adult vocal choir). While the committees reported a larger, though statistically insignificant,

increase in relational closeness than did the choirs (3.95 and 1.74, respectively), this difference was largely due to the score of the comparison choir being virtually unchanged. The treatment choir, considered by itself, gave a score increase much closer to that of the committees (comparison and treatment combined).

Changes in ministry task satisfaction also show the comparison choir to be unique, as illustrated in Figure 5.2. Job satisfaction of both the choirs and the committees within the treatment group decreased slightly but by similar amounts (-0.864 and -0.318, respectively). The comparison committee surprisingly scored a slight increase. The comparison choir scored a greater decrease of than any other group (-7.80). While none of these changes rise to the level of statistical significance, the scores of the comparison choir are consistently unique.
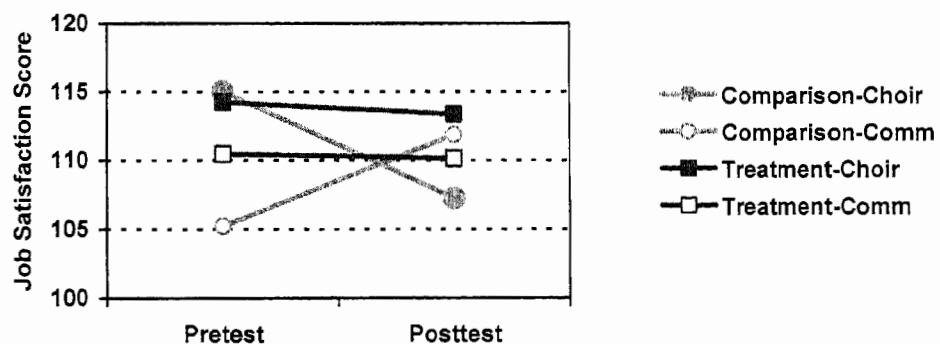
Figure 5.2. Change in job satisfaction for comparison, treatment, choir, and committee groups.

No intervening variable included in the questionnaires appears to explain this uniqueness. A difficult staff change prior to the treatment period is the most likely explanation. The worship minister (who led the praise band, directed the adult vocal

choir, and coordinated all musical groups) was fired for nonperformance shortly before

the treatment period. The children's and youth choirs had significantly declined in

numbers, a serious issue in a congregation with many young people. While the style of

music employed in the contemporary worship services was appropriate, his personal

leadership (prayers, comments, etc.) was not pleasing to many in the congregation. The

praise band continued to perform well primarily due to the talents and persistence of the

band members (in the treatment choir group). The handbell choir (in the treatment choir

group of this study) had little interaction with the worship minister and no sense of

personal relationship with him. The single area in which his performance was adequate

and in which he developed some positive relationships was the adult vocal choir, which

constituted the entire comparison choir group and half the entire comparison group in this

study. The termination of the worship minister may explain survey results that often show

the adult vocal choir (comparison choir) responding different from, and sometimes even

the opposite of, every other group. The only identifiable difference between the vocal

choir and the other groups was their closer relationship with the former worship minister

and distress over his being fired. However, this explanation is an indirect interpretation,

confirmed by some casual conversations with a few choir members but not something

directly tested by the survey instrument.

As a side note, in the months since the experiment was completed, the adult vocal

choir grew to love and appreciate the new worship minister and soon performed well in

worship under his direction. A later survey would almost certainly have elicited from

them very different responses. More positive responses from the adult vocal choir would

probably erase the already statistically insignificant distinction between treatment and comparison change scores.

The fact that the treatment music groups (praise band and handbell choir) did not see declining ministry task satisfaction may indicate a positive effect of employing the Community Building Curriculum in these groups, as they too had been affected by the staff change. Their constant rating of ministry satisfaction was probably because the previous worship minister's work with them had been less than stellar, and they were more content with the staff changes than were members of the adult vocal choir.

Implications of the Findings

This research project attempted to fill in a blank in existing knowledge regarding the correlation of the feeling of relational closeness with the feeling of job satisfaction among task group participants. Abundant social science research exists regarding relational closeness, and there is a separate body of research on job satisfaction. However, the bridge between the two areas is filled mostly with anecdotes and suggestions, a limited amount of experimental research in the field of business studies, but no known treatment research in the realm of the Church. This project did not find statistically significant indications that relationships can be positively affected in such a brief period of time through the employment of curriculum designed for this purpose. Therefore, the correlation of relational closeness to ministry task satisfaction remains a matter of conjecture. This project did not reveal persuasive evidence to support or disprove the thesis.

Limitations of the Study

This study was carried out in the specific setting of Northwest Hills United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. This congregation is set in suburban northwest San Antonio. Northwest Hills was located in a middle-class neighborhood, inhabited predominantly by young families with children. Most households are headed by dual income couples or single income single parents. Their children are most often involved in extracurricular activities such as sports and music. These families are very busy. The congregation is generally evangelical. Just over twenty years old, the church has experienced consistent growth in membership and attendance over the years. The findings of this study may or may not be valid for other congregations of similar character and in similar settings.

Contribution to Research and Methodology

This project strongly suggests that a longer-term study is necessary to arrive at a clear determination as to whether feelings of relational closeness can be significantly altered through the use of a discussion question curriculum. It also suggests a significantly longer time may be needed to detect a change in ministry task satisfaction or any other secondary or derivative feeling. A seven-week treatment period is insufficient for these purposes.

Recommendations for Further Study

Do not prematurely conclude a lack of connection between feelings of relational closeness and feelings of ministry task satisfaction. A common-sense connection exists between these two variables, and much anecdotal evidence exists to support the thesis. The connection is deserving of further study. A certain amount of time is necessary to

develop closer relationships and even more time for closer relationships to trickle down to a greater sense of ministry task satisfaction. A longer-term study could be structured around a pretest, employment of an extended Community Building Curriculum (perhaps twelve weeks), a midtest immediately after completing the curriculum, employing further sharing questions on a monthly rather than weekly basis, and a posttest at the end of six months. The midtest might reveal changes already taking place in feelings of relational closeness while the posttest would hopefully reveal a corresponding increase in feelings of ministry task satisfaction. Special attention could be given to the possibility of an increase in trust, as well as relational closeness. A larger sample size would lend more strength to any results obtained.

Employment of interviews in addition to survey questionnaires might provide optimal data for a fuller analysis. Interviews would provide an opportunity to probe more deeply in areas of special interest, to follow intuitions, and to pursue anecdotal evidence. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data could be a very good option.

Another worthwhile study might be an examination of the personality types of people choosing to participate in choirs and committees. Personality testing could include a tool to discern whether an individual is left-brain or right-brain dominant, task-oriented or people-oriented. With this information in hand, the researcher could investigate how different personality types respond to the CBC.

Personal Reflections

While this research project was born out of the struggle to develop meaningful relationships within Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, do not conclude that no such relationships are found in the church. Pockets of deep community exist here and

there throughout the congregation. A number of small groups meet for fellowship, prayer, and study.

I have experienced deeper relationships in this congregation than ever before in my life. A men's Emmaus reunion group has been invaluable in encouraging my spiritual life, holding me accountable for balancing my roles as pastor, husband, and father, and urging me on when I was tempted to take the easier route of quitting and walking away. The relationships among paid staff are rich, marked by cooperation, friendship, deep sharing, and praying for one another. Unsolicited comments about our life together such as, "I can't believe I get paid to do this," and "It's great that we get to do this together," are not uncommon. As the psalmist wrote, "How good and pleasant it is when we live together in unity" (Ps. 133:1).

APPENDIX A

PRETEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please read each statement below carefully, consider each statement in relation to the committee or choir in which you presently participate, and circle one number for each statement that comes closest to reflecting your opinion. Please do not indicate points between the available numbers, but select one number that most reflects your opinion.

	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
1. My group leader is competent in doing his/her job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition that I should receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I like the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Communications seem good within this group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. My group leader is unfair to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I do not feel the work I do is appreciated.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I find I have to work harder at the task because of the incompetence of the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I like doing the things I do in my group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. The goals of the group are not clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. My group leader shows too little interest in the feelings of group members.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I have too much to do at this task.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I enjoy my group's members.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I often feel like I do not know what is going on with the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I feel a sense of pride in doing my part in the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
18. I like my group leader.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. There is too much bickering and fighting in the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. My job in the group is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Work assignments are not fully explained.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Not at all	Getting there	Not as much as other people	A little bit	A lot	Extremely
22. How satisfied are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. How committed are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. How intimate are your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. How much do you trust group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. How content are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. How dedicated are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. How close are your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. How much can you count on group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. How happy are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. How devoted are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. How connected are you to group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. How dependable are the group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please provide the following personal information.

34. Gender (circle one)   M   F

35. Age (circle one)   25-29   30-34   35-49   50-54   55-59   60-64   65-69   70-older

36. I participate in a (circle the one for which you are responding in this questionnaire)

         choir   committee

37. How many years have you been actively involved in Northwest Hills? _____

38. How many years have you been actively involved in this task group? _____

39. In order to maintain anonymity we do not want you to provide your name. But in order to allow us to relate your responses on this questionnaire to those on other questionnaires, please create a personal code in the following manner. On the blank below neatly print (1) the month and date of your birth in numerical form (ex. May 21 would be 05/21), (2) your middle initial, (3) the number of brothers and sisters you have/had. So, for instance, Pastor David Trawick's birthday is May 21, his middle initial is D, and he has two siblings, so his code would be 05/21 D 2.

_____

Again, thank you for your participation in this project.

APPENDIX B

POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please read each statement below carefully, consider each statement in relation to the committee or choir in which you presently participate, and circle one number for each statement that comes closest to reflecting your opinion. Please do not indicate points between the available numbers, but select one number that most reflects your opinion.

	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
1. My group leader is competent in doing his/her job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition that I should receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I like the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Communications seem good within this group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. My group leader is unfair to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I do not feel the work I do is appreciated.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I find I have to work harder at the task because of the incompetence of the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I like doing the things I do in my group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. The goals of the group are not clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. My group leader shows too little interest in the feelings of group members.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I have too much to do at this task.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I enjoy my group's members.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I often feel like I do not know what is going on with the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I feel a sense of pride in doing my part in the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
18. I like my group leader.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. There is too much bickering and fighting in the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. My job in the group is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Work assignments are not fully explained.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Not at all	Getting there	Not as much as other people	A little bit	A lot	Extremely
22. How satisfied are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. How committed are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. How intimate are your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. How much do you trust group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. How content are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. How dedicated are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. How close are your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. How much can you count on group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. How happy are you with your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. How devoted are you to your relationships in the group?	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. How connected are you to group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. How dependable are the group members?	1	2	3	4	5	6

To the extent that you have grown closer to the members of your group in the last few weeks, indicate how important each of the following factors was in the development of those relationships. If you are in a musical group, do not respond to question 35. If your group did not participate in the sharing questions and sharing prayer concerns, do not respond to questions 36, 37, and 38, but skip to 39.

	No importance	Very little importance	Moderately weak importance	Moderate importance	Moderately strong importance	Great importance
34. Spending regular time together	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. Participating in leader training together	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. Using sharing questions to stimulate discussion	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. Sharing prayer concerns and praying together	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. The initial leaders' retreat	1	2	3	4	5	6

39. Did all the members of your group participate in the leader training and/or small group sharing they were invited to? (Circle one)

    Yes   No   Not applicable, I'm in the choir

If you answered "no" to 39, please answer 39a and 39b. If you answered "yes" or "not applicable," you may skip to question 40.

39a. The impact of nonparticipation of group member(s) on my feeling of relational closeness within my group was (Circle one)

    Strongly negative   Mildly negative   Neutral   Mildly positive   Strongly positive   Not applicable

39b. The impact of nonparticipation of group member(s) on my feeling of job satisfaction in my work in the group was (Circle one)

    Strongly negative   Mildly negative   Neutral   Mildly positive   Strongly positive   Not applicable

40. Did you attend the retreat? (Circle the appropriate answer)

    Yes   No

41. How many times in the last six weeks did you participate in the group's study and/or discussion? (Circle one. If you are not sure, make your best guess.)

    1   2   3   4   5   6   Not applicable, I'm in the choir.

Please provide the following personal information.

42. Gender (Circle one)   M   F

43. Age (Circle one)   15-24   25-29   30-34   35-49   50-54   55-59   60-64   65-69   70-older

44. I participate in a (Circle the one for which you are responding in this questionnaire)

       Choir   Committee

45. How many years have you been actively involved in Northwest Hills? _____

46. How many years have you been actively involved in this task group? _____

47. In order to maintain anonymity we do not want you to provide your name. But in order to allow us to relate your responses on this questionnaire to those on other questionnaires, please create a personal code in the following manner. On the blank below neatly print (1) the month and date of your birth in numerical form (ex. May 21 would be 05/21), (2) your middle initial, (3) the number of brothers and sisters you have/had. So, for instance, Pastor David Trawick's birthday is May 21, his middle initial is D, and he has two siblings, so his code would be 05/21 D 2.

_____

Again, thank you for your participation in this project.

APPENDIX C

RETREAT CURRICULUM

Open with a welcome, prayer of blessing the meal, and sharing breakfast. When breakfast is completed, distribute questionnaires to all participants. Briefly describe the Doctor of Ministry program, the place of the dissertation in the program, and place of the experiment in which they are participating. Full cooperation and participation is urged. Explain how anonymity will be maintained, so they can be completely honest. Collect questionnaires and release comparison group participants.

Lead brief worship, then teach on the importance and power of community in the individual life and the life of the church. This retreat and the larger dissertation project are designed to build relationships.

Lead a series of exercises that facilitate conversations that gradually move toward deeper sharing.

Break for lunch.

After lunch resume the exercises.

Wrap up the day by explaining they will continue to deepen their relationships by using sharing questions in weekly gatherings with their ministry team.

Close with prayer.

APPENDIX D

SMALL GROUP LEADERS' TRAINING CURRICULUM

Open with welcome and prayer. Remind them they are to lead others in conversations that will develop relationships, and so we begin the training by getting to know each other a little better. Follow with icebreaker questions.

Teach some basic concepts from small group literature, including optimal size, different types, and our goal in using them to build relationships. Describe the role of conversation facilitator as modeling appropriate transparency and care giving, drawing quiet people into conversation, and inhibiting those who might dominate conversation. Discuss particular strategies for these functions.

Teach and practice simple listening skills, including using and reading body language, eye contact, paraphrasing, perception check.

After a break, begin again with an icebreaker question.

Teach simple skills in dealing with difficult people – those who talk too much, those who do not talk, and those who may have emotional or other difficulties beyond the scope of a small group leader's responsibility. People with serious difficulties are to be referred to the pastor.

Review the sharing questions curriculum and how it is to be used in their ministry task groups. Give copies of the curriculum to all leaders for use in their groups.

Close with prayer.

APPENDIX E

SHARING QUESTIONS AND PRAYER CURRICULUM

A Note to Discussion Leaders:

The following exercises are to be used in order, one exercise at each meeting. Please use them in order, as each exercise goes a little deeper than the previous exercise. Encourage each individual member of the group to actively participate in the exercises. When someone answers a question, others may ask follow-up questions for more understanding. There are more questions than weeks in this experimental period. The extra questions are for you to use after the experimental period, if your group wants to continue the exercises.

Each meeting shall end with the sharing of personal prayer concerns and praying for one another. It is important that prayer concerns be shared briefly, for the sake of time. The object is not extensive story-telling, but specific and personal praying. Encourage members to pray in short, simple sentences. Model this type of praying yourself. You can use a variety of patterns for group prayer, so long as each pattern allows each individual the opportunity to pray aloud for someone else in the group. For example, each person can share their prayer concern, one after another. Then you can ask each one to pray in one sentence for the person to their right, and go around the circle, so everyone prays and everyone is prayed for. Allow them the freedom to pray aloud or silently. You could have one person share their prayer concern, invite everyone to lay a hand on them, and allow anyone who wants to pray aloud for that person. Then go on to the next person.

Sharing Questions

1) Family Crest 1
With crayons create a family crest to represent your family of origin. Divide it into as many parts as there are/were members of your immediate family. Represent each family member, including yourself, as an animal, plant or object. In a ribbon across the top write a short phrase to describe the family as a whole. Show and explain the crest to your group.

2) Family Crest 2
With crayons create a family crest to represent your present immediate family. Divide it into as many parts as there are members of your family. Represent each family member, including yourself, as an animal, plant or object. If you are live alone, simply draw a crest representing you. In a ribbon across the top write a phrase of six words or less to describe the family as a whole. Show and explain the crest to your group.

3) Church Shopping
Answer each of these questions:
What kind of church background did your parents give you as you were growing up?
     What did you like/dislike about it?
What denominations have you been a part of?
     What did you like/dislike about each one?
What was your best/worst experience in a church?
Describe your idea of the ideal church.

4) God Connection
Answer each of these questions:
People have different ways that they best connect with God. Which is your preferred way? (Possibilities include nature, prayer, Bible study, serving, worship, fellowship, and others.)
Describe a time in the last year when you felt closest to God.
Describe a time in the last week when you felt closest to God.

5) Warm Memories
Answer each of these questions:
When you were a kid, what was your favorite thing to do on a warm summer day?
Which of your parents was the warmest emotionally?
When did God become a "warm" person to you, and how did that happen?
     Or are you still hoping and searching for that?

6) Spiritual Journey 1
Graph the last year or so of your spiritual journey, indicating spiritual highs and lows.
Explain it to the group.

7) Spiritual Journey 2
Answer each of these questions:
During the last week, when were you disobedient to Christ?
When were you obedient?
When did you feel closest to Christ?

8) Epitaph
Draw your tombstone, and write on it what you would want it to say.
Share it with the group and explain why you want it to say that.
Is there anything that needs to happen in you to make that tombstone fit you better?

9) Things:
Answer each of these questions:
The thing I have had for the longest time is...
The thing that has the greatest sentimental value is...
The thing that reminds me of a fun time is...
The thing that means a lot to me because of the person who gave it to me is...

10) John Wesley's constant question was, "How is it with your soul?"
To answer his question, do one of these:
Choose a color and explain.
Choose a weather condition and explain.
Choose a number from 1 to 10 and explain.

11) Favorites:
Answer each of these questions:
What is your favorite TV program, movie, hobby, hero?
What is your favorite memory with your father/mother?
Do you carry a painful memory of your father/mother that needs prayer and healing?

12) Fire Drill
Answer each of these questions:
If your house was on fire and you could only get three items out (not including pets and people), what items would you choose and why?
If you had to narrow it to one item, what would it be and why?

13) Changes
Answer each of these questions:
If you could change one physical feature of your body, what would it be and why?
If you could change one event in your past, what would it be and why?
If you could change one aspect of your character or spirituality, what would it be and why?

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