

## ABSTRACT

### **THE RELATIONSHIP OF MISSIONAL OUTREACH TO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GROWTH IN THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN REGION, 1990-2005**

by

Carol D. Crawford

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach centers on United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005. Participants from United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches located in the Central Appalachian region completed a semi-structured, open-ended survey and interview with questions based on the above goal.

The findings demonstrated that specific factors operating within the missional outreach program ministries positively impact the growth of United Methodist churches located in close proximity. Strategies are suggested for future operations and relationships between the two forms of ministry.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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CHURCH GROWTH IN THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN REGION, 1990-2005

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF MISSIONAL OUTREACH TO UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH GROWTH IN THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN REGION, 1990-2005

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The Central Appalachian region has been the focus of missional outreach since the early pre-American revolution colonialization by European mainline denominations. West Virginia was the first area to be introduced to denominational religion and remains balanced in mainline presence much like the rest of the nation (Salstrom x). Eastern Kentucky, North Central Tennessee, and Southern West Virginia, located west of the Appalachian Mountains, were settled in the early 1800s and soon became the focus for mainline Protestant and evangelical missionaries (Poage iii). Methodism became one of these early colonizing forces of outreach in what Paul Salstrom refers to as the “newer Appalachia” (x). This latter portion of Central Appalachia, including Eastern Kentucky, North Central Tennessee, and Southern West Virginia, is the geographical focus of this paper.

Deborah McCauley, in her book, says, “Methodist churches were the most common churches brought into the small coal and mill towns founded by industrialists” (239). Along with the churches came Appalachian settlement schools and other outreach ministries in the first half of the twentieth century (Poage iv). To carry out the work of these numerous churches and missional outreach posts, countless missionaries have dedicated their lives and their financial means over the years to further the kingdom of God in this challenging geographic location of the eastern United States where poverty and harsh living conditions have consistently prevailed.

## **Problem**

Though the missional outreach centers have grown through the decades of operation in terms of programs, employees, participants (individuals served), and budgets, the United Methodist churches located geographically close to the centers have remained small in membership, often struggling to maintain existence. Relationships are established between the outreach centers and the United Methodist churches located in the ministry area of the centers. The dynamics of these relationships help define the growth experienced by both parties.

Employees and volunteers of United Methodist missional outreach centers in Central Appalachia come from varied backgrounds. In all centers are workers who are indigenous to the community and those who have been appointed and/or assigned by the mission board or wider connectional church system from outside the local community. Some of the workers are United Methodist with experience in missional outreach; some of the workers are just United Methodist with no prior missional outreach experience. Other workers are not United Methodist at all and may or may not have prior missional outreach experience.

The United Methodist pastors serving the churches located in the geographic ministry area of the missional outreach centers are also varied in background. Some are elders within the connectional church with a seminary education, and others are local pastors pursuing certification through the Appalachian Local Pastors School (ALPS) course of study. A few of the pastors are United Methodist missionaries appointed through the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

Many of the churches located close to the missional outreach centers were established simultaneously with the centers. They were able to share the same vision for ministry, leadership, founding, and funding over decades. In the 1970s the churches were separated from the outreach centers after the formation of the Red Bird Missionary Conference within the Kentucky Conference and the adoption of more stringent educational requirements for United Methodist pastors throughout the connectional system. Pastors were assigned to the churches by the bishops of the different conferences located in the Central Appalachian region with little or no consultation or interaction with the directors of the missional outreach centers. This practice remains current.

Dr. Bennett Poage, past executive director of the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center (AMERC) at Berea, Kentucky, has researched all predominant denominations and religious bodies in Central Appalachia from 1990 through 2000. Categories include the location of the churches, the size of their membership, the growth pattern during the decade, and their relative strength in relation to other theologically similar and dissimilar religious bodies (Leatherman 4). According to Poage's findings, the United Methodist Church consistently remains the top mainline denomination in all counties but two in Eastern Kentucky, in all nineteen Central Appalachian counties of Tennessee, in the seven Central Appalachian counties of Southwestern Virginia, and in the nine Central Appalachian counties of Southern West Virginia (14-17).

Poage's research is significant for United Methodists serving in ministry in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian Mountains. He has shown that

growth within the denomination is prevalent across all three states included in the study. Yet within the same geographic region, in the areas where United Methodist outreach centers are functioning, churches of the same denomination are struggling to stay alive.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005. In this study, church growth is more than an increase in the number of persons attending worship services and other weekly activities. Church growth is also indicated by the presence and influence of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity. As a missionary pastor currently serving in the Central Appalachian region, understanding the connection points between the two entities of churches and mission institutions is vital to my personal effective ministry now and in the future. This study strove to identify the specific factors operating within the missional outreach program ministries that directly relate in a positive or negative way to growth of United Methodist churches located in proximity to the centers. Once the factors were isolated, strategies were suggested for future operations and relationships between the two forms of ministry.

### **Research Questions**

To explore the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005, the instruments used provide data to answer three basic questions. Within the



context of church growth as transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity; the following questions are important.

**Research Question #1**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to the religious culture of the Central Appalachian region?

**Research Question #2**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to evangelism?

**Research Question #3**

What has been the impact of cooperative ministries between United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches located in close proximity?

**Definition of Terms**

The specific terminology used within the context of this dissertation is related to the work of missional outreach centers and church growth. The perspective utilized is detailed in the following explanations.

*Church growth* represents an increase in incidences of the following practices: transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity in the churches participating in the study (Hunter, To Spread the Power 112). The term church growth also includes the number of persons attending local church worship services, Sunday school, Bible study groups, youth fellowship gatherings, and mission project events on a weekly basis.

*Cooperative ministries* are sponsored jointly by the churches and missional outreach centers for the common purpose of furthering the kingdom of God in their local community. For the purposes of this study, cooperative ministries may also be separate ministries sponsored by either the churches or the outreach centers but are supported by a spirit of cooperation by the other entity such as by avoiding schedule conflicts with other events or programs that involve the same groups of people.

*Intentional evangelism* is a plan to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with a specific people group in a specific way. The targeted group may experience a feeling of security, belonging, and friendship with the messenger(s) as they develop an interest and desire for a relationship with Christ (Crandall 144).

*Missional outreach* refers to planned programs supported by various churches, various denominations, and/or groups of individuals that reach out to people in poverty situations in order to meet basic physical, spiritual, and/or emotional needs.

*Religious culture* is a combination of activities and beliefs practiced by individuals and groups of individuals in a community. These activities and beliefs include worship habits, personal Bible study, group Bible study, personal prayer time, group prayer time, fellowship/community-building activities with other Christians, and personal theology of mission and faith.

### **Context**

The context in which this research was conducted is within the Central Appalachian region of the United States west of the Appalachian mountains at ten United Methodist missional outreach centers and ten United Methodist churches located in close

proximity to the centers. The centers are located within counties of Tennessee, Eastern Kentucky, Southwestern Virginia, and Southern West Virginia.

*Central Appalachian region* refers to a geographic location in the eastern United States composed of eighty-four counties that comprise parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (Poage iii). The entire Appalachian Mountain region goes from as far north as New York and as far south as south Alabama and eastern Mississippi with a total of 404 counties (Grammich 1; see Figure 1.1).



**Source: Poage i.**

**Figure 1.1. Central Appalachia 1990-2000.**

## **Methodology**

This study was exploratory study in the descriptive mode. It identified the specific factors operating within the missional outreach program ministries that directly impact in a positive or negative way the growth of United Methodist churches located in proximity to the centers. Once the factors were isolated, I developed strategies for future operations and relationships between the two forms of ministry.

## **Population and Sample**

The population and sample encompassed ten executive directors from ten United Methodist missional outreach centers located in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains and ten outreach program managers from the same centers. Ten pastors of United Methodist churches in close proximity to the ten selected centers along with one layperson in a leadership position from each of the ten churches were also included as part of the sample. The total participant population numbered forty.

## **Variables**

Variables are not commonly utilized in studies focused on discovery and description because of the nonscientific nature of the process. For this specific study variables are included strictly to add metaphorical depth.

One variable of this study was church growth. The operational definition sets the guidelines for measurement to include the presence and influence of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity. Church growth also includes the number of persons attending local church worship services, Sunday school, Bible study groups, youth fellowship gatherings,

and mission project events on a weekly basis.

Other variables that may have affected the outcome of this study included generational poverty characteristics, environmental and developmental influences on cognitive functioning, and economic and educational limitations.

### **Instrumentation**

The study utilized a semi-structured, open-ended survey/interview with questions identifying positive and negative growth factors. The project introduced a survey/interview format administered to executive directors of United Methodist missional outreach centers across the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains and outreach program managers of the same centers. The survey/interview was also administered to United Methodist pastors and/or key church leaders of churches located within the ministry area of the participating missional outreach centers.

### **Data Collection**

A letter was sent by direct mail to each of ten executive directors of mission institutions, ten outreach program managers of the same mission institutions, ten pastors of churches located in closest proximity to the designated mission institutions, and ten laypersons identified in positions of leadership within the targeted churches (see Appendixes A and B). I followed up the letter with a telephone call in order to answer any questions and schedule an interview date with each participant involved.

On the dates scheduled, I arrived at the mission institutions and churches at the twenty different locations to conduct the interview protocol with the participants and take

field notes. A tape recorder to assured accuracy in the collection process. Ethical procedures were discussed with each of the participants explaining the necessity for disclosure permission and confidentiality rights. Each participant signed a letter of consent before the interview began (see Appendix C for a copy).

Data from the completed survey questionnaires, interviews, and field notes were categorized, recorded, and summarized for analysis.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

This study focused on United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches in a geographic circumference that was convenient in terms of location for research-gathering purposes. The project was limited to the United Methodist denomination because of accessibility of information for literature review, data collection, and previous personal experience and knowledge. The results of the study are only generalizable to United Methodist churches and missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian region of the United States.

The results of this study have significant implications for the future relationships and ministries of missional outreach centers and churches in the high poverty and culturally sensitive regions of Appalachia and possibly rural areas of ministry such as in the Alaskan Missionary Conference and Oklahoma Missionary Conferences of the United Methodist Church. Other denominations with missional outreach centers in Appalachia or in a similar context may also be able to apply the research findings to their ministry setting.

### **Biblical/Theological Foundation**

Thousands of years before Star Wars ever graced the screens of the modern-day movie theater; the followers of Yahweh were hearing the words of the prophet Isaiah describing a temple scene far more magnificent and electrifying than any production house could ever conceive (Lucas 1). It was magnificent because it meant that a mere mortal had been given a vision of the throne room of the most high God. It was electrifying because the voice of the most high God was calling to his people to rise up and go in his name and make a difference in the lives of others in the world. Followers later referred to this journey of service as being in “mission.” For Christians, missional outreach is more than just a project done in some needy place for someone too poor to do for themselves. Missions is a call to a way of life that involves following Christ and leading others to that same knowledge and relationship that they might share in the joy that comes as children of faith living and serving in the kingdom of God together.

From its formation Methodism’s theological tradition views itself as part of a greater Christian tradition and community that extends through the ages. John Wesley’s primary interest is that people come to know Jesus Christ in such a personal way that their lives are transformed and that they no longer focus only on themselves. Theology, for Wesley, is simply a *means* for understanding one’s faith in Jesus Christ and equipping one another for the transformational work of living in God’s kingdom. Centuries later, believers call this kingdom life of sharing one’s faith and service to others evangelism and missional outreach.

In Matthew 25:45 Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do

it to one of the least of these you did not do it to Me” (NASB). These are strong words as Christians look around today and see the vast scope of severe needs in the world. Sometimes the “least of these” are difficult to identify, and believers often fail to trust the Spirit of God to work within all hearts involved. One of the enduring characteristics of United Methodist theology has been the “universality of grace” put forth as a foundational belief from the beginning of Methodism (Collins, Scripture Way 93). The “universality of grace” involves the belief that the sovereign and holy God who created the heaven and the earth loved all of humankind so much that he made a way for them to be reconciled to him. In short, God’s grace and favor is extended to all people, drawing them back into fellowship with him after they have been separated by the sinful state into which humankind has been born since Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden.

The twenty-five Articles of Religion are among two doctrinal standards held in common by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), and United Methodist (UM) churches. The seventh and eighth Articles clearly state the belief that all of humankind is confronted with “original sin.” They also declare humankind’s great need of God’s grace:

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works, to faith and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will. (Olson 59)

God’s grace enables believers to move beyond a focus on self and recognize the need to serve others to the glory of God in the world.



This Scripture-based emphasis on prevenient grace moving on to justification, then forward to an assurance of salvation to sanctification, and then to final glorification drove the preaching and teaching of Wesley and fueled a mission movement and ministry to the world that has lasted until today (Collins, Scripture Way 15). United Methodist theology has often been accused through the ages of trying to sanctify all of society. This reformation characteristic of United Methodist theology has brought proponents face-to-face with the poor, the unfortunate, and those who are sick and dying. It has been an intricate part of what being a Methodist means since the title was first coined. Wesley's General Rules state that those who call themselves Methodists will give forth their best effort to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit or help the sick and those in prison (Olson 71).

One of the great strengths of United Methodist theology is the emphasis it places on social responsibility as it relates to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If one reads and understands the United Methodist doctrines of standards and strives to be obedient to what following Jesus Christ means, that person will be involved in social issues. Thousands of people in the world are crying out for a divine touch. The triune God sent his only Son to reach out and minister to those whom Jesus called "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45). In John 20:21 Jesus instructs his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Social responsibility comes with following a Savior who lifts up the broken hearted and suffering of the world. Every true and faithful Christian should hear the call and answer, "Here am I, send me." In short, this theocentric (God-centered) spirit of service and pouring out of love to "the least of these" has stimulated growth and

renewal across the United Methodist Church.

God loves cultural diversity. Romans 10:12-13 says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him: for ‘whoever will call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.’” Christ died on the cross to redeem all people, not just people of a particular race or culture. God does not limit his church and its ministry to those who are only of “white” European descent and/or of a higher socioeconomic level. Acts 2 exemplifies how the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on people who spoke many different languages. Revelation 7:9 describes “a great multitude, which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” God created a world full of diverse people and cultures and income levels, and his church should expect to reflect this diversity as believers strive to build relationships with one another and with the God who desires to unite all followers together in his love and for his glory and honor.

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach centers to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian Mountains from 1990-2005. A researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol was conducted with forty participants. The participants included ten executive directors of mission institutions in Central Appalachia along with ten outreach supervisors from the same mission institutions. Ten pastors and ten lay leaders from churches located in close proximity to the targeted mission institutions were also included

as participants. The research questions focused the survey data on topics related to religious culture of the participants and the local community, evangelism practices of the churches and outreach centers, and cooperative ministries between the churches and the outreach centers. Specific factors operating with the missional outreach program ministries that directly relate to the growth of United Methodist churches were isolated and analyzed for significance. Strategies for change and improvement were identified.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE**

This study explored the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian Region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005. The literature review focused on four foundational elements that serve to bridge the gap between missional outreach and church growth. A theology of mission and Wesley's theology of Christian faith form two key connecting components. Church growth is examined through the lens of transformational leadership, evangelism emphases, discipleship practices, and community building. The review is concluded with an examination of cultural sensitivity in the Christian ministry setting.

#### **A Theology of Mission**

A theology of mission goes far beyond the volunteer programs and work projects so popular across the nation and world at present. It leads people to see that what is central to mission is to proclaim and demonstrate that God is calling everyone to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster describe this "godbearing life" as the point where the triune God sent his only son to earth, crossing every boundary known to humankind, life and death, divine and human, and space and time. Jesus was sent by his heavenly Father on a mission of reconciliation that would bridge the gap once and for all between the most holy God and sinful humankind. The early Church recognized the mission of Christ for what it was—an act of love in the very fullest sense of the word (32). Those first believers responded by selling all of their possessions and ministering to one another as any had need (Acts 2:44). Today this type of selfless

behavior of individuals, groups, and organizations is labeled “missional outreach.” These Christians answer the call to take on like a garment the love task of reconciliation initiated by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago.

In order to reach out and grow, a church must be clear about its theology of mission. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Those who follow Christ are called to lead others to that same knowledge and relationship that they might share in the joy that comes as children of faith. Craig Van Gelder describes the missionary nature of the church as “the great mission of God’s redemptive reign confronting the forces of evil” as it “stands at the crossroads between God and the world” (86). As believers join together and follow Christ, the witness they bear to the world around them draws others into the same right relationship with God where faith and forgiveness are experienced through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Van Gelder sees the key to the church’s effectiveness in mission to the world as being found with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (86). The Holy Spirit creates the community of faith as he guides believers into all truth and enables them to “bear witness” to the things “concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8-13). Individuals cannot come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior without the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way the church cannot confront the influences of evil in the world without being directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. A theology of mission is uniquely connected to the foundational Christian belief and experience of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had a message: “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). The book of Matthew puts a strong emphasis on the importance of learning to live and serve

in God's kingdom. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." Darrell L. Guder et al. describe the church as "a preview of life under the rule of God in the age to come, a forerunner of the new Jerusalem, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, a sign of the reign of God" (128). Following Guder et al.'s viewpoint, the way the church lives in community on earth makes a difference in how effective their Christian witness is to the non-Christian population among whom they serve in mission. Jesus called his followers "salt of the earth," "the light of the world," and "a city on a hill" (Matt. 5:13-14). Jesus goes on to remind his disciples, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (5:16). The distinctive community life of faith exemplified by those who claim to be Christians reveals the kingdom of God for the rest of the world in more effective ways than any sermon or Sunday school lesson could ever attempt to achieve. This truth runs consistent beyond small groups of believers by relating to Christian institutions living in community with one another sharing leadership and other responsibilities in close proximity. Their life and work in mission together can be a "visible city on a hill" or "hardly visible" at all in the darkness of the world (129). As a separate people raised up by God to see the world through his eyes, Christians need to embrace the mission of the church, which is to reach other individuals for salvation and incorporate them into the church body in order to make an impact on the world for the glory of Christ.

### **John Wesley's Theology of Christian Faith as It Relates to Missional Outreach**

Over the span of several centuries an immense amount of literature was produced

about the founder of Methodism, his theology, and his life's work. Wesley had a deep compassion for the souls of humankind; consequently, his preaching centered first on an individual's need for conversion from a sinful state to a belief in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In a similar vein, Wesley's emphasis on missional outreach directed itself first to the individual and then focused on the English nation, other nations, and finally humankind in general, "regardless of its structure, culture, or political and economic order" (Marquardt 119). German theologian Manfred Marquardt writes extensively on the social ethics of Wesley. Marquardt describes Wesley's aim as being first to guide persons to faith through God's prevenient grace followed by justification and sanctification. As individuals began to enjoy and experience a meaningful life, Wesley would then strive to encourage them to participate in some activity contributing to the transformation of society as a whole from within (119). Marquardt writes, "The ethical power thus awakened and preserved, and firmly founded in connection with Christ, overcame the fatalism of the predestinarians and Deists and enabled many to bring about social change in their vicinity" (120).

D. Michael Henderson analyzes Wesley's discipleship practices as they relate to his response to the social conditions existent at that time in history in England and the world. Henderson sees Wesley's method of confronting the problems of society to be a system focused primarily on individuals. Wesley was a faithful Tory in the political realm, and he opposed all types of revolution for any reason (136). He was completely against the American Revolution advocating peaceful and orderly change by negotiation and persuasion of the people known to promote unlawful or immoral practices. One

prime example of this type of response to social immorality is noted as Wesley confronted the difficult issue of widespread alcoholism in the eighteenth century. Instead of rising up against the sellers and manufacturers through rallies and protests, Wesley utilized group therapy techniques, led educational programs for sufferers, and devised rules within the Methodist groups themselves that discouraged the use of alcohol by any participants (137).

Wesley theologian Kenneth J. Collins describes Wesley's usage of the term "real Christian" (Real Christian 102). Collins notes that Wesley believed and taught that real Christians possess a "conscious assurance" through the perceptible witness of the Holy Spirit that they had been accepted by God (102). Douglas Strong adds that genuine faith for Wesley went a step further than a mere spiritual experience; it also included a life sanctified and dedicated to the daily service of God and others (71). Strong describes the real conversion experience of a prosperous slave owner by the name of Freeborn Garrettson. When God brought him under conviction and then gave him the assurance that his sins were forgiven, he still did not experience God's peace and liberation. As he prayed about his feelings, God let him know that he needed to do something more. He needed to let his oppressed slaves go free. As soon as he obeyed God and gave his slaves their freedom, he also felt free of bondage for the first time in his life. Garrettson went on to become an itinerant preacher and a leader in the spread of early American Methodism, sharing Wesley's lessons on "real Christianity" and antislavery to all who would listen (70). The point here is that spiritual conversions for those brought to faith through Wesley's teachings know that the journey has just begun. Compassion and freedom from



bondage for others follows fast on the heels as one moves toward a life of sanctification to God.

The Christian faith goes much deeper than just knowing the truth about Jesus Christ as Savior. Believers are transformed by that truth and, in turn, become a part of a transformed community. Faithful obedience to Christ leads to spiritual discipline and on to voluntary service for others. All these are characteristics of a new kingdom community, the church (Callen 149). Nevertheless, for Wesley, the importance of Christian community moved beyond the point of individuals seeking to transform society. Christian communities were to demonstrate the kingdom way and thus both critique and transform society. Wesley formed all kinds of communities (classes, groups, conferences), but they all related to the main Christian community, the church.

Today in America, Wesley's theology of mission and the theology of mission set forth by the United Methodist Church sometimes appear to be fragmented. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states clearly the mission of the church. "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ" (Olson 87).

The Discipline then goes on to outline how the United Methodist Church members follow through with the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Disciples are made by preaching the gospel, leading people through the process of committing their hearts and lives to Christ, baptizing people, nurturing people in the faith through worship and other spiritual disciplines, and community building. All of these ways of making disciples were key to the ministry and preaching of Wesley including the last way put forth in the Discipline:

Disciples are made by sending persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as sacraments of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel. (88)

The fragmentation occurs when the United Methodist churches and mission institutions forget the stated mission of the church and try to invent a new way of being in the world, leaving out the Scripture and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This study stands in the gap of that brokenness and asks questions about who Methodists have been since their beginning and who they still need to be today in order to fulfill the mission of the Church. The polity (the organization and the relationship between the centers and the churches) is not contributing to the principles. So, the Discipline itself is witness to the problem being explored in this study.

### **Church Growth through the Lens of Transformational Leadership**

Jim Herrington is an executive director of an interdenominational, multicultural intercity mission. Mike Bonem is president and cofounder of a church-consulting and training firm, and James H. Furr is a church consultant and professor of sociology. Together these three write about church growth from the point of leadership. Church growth in the view of Herrington, Bonem, and Furr is largely dependent on the type of leader at the helm. Transformational leaders have a clear vision for the future and know how to inspire and empower others to follow their lead and be the best they can be in the process. These leaders encourage individuals to express their creativity and use their gifts fully. Transformational leaders are respected and trusted, even when discontinuous and sometimes radical change takes place under their watch (96). When mission institutions or church congregations do not have leaders who exhibit transformational qualities of

leadership, positive growth is difficult to achieve. The greater the change is needed, the more necessary the transformational support system on the leadership level.

Lyle E. Schaller refers to the same type of leadership as “visionary” as he describes what is needed for experiencing numerical congregational growth. Schaller believes a leader of the church body needs to have a divine vision for ministry. The vision is then shared in such a way that the rest of congregation can understand, translate by implementation of strategies, and support by mobilization of resources (44 Steps 61). Additional characteristics of a visionary leader as noted by Schaller include “pastoral competence, persuasive communication abilities, productive work habits, an emphasis on excellence, contagious enthusiasm, attention to detail, and, most important of all, a positive vision of what God has in mind for this congregation” (62). Without a clear vision of where the ministry is going and why it is heading in that particular direction, limited excitement and motivation for growth is desired or experienced throughout. Vision provides energy for moving forward in the ministry.

Stephen Macchia writes and speaks extensively on the topic of church growth and renewal. A transformational leader from his experience and perspective translates into another term for a servant leader. Macchia looks to Christ for the perfect example of servant leadership as he demonstrates the three essential components of such a leader: “humility, servanthood, and shepherding” skills (118). In Ephesians 4:11-13, the apostle Paul speaks of this same type of leader:

And He gave some as apostles and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son

of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the statue which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Effective transformational servant leadership is a God-given responsibility with multiple facets. It involves preparing believers for the work of service, building up believers, enabling believers to unite together in their common faith so they can become mature followers of Christ being formed in his own fullness and image (Macchia 119).

People would like to believe that transformational servant leadership is something anyone and everyone can achieve with a bit of extra effort. The evidence given from Scripture and case studies of growing churches and missional outreach ministries tells a much different story. Transformational servant leadership is directly related to a leader's personal relationship with Christ. When no relationship with Christ exists, no Christlikeness exists in the role of leadership.

### **Church Growth through the Lens of Intentional Evangelism**

In Acts 26:15-18, one of the first tasks Christ gave Paul to do was “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.” People who have no interest in God are spiritually blind according to Scripture. Rebecca Manley Pippert writes about this precise dilemma as Christians struggle for ways to proclaim the good news of Christ to nonbelievers. She says that the first step of intentional evangelism is piquing the curiosity of the seekers by “cultivating the soil” (140). Part of the cultivation process involves listening carefully to the questions being asked by the seeker and determining the issues of life that interest these individuals the most. A certain degree of discernment is necessary as the would-be evangelist endeavors to uncover the larger issue of truth beneath the questions. Pippert purports the key to be

the movement of the seekers from the questions relating to culture and life situations to questions about spirituality and God by utilizing the skills of investigation, stimulation, and relationship (142). As conversations occur between believers and seekers, common interests are discovered, and trust is developed and nurtured. Spiritual matters are deeply personal issues to most individuals. As trust gains a strong and sure foothold in the heart of the seeker, the evangelist has a better opportunity of speaking the truth so that it can be heard.

George G. Hunter, III is a professor of evangelism and church growth. Hunter writes extensively about a Celtic model of evangelism that demonstrates how most people come to the Christian faith through a gradual process rather than through one specific evangelistic event. This gradual process particularly involves helping people develop a sense of belonging to a group of believers. Hunter's research shows that "for most people belonging comes before believing" (Celtic Way 55). The small group movement today has, in part, captured this same concept as seekers are encouraged to be a part of a small group comprised of individuals with common interests, life experience, or goals. Those groups specifically focused on helping people toward a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ are often effective in the Celtic sense with a feeling of belonging coming months before the believing arrives.

Ron Crandall writes about the effectiveness of evangelism techniques implemented through the ties of true friendship. Crandall sees a true friend as one who cares about the well-being of the other through the good times of life as well as the difficult. As part of the evangelist's own personal close relationship with Jesus, part of

the caring for someone else is being free with information and testimony about life as a Christian. For this reason Crandall sees true friendship as being a ready opportunity to initiate spiritual conversations and, at some point, as guided by the Holy Spirit, offer Christ to seeker friends (144).

### **Church Growth through the Lens of Discipleship**

The gospel of Matthew tells that eleven disciples went to Galilee to a certain mountain to which Jesus had told them to go, and then they saw him, the risen Christ. At that point Jesus began to speak to them the words later referred to as the Great Commission:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20)

Win and Charles Arn refer to this command by Jesus as “The Master’s Plan” disciple-making strategy composed of nine key principles (57). These principles for effective discipleship can be summarized as follows:

1. Disciple making is an intentional response to the teachings of Jesus (57).
2. Disciple making focuses on existing natural networks of Christians (58).
3. Disciple making exemplifies sincere love and caring (59).
4. Disciple making is a task for the entire Christian body (62).
5. Disciple making is a team assignment (64).
6. Disciple making is divinely connected to the local church (66).
7. Disciple making recognizes particular needs and celebrates differences (70).

8. Disciple making integrates biblical insights and church growth research (74).

9. Disciple making is a natural continuing process of the life journey (75).

For many individual Christians, local churches, and outreach ministries, discipleship issues are viewed as somebody else's concern. Time constraints limit the scope of needs to be addressed. Taking the view of Arn and Arn, discipleship becomes more than another program concern; it becomes a lifestyle, a divine assignment with no option for refusal. It also becomes a highly effective way to build unity among the body.

Hunter addresses a problem that influences many of discipleship emphases in churches and outreach ministries across the lines of denominations. It is the problem of what he terms "nominal Christians" (To Spread the Power 162). Hunter describes how millions of Christians in the world join churches as members, are baptized, and may even attend worship from time to time, but their personal relationship with Jesus Christ is shallow and bears little or no fruit for the kingdom of God (163). When churches and outreach ministries are occupied by nominal Christians, the call for all members and workers to be actively involved in disciple-making practices is unheard. People who have not experienced the grace of God themselves are like those Wesley would label "sleepers." As babes in the faith, they will remain unable to show others how to grow until someone first disciples them and wakes them up so they understand how to be true followers of Christ (Wesley 80).

Henderson describes eight concepts that comprise Wesley's philosophy for educating new believers about the Christian life (128). These include the following:

1. Human beings can be made perfect by God's grace (129).

2. Believers learn by practicing the will of God in daily life (131).
3. Human beings grow spiritually by worshiping and learning together in groups (132).
4. The spirit and disciplines of the early Christians can be replicated (133).
5. Believers will grow spiritually if they participate in “the means of grace” (134).
6. The poor must hear the gospel proclaimed (135).
7. Social evils must be overcome with goodness (136).
8. Spiritual and educational leaders need to equip others to lead and minister (137).

From Henderson’s writings and research on Wesley, discipleship emerges as an intricate aspect of becoming a true believer and follower of Jesus Christ. In this view, as Christians join together for worship, study and practice Christian disciplines, along with caring for the needs and justice of the poor and needy, spiritual depth and growth is experienced by all through the grace of God. The new spiritual and educational leaders who are formed are an added bonus in the process.

### **Church Growth through the Lens of Community Building**

In this age of TV evangelism and narcissism, discussing church growth through the context of community building makes some circles of believers uncomfortable. Gordon Fee boldly steps into the conflict and discusses the biblical support for such a connection. Fee draws from the Old and New Testaments to explain how God continues to save a people for the sake of his name, though they are no longer saved solely on the basis of which nation they happen to be (64). Through the saving activity of Jesus Christ,



God is saving the church in full. The entry into the church is on the basis of individual faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as signified by baptism, but God is choosing a people and church as a whole for his name (65). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul uses multiple images to describe the community of faith indwelt by the Spirit of God. Fee expounds on the passages from Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians that utilize the images of “family, temple, and body” to refer to the church as a whole (68). The key point here is that living, working, relating, and worshiping in community is the biblical design for way the community of faith functions in the world. Fee explains that this design is fashioned after the triune God himself (71). When the church and its ministries fail to build up the community of faith, they are functioning contrary to the Scripture and God’s own design for his people. In contrast, the church and its ministries can move forward with assurance that they are in God’s will when they are striving to build up a unified community of faith through all the many activities of their ministries.

Schaller has written extensively on strategies that facilitate positive change within the context of church growth. Significantly all of the five strategies that Schaller describes in some way involve building up a community of faith. His five steps use terms such as “trust, relational, listening, talking to one another, asking questions, explaining, responding to concerns” (Strategies for Change 101). Schaller has determined that in order for a church to grow numerically and spiritually, it has to learn to function in a unified manner, with one another and around the vision that is cast for the ministry (112). As the church and outreach ministry centers learn to build up the community of faith,

growth will be experienced and effectiveness for the kingdom of God will be evident.

Hunter describes the benefits of community building in the small group setting that connects with the need to evangelize the unchurched of the world. He writes, “There are some things that people need that if they do not experience them in small groups—they do not experience them” (Church for the Unchurched 114). Hunter lists those things as “scripture study, sharing, prayer, accountability, support, and mutual empowerment” (114). Hunter then goes on to add that the community of faith joined together in worship and celebration also gives forth vision, strength, and hope that, in turn, results in reached people and changed lives, preparing the participants for outreach and witness to the seeking world around them (115). Though secular society today promotes the worldly benefits and safety of isolation and looking out for self first, Hunter’s view leads one to contemplate the spiritual benefits of building up and participating in the community of faith of Jesus Christ. The first may satisfy the flesh and body for a time; the latter will satisfy the soul for eternity.

### **Cultural Sensitivity in the Christian Ministry Setting**

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall was one of the first to coin the phrase “silent language” in reference to how the people of a given culture communicate nonverbally with one another (29). A. H. Mathias Zahniser describes this phenomena in more detail by explaining that it includes “body language, gestures, facial expressions, clothes, entertainment, humor, and the way persons use space and time” (18). Zahniser then goes on to describe the need for culturally relevant adjustments in the Christian ministry setting (19). Jesus Christ is taken as Zahniser’s model because he had to adapt when “the

Word became flesh” as noted by John 1:14 (25). As Christian workers look to the Holy Spirit for guidance, the Spirit of the resurrected Christ present on earth, and model their ministry after what they see him doing, culturally relevant ministry happens (Blackaby and King 9). Hunter suggests that a clear understanding of what kind of adjustments need to be made will only be identified as Christian ministry workers practice more effective communication skills (Radical Outreach 77). Craig Storti believes that to develop more effective communication skills, a worker must first understand the true meaning of the term “culture.” After extensive study Storti settled on the following definition for culture: “Culture is the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people which result in characteristic behaviors” (5).

Anthropologists Carol R. and Melvin Ember also note that culture is learned, is always changing, and is mostly integrated, in that the characteristics that exist as part of a given culture generally adjust to or connect in some way with one another (30).

When discussing the need to practice cultural sensitivity in the Christian ministry setting, the first impulse is often to overcompensate in the name of being sensitive. Charles Kraft reminds Christian workers that “culture refers to the structure, society refers to the people themselves” (386). Cultures need to be respected, just as Jesus himself came to earth and entered the Jewish culture in order to share the truth with them (386). At the same time, working from within the culture, honor and glory needs to be brought to Christ, patterning lives after him, modeling behaviors that are appropriate to faith in him in the midst of the given culture. The strength of the culture lies in the habits of the people, and those habits need to be aligned with the standards of Christ in the midst

of any culture (387).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural cognitive theory provided insight for this study. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes "developmental analysis, the role of language, and social relations" (Santrock 47). The basic claims of Vygotsky's theory include the following beliefs about cognitive functioning:

1. A specific cognitive function cannot be understood accurately in isolation but should be analyzed as one step in a continuing developmental process (47);
2. To understand cognitive functioning accurately an analysis is made of the factors that influence and shape it (47); and,
3. Cognitive skills are rooted in social relations and culture (47).

The interesting point about this theory is that in Vygotsky's view cognitive functioning is influenced by more than just what type of brain hardware an individual receives at birth. The environment including "objects, artifacts, tools, books, the communities in which people live, and the language they speak" (Santrock 48), all of these function cooperatively through interaction with others to advance knowledge in the individual. Vygotsky initially examined adolescents for his study, and he determined that formal education was only one cultural factor that impacted cognitive growth in his subjects. Parents, friends, the community, socialization opportunities, and other advantages or disadvantages in the immediate cultural environment also influenced cognitive functioning (115).

In the Central Appalachian context addressed by this study, the claims purported

by Vygotsky's theory lend perspective. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian Region from 1990-2005. United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches in Central Appalachia address basic needs related to poverty of body, mind, and soul throughout the region.

In terms of education, Central Appalachia, particularly Kentucky, lags further behind than any portion of the entire Appalachian mountain area. "In only a handful of Appalachian Kentucky counties do a majority of adults have a high school diploma" (Grammich 3).

Limited employment opportunities plague most counties of Central Appalachia with more than one in ten being registered as unemployed (Grammich 4). During the last decade the change in per capita income in Central Appalachian counties show that the "the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer" and only a small number of central counties earn as much as three-fourths of the national level (14).

*Generational poverty* is a phrase used by sociologists to refer to an economic phenomenon where generation after generation within a family unit continues to live in a state of poverty similar in context to the generation in the years preceding (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 69). An example would be adults who live in the same poverty situation as they lived in as children with their own parents and perhaps as their grandparents lived in before that generation. Generational poverty is predominant through the Central Appalachian region. Along with generational poverty comes a host of other cultural characteristics that influence all aspects of life. The following list is only a

sampling of these characteristics:

§ Background noise is a constant issue. If a family owns a TV or stereo, one or both are functioning almost constantly whether anyone is listening or watching or not. Everyone talks in a family at the same time (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 69).

§ Importance of personality becomes elevated. Because money is not something one has to share, the ability of a person to tell stories or jokes and entertain a crowd with humor is highly valued (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 69).

§ Importance of relationships is key to daily existence. Relationships are the only thing a person has to rely on for survival and people often have favorites (Payne, DeVol, Smith 69).

§ Significance of entertainment is evident. When people have few positive points in their life, self-entertainment becomes a major priority (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 69).

§ Oral-language tradition is prevalent. Talking in a familiar casual manner is expected and acceptable in all life situations (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 69).

§ Survival orientation is accepted as the norm. Academic subject matter is not valued or appreciated. All general discussion revolve around people and relationships. A job is generally about money, not career advantages, enjoyment, or a sense of responsibility (Payne, DeVol, Smith 69).

§ Identities are specific for men and women. Men are expected to be strong as lovers, fighters, and workers with physical endurance. Women are expected to “rescue” their men and care for their men and children (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70).

§ Importance of nonverbal communication becomes extreme. Touching is utilized to communicate along with spatial and other emotional forms of communication other than language (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70).

§ Ownership of people is considered to be the norm. People are viewed as possessions, and great fear and talk is generated when someone raises the subject of leaving the local community to gain an education or get a better job (Payne, DeVol, Smith 70).

§ Discipline is redefined. Punishment is not about change for the better. It is only about doing penance and being forgiven (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70).

§ Polarized thinking is common practice. Options are not valued or hardly ever considered. Everything is viewed one way or the other (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70).

§ Time is not an issue of concern. The future is not considered. Only the present matters, though it is always flexible and unmeasured (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70).

The children and the elderly suffer the most from the pervading poverty conditions that, in turn, result in some of the nation's highest levels of disabilities for children under the age of eighteen (Grammich 15). To complicate the situation, Appalachia has one-fourth fewer physicians available per population than the nation as a whole. In the counties of Central Appalachia, an average of more than 1,970 persons per physician currently prevails. "In 29 of the Appalachia counties there are more than 5,000 persons per physician" (24).

Family life in the region usually means with children for one in three households, and 21 percent live with a single parent, almost always the mother (Grammich 21). Birthrates and especially teen births are highest in eastern Kentucky. In the fifty-one counties of Central Appalachia, more than one-fourth of all births are to teen mothers (23).

Other environmental factors that influence life in Central Appalachia include access to transportation. Substantial numbers in the region do not have access to an automobile of their own (Grammich 19). Many homes do not have phone service (19). Though 74 percent of the region now has piped water, the remaining 25 percent relies on drilled well water, often contaminated by mining and logging in the area (17). Wood stoves are utilized by more than one-fourth as a primary source of heat for the household, and ten houses out of twenty-six in the central region lack complete plumbing facilities (18).

By viewing the above factual information through the framework of Vygotsky's theory, addressing basic needs related to poverty of body, mind, and soul in the Central Appalachian context takes on new dimensions. The environment includes limited education and employment opportunities, mental and physical disabilities, family obligations of single parents and teens, lack of ready transportation, lack of telephone service, inadequate bath and toilet facilities at home, and inadequate or poor water supply. All of these factors influence the way the people of the Central Appalachian region perceive, receive, benefit, and grow in body, mind, and soul through the ministries of the missional outreach centers and churches.



## **Research Methodology**

The research method utilized in this study was triangular in scope in that it entailed multiple methods of data collection (Carter and Nunan 118). The design included a semi-structured interview protocol, tape recordings, and field notes. A review of the literature and eighteen years of ministry experience in the highlighted geographic region provided meaningful background material for the variables studied including the relationships between sociological and psychological variables involved (Wiersma and Jurs 163).

Though the mailed questionnaire is commonly used for data collection, I administered the questions for this study through one-on-one interview protocol format. The questions for the interview protocol varied in length and complexity depending on the specificity of the topic being discussed (Wiersma and Jurs 165).

The data conclusions and results were formulated and synthesized by statistical analyses and qualitative description (Wiersma and Jurs 164).

## **Summary**

The discussion of literature selected for this review is organized around four foundational themes and one sociocultural cognitive theory. These four themes serve to form the connections necessary to fulfill the primary purpose of this study. The themes are as follows:

- § a theology of mission,
- § John Wesley's theology of Christian faith,
- § church growth, and

§ cultural sensitivity.

The theology of mission involves a call to a way of life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a lifestyle dependent on the empowerment and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This love relationship with the triune God translates into a life committed to faith and service, love and reconciliation, and peace and justice among all peoples and in every place God sends that all may come to know and enjoy the same eternal communion with the Most High God.

Wesley's theology of Christian faith as it relates to missional outreach focuses first on the individual's personal relationship with Jesus Christ as described in the first theme. Then it turns to a Christian's divinely given responsibility to work toward the transformation of society by confronting immorality and evil, caring for those who are suffering, and persuading any who will listen to be seekers after Christ. Compassion and freedom from bondage for all humankind are interlocking components of this theology as it forms a firm foundation upon which to stand.

Church growth is discussed in this study through the lens of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship, and community building.

Transformational leadership entails the ability to vision for the future, empower and motivate, gain respect and trust, utilize resources, and implement strategies. A transformational leader demonstrates servanthood with a humble and gracious spirit flowing from the heart of a true shepherd modeled after Christ himself.

For the purposes of this study, intentional evangelism is examined as a means to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people of all cultures. One characteristic of

intentional evangelism discussed is to use investigative questions related to an individual or group's culture and life situation to stimulate interest, build relationships, and gain trust so that the gospel can be heard. Patience and perseverance are needed to enable people to gain a sense of security and belonging often necessary before openness comes to deal with spiritual matters.

Discipleship connects to intentional evangelism in that it follows fast on the heels of an individual's initial decision to follow Christ. The need for discipleship is based on the command given by Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection and before he ascended into heaven. The literature review highlights the effectiveness of utilizing natural networks for discipleship purposes. The task of making disciples is not delegated only to a select few within the body of Christ but rather the responsibility lies with all who claim to be followers and believers, a true team effort is necessary. Discipleship is a divine assignment for all Christians that lasts a lifetime with no option for refusal. When new disciples are continually being added to the body, the church grows spiritually and numerically.

Community building occurs naturally when transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship emphases, and a theology of mission and faith are woven throughout. As the people of God take their relationship and eternal inheritance seriously, the community is built up in faith to the glory of God. Together the community lives, works, relates, worships, and follows a common vision for the future with Christ at the center of all that happens in life.

Cultural sensitivity is discussed in this study because of its inherent nature in

every life context. Wherever human beings exist, culture exists. If missional outreach centers and churches desire to be relevant in a given community, region, or nation, cultural sensitivity must evade every phase of the ministry process as an issue for consideration. Unless the “shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people” (Storti 5) are known and given respectful attention, effective communication of the gospel or any other message has little chance of being heard and appropriated.

Vygotsky’s theory provides a framework for understanding the sociocultural impact of environmental and developmental influences on cognitive functioning in the context of the Central Appalachian geographic region. This study describes the uniqueness of the Central Appalachian region in terms of its environmental, educational, economic, and social concerns. All of these influences are factors that need to be addressed as missional outreach centers and churches develop and plan for ministry in the region.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Central Appalachian region of the United States has been the focus of Methodist missional outreach centers and churches since the early 1800s (Poage iii). Though some of the earliest centers closed with the improvements of the road system and the expansion of the public school districts, some of the missional outreach centers and churches have continued to broaden their vision and grow with the times. The problem being addressed by this study centers around the relationship between the United Methodist missional outreach centers currently operating in the Central Appalachian region and the churches of the same denomination located in closest proximity to the centers. Though the United Methodist missional outreach centers have flourished and grown over the last few decades of ministry, the churches closest to them have declined.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005. This study strove to identify the specific facts operating within the missional outreach program ministries that directly relate in a positive or negative way to the growth of United Methodist churches located geographically within the ministry area of the centers. The factors were isolated by utilizing a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol. Strategies were suggested for future operations and relationships between the two forms of ministry based on the outcome of the research.

## **Research Questions**

The instruments used provided data to answer three primary research questions for this study.

### **Research Question #1**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to the religious culture of the Central Appalachian region?

A semi-structured interview protocol was constructed to measure six components of religious culture impacted by the ministry of missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian region. These components were worship habits, personal Bible study, group Bible study, personal prayer time, group prayer time, fellowship/community-building activities with other Christians, and personal theology of mission and faith.

### **Research Question #2**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to evangelism?

Church growth was measured by recording the presence and impact of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity among the participants in the study. The last measure of church growth is the number of persons attending the United Methodist churches located in closest proximity to the mission outreach centers. I gathered data on attendance to worship services, Sunday school, Bible studies, youth fellowship gatherings, and mission project events.

**Research Question #3**

What has been the impact of cooperative ministries between United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches located in close proximity?

The survey questionnaire measured the existence and impact of the following cooperative ministries: worship services, youth events, after-school children's activities, community service projects, and Bible study groups.

**Description of Project**

The project proposal involved administering a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol to ten executive directors from ten United Methodist missional outreach centers located in the Central Appalachian Region west of the Appalachian mountains and ten outreach program managers from each of the same centers. Ten pastors of United Methodist churches in close proximity to the ten selected centers along with one layperson in a leadership position from each of the ten churches were also included as subjects.

The interview protocol included questions related to theology of mission and faith, church growth as it relates to transformational leadership, evangelism emphases, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity. I administered the instrument in a face-to-face style interview. Responses were recorded by utilizing a note pad and tape recorder.

**Population and Sample**

The missional outreach centers selected for this study are located in the Central Appalachian areas of Eastern Kentucky, North Central Tennessee, and Southern West

Virginia. They include the following United Methodist mission institutions:

- Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Kentucky;
- Red Bird Mission in Beverly, Kentucky;
- Red Bird Medical Center in Beverly, Kentucky;
- The Bennett Center of London in London, Kentucky;
- Hillcrest-Bruce United Methodist Ministries in Ashland, Kentucky

(Dunlap-Berg 84);

- United Methodist Mountain Mission in Kentucky in Jackson, Kentucky

(84);

- The Wesley House Community Center in Knoxville, Tennessee;
- United Methodist Neighborhood Centers in Chattanooga, Tennessee;
- The Ebenezer Community Outreach Center in Huntington, West Virginia;

and,

- Scott's Run Settlement House in Osage, West Virginia.

The churches in the study included those that follow:

- Hope United Methodist Church in Frakes, Kentucky;
- Beverly United Methodist in Beverly, Kentucky;
- Jack's Creek United Methodist in Roark, Kentucky;
- London First United Methodist in London, Kentucky;
- Christ United Methodist Church in Ashland, Kentucky;
- First United Methodist Church of Jackson, Kentucky;
- Bethlehem Community Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee;



- Central United Methodist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee;
- Ebenezer United Methodist Church in Huntington, West Virginia; and,
- Cassville United Methodist Church in Cassville, West Virginia.

Of the ten missional outreach centers and churches selected, five are located in rural geographic settings and five are in urban communities. All of the mission institutions are under the authority of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, the official mission agency of the United Methodist denomination.

The Bennett Center of London became a mission agency of the Red Bird Missionary Conference in 2003. The Center is located on the former campus of Sue Bennett College in London, Kentucky, a Methodist college for over a hundred years. Ten community-based partners provide programs in the facilities of the Bennett Center. Volunteer teams come each summer to help with home repair in the community. Other family ministries provide specific support to the elderly and disabled. Additional information is available at <http://redbirdconference.org/bennett.htm>.

The Bethlehem Center was founded in 1920 near Polk and East 16th Street in Chattanooga. In 1921 the Beth moved to Phillips Temple CME Church. The Bethlehem Center facility in Alton Park opened in 1986 and was named in honor of the Rev. Sallie Crenshaw, a female, African-American, Methodist minister. In 1997, the Bethlehem Center hosted the first Sports Leadership Academy in the community. The next year, the Bethlehem Community Development Credit Union opened as a way to lay the foundation for future economic development in the Alton Park Community of Chattanooga. The

Web site for the Bethlehem Center is <<http://www.thebeth.org/www/doc/120/history>>.

According to the pastor and layperson of Ebenezer UMC, the Ebenezer Community Outreach Center was founded in the early 1990s in the basement of the church. In the beginning the Center was primarily a day care type of program for working adults in the low income housing project community located near the church building. When the basement became too small for the number of children attending each day, the church purchased a building across the street. Grants were written, and eventually, the West Virginia Conference made the move to make the Ebenezer Community Outreach Center of Huntington, West Virginia, an official mission agency. The Center now has a preschool, after-school programs, and many other support ministries for families and children.

Henderson Settlement was founded in 1925 by Rev. Hiram Frakes, a Methodist pastor serving in nearby Pineville, Kentucky. Frakes came to the Laurel Fork Valley in Southeastern Kentucky with a vision for transforming the community through educational, economic, and spiritual reform. Local families donated the land for a farm, school, and church. Today over sixty ministries are serving the community. Henderson Settlement is the only mission institution of the United Methodist Church in the United States with a full agricultural program. Additional current information about Henderson Settlement may be found at <<http://redbirdconference.org/henderson.htm>>.

Hillcrest Bruce United Methodist Ministries was founded in 1971 by a group of United Methodist Churches in the Ashland, Kentucky, area. According to the current director of the institution, the founding churches were overwhelmed by requests to help

with basic necessities like food and clothing. By joining together, the churches found they could better serve the poor of the community. In 1985 a new facility was completed, and the Hillcrest Bruce United Methodist Ministries officially became a United Methodist mission institution addressing the spiritual, physical, emotional, educational, and social needs of people in the Ashland, Kentucky, community.

Kentucky Mountain Mission in Jackson, Kentucky, was founded in 1943 to serve impoverished communities of southeast Kentucky. The mission receives donated clothing, furniture, appliances, toys, and other items. The merchandise is then sold at low prices to mountain residents. In a region known for high employment, the mission provides jobs for sixty-eight persons in the Jackson community. Additional information may be found at <<http://www.bedfordfirst.org/missions/ummm.html>>.

Red Bird Clinic was founded in 1922 by nurse Lydia Rice. In 1926, Dr. Harlan Heim came to work as the first medical doctor in the Red Bird Valley of Southeast Kentucky. Dr. Heim made house calls on horseback. In 1928, the first hospital was built. In 1986, the hospital was closed and the current primary care clinic and dental clinic opened to serve the community. Additional information is accessible at <<http://www.redbirdconference.org/RB%clinic.htm>>.

Red Bird Mission was founded in 1921 by two teachers and a United Evangelical pastor, John J. DeWall, moved into the Red Bird Valley and built a school and a dormitory. Because of the isolation of the area, educational and medical services were not available to the residents of the area. The school and medical care opened the door to an improved life for people many of the people in the area. Today Red Bird School still

operates with over two hundred students. Outreach programs meet many other basic needs. Additional information is available at

<<http://redbirdconference.org/RB%20mission.htm>>.

Scott's Run Settlement House, Inc. was founded in 1922 by the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. According to the current mission staff, Osage, West Virginia, was a poor mining community with inadequate health care and substandard educational opportunities. Scott's Run Settlement House was established to provide spiritual education, health services, and recreation for the children. Today it has a variety of ministries that touch people of all age groups in a community that still deals with daily poverty issues. Additional information is found at <[www.srsh.org](http://www.srsh.org)>.

The Wesley House Community Center, Inc., of Knoxville, Tennessee, has education as a main emphasis. Children in grades 1-5 come to after-school learning/tutoring programs at the center that help them overcome difficult life situations and teach spiritual and recreational disciplines. The current director did not share the history of the center, and no Web site was available as a resource.

### **Instrumentation**

Literature on qualitative research utilizes terminology somewhat different from the terms "validity, reliability, and objectivity" so often associated with standardized test instruments (Richards and Renandya 340). Instead, the terms "trustworthiness, credibility (truth-value), and auditability (consistency)" are commonly used (340). The basic concern here focuses on whether or not the instrument measures what it is intended to measure and whether or not the same results would be obtained if the assessment were

replicated (340). The qualitative assessment made in this study was ethnographic in scope in that it was designed to provide a description of specific process and phenomena within a specific cultural context (Wiersma and Jurs 488). The trustworthiness and credibility of the instrument was validated by the subjects actually participating in the survey questionnaire/interview (Richards and Renandya 340). Further reliability or credibility was ensured in this study by the following:

- Multiple questions were included in the researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol leading to the same outcome (Richards and Renandya 340).
- The criteria were clear and specific for assessing the responses gathered (Richards and Renandya 340).
- The responses in the study were recorded in a consistent manner (Richards and Renandya 340).
- Triangulation was utilized in the collection of the data and information (Richards and Renandya 341).

### **Variables**

This study has focused on discovery of the barriers to cooperation in mission between United Methodist churches and United Methodist outreach centers. The goal of this study was to describe the current situation and suggest ways to foster cooperation in mission.

As defined previously, church growth is measured by the presence and influence of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community

building, cultural sensitivity, and changes in attendance at church functions. These factors vary according to the degree of agreement and cooperation between the outreach center and the church.

The contextual variables also include generational poverty characteristics, environmental and developmental influences on cognitive functioning, and economic and educational limitations.

### **Data Collection**

A letter was sent by direct mail to each of the ten executive directors of mission institutions, each of the ten outreach program managers, each of the ten pastors of the United Methodist Churches located in closest proximity to the mission institutions, and each of the ten laypersons identified in positions of leadership within the targeted churches. See Appendixes A and B for a copy. I followed up the letter with a telephone call to answer any questions and schedule an interview date with each subject involved.

A participant consent form was duplicated in advance of the interviews. The form explained the title and purpose of the research project. It defined the type of study as a researcher designed semi-structured interview protocol and indicated the timeline for the study. Possible risks were identified as well as the benefits that could result from the gathered data. The form also provided contact information for future questions related to the study (Andrews 25; see Appendix C).

On the date designated by the subjects as most convenient for the encounter, I arrived on time at each location, explained participant rights and ethics, received a signed consent form, conducted the interview protocol, and completed field notes (see

Appendixes D and E). A tape recorder was utilized to ensure no information was misunderstood or lost.

Data from the completed interview protocols, tape recordings, and field notes were categorized and recorded on a computer. The information was then summarized and prepared for the analysis stage of the research.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interview protocols, tape recordings, and field notes was coded into categories that emerged as the information was analyzed. Specific themes were discovered. The information was retrieved according to the categories that related to each theme and set aside for further analysis. Factors identified as significant for future ministry application were isolated for consideration. Any patterns were matched and compared. A brief explanation was written for reference purposes.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Since the early 1800s Methodist missionaries have served the population of Central Appalachia striving to bring opportunities for better education, medical care, and spiritual growth throughout the region. Methodist churches were founded in the beginning as an essential component of missional outreach to the Appalachian communities. While the majority of the missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian region have expanded over the years, many of the Methodist Churches in closest proximity to the centers are in decline. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains from 1990-2005.

Within the context of church growth, three questions have guided this study: What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to the religious culture of the Central Appalachian region? What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to evangelism? What has been the impact of cooperative ministries between United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches located in close proximity?

#### **Profile of Subjects**

A semi-structured interview protocol was conducted with nine executive directors from ten United Methodist missional outreach centers located in the Central Appalachian region west of the Appalachian mountains and ten outreach program managers from the same centers. One executive director served two different missional outreach centers.



This provided nineteen interviews with one participant directing two outreach centers.

Ten pastors of United Methodist churches in close proximity to the ten selected centers along with ten laypersons in a leadership position from ten churches were also included as part of the study. One pastor also served as the executive director of one of the missional outreach centers. This work provided an additional nineteen interviews. The total participant population numbered thirty-eight. Thirty-one participants were members of a United Methodist church. Eighteen were members of the United Methodist churches participating in the study. Other denominations represented by the participants included Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Church of God, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic. Two executive directors and two outreach program managers at three different centers did not attend any church regularly according to their own admission.

### **Findings and Research Questions**

Three research questions helped focus the study around issues of religious culture, evangelism, and cooperative ministries.

#### **Research Question #1**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to the religious culture of the Central Appalachian region? I asked people about worship habits, personal Bible study practices, personal prayer time, group prayer time, fellowship/community building activities with other Christians, and personal theology of mission and faith. Participants provided responses regarding their perception of the religious culture of their community (see Table 4.1).

### **Articulation of Beliefs**

Around the world in the United Methodist connectional system, people often assume that the leaders of United Methodist mission institutions and the pastors and persons serving in lay leadership positions in United Methodist churches have a knowledge base of at least the basic United Methodist theological beliefs. To test that assumption, several of the questions in the interview protocol addressed this issue.

The study found that five out of the nine executive directors and eight out of ten outreach managers could share information about basic United Methodist beliefs and faith issues. Two of the executive directors and two of the outreach managers in the study could share no information about basic United Methodist beliefs. Thus six out of nineteen directors and managers could share either no information or only limited information about basic United Methodist beliefs. Seven executive directors and six outreach managers had no knowledge base about the other religious denominations represented by participants in their day to day program ministries. The responses indicating no knowledge base were simply “no,” “none,” and “no idea.” In three of the same mission institutions, severe communication problems exist between the centers and the United Methodist churches closest to them.

Some critics may argue that having a knowledge base about basic United Methodist beliefs does not matter as long as the institution fulfills the Great Commission and does what it was established to do in a given community. One aspect of the problem being explored in this study is whether or not this lack of knowledge of basic United Methodist beliefs is also a reflection of a lack of knowledge of basic Christian beliefs.

Three executive directors and seven outreach managers could share a personal theology of mission and about a personal faith experience. Five demonstrated a lack of knowledge of basic Christian beliefs. One additional executive director had only a limited knowledge of United Methodist beliefs and lacked the ability to talk about a personal faith experience. The same executive director did not attend any church regularly, except when speaking on behalf of the mission center. The United Methodist churches in four locations where the lack of knowledge about United Methodist beliefs were involved are in membership decline. The point to be made here is that church growth is difficult if disciples are not being made and the teachings of Jesus are not being taught by those directing influential Christian ministry in a given community. The responses below are examples of the difference between executive directors of United Methodist mission institutions who are free about sharing basic Christian beliefs and United Methodist beliefs in the mission institution and those who are not:

Our teachers of every Bible study group in the center are trained and encouraged to share the basic plan of salvation, then kids are encouraged to stay after class if they need to talk about faith issues one on one. [This refers to after-school programs for kids.] (Executive Director)

The children served by the mission institution are not supposed to talk about beliefs of any kind. (Executive Director)

All programs have a spiritual element. Questions about faith are answered freely. The mission has a prayer box available where participants ask for prayer for specific needs (Executive Director)

Our main goal is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ with different tools. It's not our business to tell people to go to the United Methodist churches. (Executive Director)

I have no idea what United Methodists believe "being saved" means. At our mission we say a blessing for the food before meals and sometimes

read a Bible story, but we can't talk about God or faith because we work with kids and get funds. (Executive Director)

According to the findings of this study, some directors and managers believe that leading people to faith in Christ and incorporating them into the Christian community are practices that are prohibited by federal law because the outreach centers receive federal money. This belief contributes to the barriers to cooperation between United Methodist churches and United Methodist outreach centers.

The deeper issue here is really whether theology matters. Clearly from this study the directors and managers who understand little of Methodism are not in a position to emphasize the Wesleyan distinctives (particularly a personal assurance of salvation, sanctification, and community building) and in no position to support the local United Methodist church.

**Table 4.1 Religious Culture Knowledge**

<b>Ability to Articulate Awareness of Christian Growth Activities</b>	<b>Director (N=9)</b>	<b>Executive Manager (N=10)</b>	<b>Outreach Pastor (N=10)</b>	<b>Layperson (N=10)</b>
<b>Worship habits</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Personal Bible study</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Group Bible study</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Personal prayer time</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Group prayer time</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Fellowship/community building</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Personal theology of mission &amp; faith</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Knowledge of United Methodist beliefs</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Knowledge of other denominational beliefs</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

**Research Question #2**

What has been the relationship of United Methodist missional outreach to evangelism? Within the context of church growth the evangelism responses focused on existence of and attendance at five weekly events and five components of evangelism. The five weekly events were worship services, Sunday school, Bible study groups, youth fellowship gathering, and mission project events (see Table 4.2).

The evangelism components also included presence and impact of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship practices, community building, and cultural sensitivity. Both the missional outreach centers and the churches answered from

the perspective of the ministry to which they were connected by employment or by membership in the case of the laypersons (see Table 4.3 for membership figures).

**Table 4.2 Church Growth Practices**

<b>Ability to Articulate Awareness of Weekly Activities</b>	<b>Executive Director (N=9)</b>	<b>Outreach Manager (N=10)</b>	<b>Pastor (N=10)</b>	<b>Layperson (N=10)</b>
Worship services	6	3	10	10
Sunday school	2	2	9	9
Bible Study groups	5	6	10	10
Youth fellowship	4	4	7	6
Mission project events	7	7	7	9

The information in Table 4.2 gives perspective about the state of evangelism in the ten mission institutions and the ten United Methodist churches participating in the study. The questions in the interview protocol were designed to find out if evangelistic opportunities were available to participants of programs at the mission institutions and in the churches.

In the case of the mission institutions, six out of nine executive directors described some type of worship service held in a mission facility as part of their program ministries. The interesting aspect of this information was that only three outreach managers of the ten mission institutions represented were aware of the worship services being held. For some of these mission institutions the worship services were held in conjunction with the volunteer work teams that come in and out during certain months of

the year. The worship services for work teams were primarily held on Sunday night and Friday night, times in which the outreach managers would not be present; however, in at least two cases, I observed that worship services labeled as “staff chapel” or “staff devotion time” were held monthly at the mission institutions. Though the outreach managers reported that they often attended, they did not refer to these worship events as “worship services” because they were not held in a church building, and they were not usually led by a pastor of their own denomination. Some executive directors shared that women sometimes were allowed to lead the worship services for staff and outreach managers of other denominations viewed that as an unacceptable practice.

In all of the worship service settings described by participants in the study, few opportunities for people to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior were noted. The positive instances were with the closing communion worship services with the volunteer work teams when the altar was opened for prayer by the groups. Some mission institutions did report that volunteers have prayed to receive Christ in those situations. Several mission institutions shared that the volunteer teams lead people to Christ on their work project sites. As the groups build relationships with the families they are serving, some of them are able to share Christ with nonbelievers. At one mission institution, nine teenagers accepted Christ through a group leading a vacation Bible school event for a week at their location.

Two of the laypersons interviewed were aware of mission project events sponsored by the churches when the pastors were unaware of them (see Table 4.2). In these two churches, the lay leadership in the churches was strong and operated with a

very independent spirit, according to the pastor. Both of the pastors in these churches had only been appointed to those locations for one year, and the laypersons reported a disconnection with the previous pastors. Thus, these laypersons were busy doing ministry with or without the blessing or involvement of the pastor. In the two mission events going on without the pastors, one offered opportunities for people to accept Christ and one did not.

### **Knowledge and Cross-Cultural Ministry**

Some questions were asked to reveal the extent of people's knowledge base about Christianity in general and Methodism in particular. If they have no knowledge base about a subject, limited information with others about that subject is shared. The staff of United Methodist missional outreach centers participating in this study, found it difficult to share information they did not have as part of their knowledge base. As described earlier, two executive directors (one United Methodist and one of another denomination) and two outreach program managers (not United Methodists) at three different centers did not attend any church regularly. One additional executive director of a fourth center attended a different denomination and had no knowledge base of United Methodist basic beliefs.

The United Methodist churches in the three locations where the participants were not United Methodist in background and/or did not attend church regularly were in decline. In addition, out of all three locations, only one staff person in one missional outreach center attended the United Methodist church in closest proximity to the center.



**Table 4.3 Membership\* and Principal Worship\*\* Attendance for Churches**

Church	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
1990	384	98	119 <sup>‡</sup>	30	708	152	40	234	92	373
	170	62	65	32	195	60	19	45	51	162
1991	398	99	116	20	689	152	38	232	117	372
	171	63	106	36	188	60	24	42	66	123
1992	359	112	110	15	686	152	36	232	112	372
	124	48	50	36	195	60	28	49	58	149
1993	328	106	106	28	668	140	36	232	110	354
	115	59	45	36	190	63	24	61	33	129
1994	316	103	99	28	652	140	36	236	74	359
	100	48	40	23	199	63	13	57	28	140
1995	314	45	98	30	589	141	15	223	75	350
	100	57	50	35	169	58	26	57	42	140
1996	309	55	84	31	552	141	15	147	77	355
	108	57	25	35	175	---	30	60	44	145
1997	303	58	152 <sup>‡</sup>	28	530	141	21	104	84	353
	95	60	95	35	190	---	32	55	39	119
1998	302	62	153	29	487	139	15	99	87	361
	90	63	60	35	191	58	25	50	45	118
1999	306	64	155	35	486	137	21	108	98	364
	90	58	97	37	187	57	20	55	58	121
2000	308	63	168	35	482	137	25	116	120	374
	94	59	108	35	195	68	27	60	58	121
2001	305	62	176	25	442	136	26	108	119	393
	76	59	129	34	157	68	28	62	54	135
2002	303	63	179	35	465	134	23	108	121	392
	79	53	134	40	165	74	28	51	44	132
2003	300	72	189 <sup>††</sup>	35	456	135	24	91	125	398
	63	48	160	39	150	60	31	41	42	136
2004	300	75	207	35	438	133	24	85	137	402
	51	47	145	39	146	60	23	45	42	145
2005	298	78	207	38	436	133	24	80	136	418
	63	44	155	45	146	60	24	45	54	160

\*Membership listed first in row; \*\*Principal Worship Attendance listed second in row

<sup>‡</sup>Statistics for closest UMC to mission outreach center

<sup>†</sup>Statistics include closest church and new church started at mission outreach center

<sup>††</sup>Statistics after closest church and mission outreach congregation merged

Sources: Arnold 441,F-1, S-1; Blinn 161,193; Bobrowski 101,105, 129, 145; Bowden T1-1, T1A-1, T1-5, 535; Crawford 150,172; Humphreys 601, 696; Kenaston 461, 469, 491, 509, 526; Lowther 381, 441, F-1, S-1; Scilley T1-1, T1-2, T1-13; Warden 180, 188, 196; Winegar 624, 655, 714, 735; Young T-1, T1A-1.

At three out of four of these missional outreach centers, thousands of clients participate in their multiple program ministries on an annual basis. In two of the locations, the United Methodist churches in closest proximity are directly across the street from the centers. In the third situation, the church was a five-minute drive from the outreach center. All four of these missional outreach centers mentioned the need for financial support and volunteer support from their local United Methodist churches as ways the churches in closest proximity could help them be more effective in their ministry.

The participants in the study were asked to share about cross-cultural ministry opportunities that they were addressing or not addressing in their local community. Two urban mission institutions described situations where Muslim children were participating in after school programs. The executive directors and the outreach manager could not share the differences between the Christian faith and the Muslim faith. Children did not have the opportunity to receive Christ at either of those two mission centers. By contrast, another center received children into their day care program from Africa, Asia, and Europe. The day care designed programs where all the children and staff learned about the countries represented by the cross-cultural families. Part of the curriculum was also learning about American holidays. When the staff shared about Christmas and Easter, they incorporated Jesus into the discussion. Some of the churches near the mission institution that was sharing about Jesus mentioned having people from other countries that attended their churches with their children. This contributed to a growth in worship attendance.

## Shared Vision

Related to the lack of knowledge base about United Methodist beliefs and the lack of support for United Methodist churches and missional outreach centers is the issue of a vision for ministry that is evangelistic in scope. Below are some of the vision statements of the missional outreach centers and the churches that are experiencing growth in mission and ministry:

§ “Our goal is to meet the needs of the poor and that gives us an open door to share our faith.”

§ “Our goal is to win souls for Christ, open doors to anybody and everybody, to serve communion to anybody and everybody.”

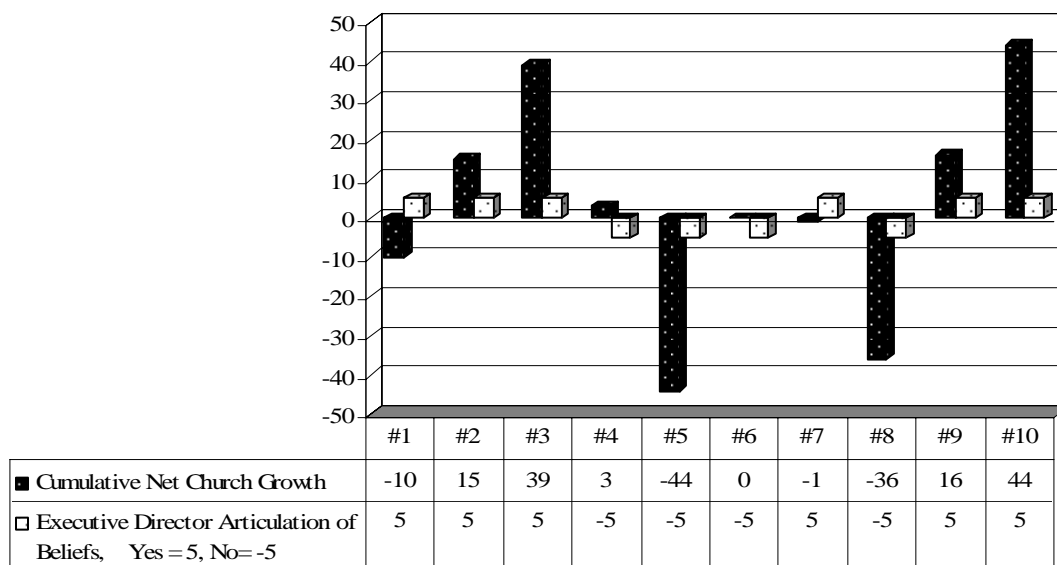
§ “Our goal is to develop really strong disciples for Christ, looking at people holistically, helping people encounter Christ and then grow in their faith.”

§ “Our goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ and the primary way we are doing this right now is to make disciples through community outreach.”

One of the missional outreach centers in the study has a vibrant and cooperative relationship with a United Methodist church in the community. The executive director shared about this combined issue of United Methodist beliefs and a vision for reaching people of all ethnic and economic backgrounds with the good news of Jesus Christ:

We are a United Methodist mission institution and we have as our goal to bring kids into a knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ and we make no apologies for what we are doing. When kids of other faiths come here they know up front what we are about. If they don't like it, they don't have to participate.

In this study, there was a tendency for the United Methodist churches to experience growth when the mission outreach center staff were aware of United Methodist beliefs, were actively involved in a local United Methodist church, and shared a vision with those United Methodist churches of reaching others in their community of all faiths with the gospel of Jesus Christ. (see Figure 4.1 and Table 4.4).



[Note: Church #9 has added 72 new members since 1994 when a portion of the church members withdrew to start a new congregation. The Executive Director response beside Church #2 and #9 is the same person.]

**Figure 4.1. Cumulative net growth in membership for years 2000-2005.**

### Transformational Leadership

*Transformational leadership* has long been one of the key indicators for leading to positive church growth. When leaders have a vision for ministry and know how to mobilize, motivate, and encourage the organizations they lead, growth happens as

demonstrated in this study. Transformational leadership of a church or organization provides followers with vision, creativity, motivation, encouragement, and opportunity to grow as individuals and as a team in body, mind, and soul (Herrington, Boem, and Furr 96). According to the responses of outreach managers and laypersons and observations noted in the interview session, five executive directors and six pastors in this study demonstrated transformational leadership as previously defined (see Table 4.4). These four executive directors exhibiting transformational leadership characteristics were team builders. They surrounded themselves with a talented staff and were not afraid to turn over responsibilities completely to these staff, offering only guidance and encouragement if difficulties were encountered. The churches in closest proximity to three of the mission institutions with transformational leaders were growing in mission and ministry, and the pastors of the churches also exhibited transformational characteristics. One of the pastors also served as one of the five transformational executive directors.

Another executive director of a mission institution was enthusiastic during the interview and stated a belief in a strong cooperative relationship between United Methodist mission institutions and United Methodist churches. The problem arose when the executive director revealed she had an agenda for ministry in the community separate from the actual stated ministry of the mission institution as shared by the outreach manager. Teamwork was not a defining characteristic of that mission institution. The church in the study connected to this mission institution was declining in membership, and the leaders had a communication breakdown with the leaders of the center. The pastor of the church did not exhibit the transformational characteristics as defined for this

study and was not optimistic about any type of cooperative ministry between the two entities in the future.

**Table 4.4 Transformational Leadership**

<b>Demonstrates Transformational Leadership Characteristics</b>	<b>Executive Director (N=9)</b>	<b>Outreach Pastor (N=10)</b>
Provides followers with vision	5	6
Creativity	5	6
Motivation	5	6
Encouragement	5	6
Opportunity to grow as individuals	5	6
Opportunity to grow as team	5	6

The findings in the study related to transformational leadership point to a relationship between the practice of team building at the mission centers and open communication lines with the churches as being crucial as to whether or not church growth occurs in the churches involved. If one of the elements is not present (team building or open communication lines), growth in the church is impacted in a negative direction.

### **Intentional Evangelism and Spiritual Growth**

As highlighted in Chapter 2, intentional evangelism and spiritual growth is a process where the skills of investigation, stimulation, and relationship building join hands

to lead a seeking individual to Christ (Pippert 142). The responses below illustrate this process at work in churches and missional outreach centers in Central Appalachia through the practice of Christian disciplines especially in worship, prayer, and Bible study:

We have a prayer team made up of all of our support churches. It is also common to have prayer chains among the participants of programs at the center. The people believe that prayer produces results. (Executive Director)

There is a ladies' Bible study at our center that is interactive. There is a Saturday afternoon Sunday school for the elementary kids called 'Stars' with a meal. It is a cooperative ministry between the center and six churches, three large and three small. (Executive Director)

The Bible is seen as the primary authority, God's revelation. People have a high view of Scripture. There have been some difficult years in the church's recent past. The result has been that some of the members have gone deeper in their Christian commitment. (Pastor)

[speaking about Christian daily living] It's not just a Sunday deal; we have sermons about how to grow deeper in our faith. On Sunday night the Bible study is open. People can talk if they want to. The pastor makes room for it. (Layperson)

United Methodists believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, all of it, and it is important to read it and study it. Prayer is the people's form of communication with God. It is important to cry out and communicate with God, to listen to him, speak to him in our minds and our spirit. We need to communicate with him, thanking him, worshiping him, giving him adoration, praise, confession, thanks, and intercession. (Executive Director/Pastor)

[speaking about different beliefs] Different denominational beliefs have not become an issue for the mission or the church. We put our emphasis on prayer and Bible study. (Executive Director)

In this study when an emphasis is placed on the Christian disciplines, opportunities to share Christ happen in normal ministry settings and spiritual growth occurs in and

through all entities involved. Below are several examples of how missional outreach managers respond to opportunities to do intentional evangelism:

I take every opportunity to try to be available to talk to people about their faith and pray with them if they ask for prayer. The husband of one couple attending one of the Bible study groups at the center got saved while attending. Talking with people about their faith pretty much happens one on one.

Faith is something that is walked out daily. Every Wednesday at noon our executive director leads a Bible study for local business people in the community. Counseling sessions with the center Christian counselor are good opportunities for people to talk about faith issues. All the economic development seminars are based on scripture. We use Larry Burkett's Crown Ministries Bible studies for the Financial Fitness classes. All classes for all ages are scripture based. Kids get together and do Bible study or volunteer groups lead Bible programs.

Three mission institutions out of ten intentionally focused on Bible study and discipleship practices within the programming of the mission as a primary emphasis. One additional executive director was involved in Bible study and discipleship practices in a local church and claimed this work as part of the mission, but the outreach manager shared no information about this work and did not consider it to be part of the program ministries of the mission. Four mission institutions did not list spiritual growth as a direct goal of their outreach ministry.

When the participants of programs at the missional outreach centers in this study learn to put their relationship with God first in every area of their lives, including the economic aspect, these same participants carry this thirst and desire to grow spiritually deeper into the churches they attend. When the pastors and church members join the excitement and thirst for spiritual growth and reach out to touch their communities by supporting the missional outreach centers, everybody's ministry grows in the process.



## Cultural Bridges

United Methodist missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian Region are accustomed to frequent staff change. Among the ten centers in this study, seven executive directors and eight outreach managers expressed concern about staff turnover and the impact such change had on program ministry. Reacting to change was a challenge for the centers and churches alike. The study found that when the staff changed, all the staff, old and new, often had cultural issues to adjust to as the new staff became a part of the existing program ministry.

Some of the cultural issues in United Methodist missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian Region are related to generational poverty characteristics (see Chapter 2). When the new staff had limited prior experience with general poverty characteristics in Central Appalachia and a majority of the old staff had a lifetime of experience in Central Appalachia, cultural differences became ministry effectiveness issues. For example, one generational poverty characteristic is that polarized thinking is common practice (Payne, De Vol, and Smith 70). Below are responses to the interview protocol at four missional outreach centers that address the common polarized thinking about women leading or teaching in ministry or praying in public:

The Baptist on staff are anti-women in leadership positions. [Note: 50 percent of the staff at this particular United Methodist outreach center is Baptist according to this same director.] (Executive Director)

[speaking about what United Methodists believe] United Methodists have several female pastors [in the community and conference], which undermines the United Methodist witness for many people. (Outreach Manager)

In this area women's role in the church is limited. Larger congregations

are more in favor of pastors that have been divorced and/or remarried than of women preachers. (Executive Director)

When we pray with Holiness people, they join in, so we tend to change prayer style when praying with them. Sometimes it seems uncomfortable to pray when Holiness men are present on the home visits. (female Outreach Manager)

Most United Methodists are not inhibited by praying in public. Since the staff isn't all United Methodist, we have to honor the cultural thing and not push female staff to pray in public. (Executive Director)

[speaking about prayer and preachers from the perspective of a Missionary Baptist] It's personal for the Missionary Baptist. If you're a woman, you don't pray out loud in church, but they do pray a lot. Women can teach children in Sunday school but they cannot preach. [Note: According to the Executive Director of this center, approximately 70 percent of the staff is Missionary Baptist.] (Outreach Manager)

The challenge with these particular cultural issues arose when the executive directors and outreach managers were United Methodist and arrived new on the scene with strong beliefs about women in ministry and spiritual leadership positions. Cultural barriers were erected to combat what many of the non-United Methodist staff believed to be morally wrong.

One pastor and the executive director and outreach manager of the missional outreach center closest to the church, along with the outreach manager of a second outreach center, expressed difficulties related to the Appalachian views of death. Below are some examples of interview protocol responses related to cultural death issues:

The memorial service was a cultural adjustment for me. People gather at the graveyard for a singing and preaching service. They eat at the grave site. It's like having a family reunion with dead people. The churches of all denominations are expected to close church and be respectful and participate even though it is held during church time. These are held in the summer and fall. They usually last four hours. There are special shelters built for these events. (Pastor)

A cultural difference for me was that funerals are such an important event and that they are used as an evangelism tool. The staff of the mission participates to show respect. (Executive Director)

[speaking of local denominations other than United Methodist] Revivals are full of preaching of fear, hell, eternal damnation and a focus on sin. There is a fear that one will die and not know Christ. (Outreach manager)

People have kind of a fatalistic attitude. For example, with death they say, "God just needed another angel," or "it was just their time." (Outreach Manager; Note: This outreach manager shared that she had trouble accepting that attitude.)

The pastors and outreach managers represented in the above examples have all made the adjustments necessary and found creative ways to grow and minister in a culture and community different from their own belief systems. The two churches in the same areas that took part in the study are experiencing growth in membership. Nine of the mission institutions held some type of community building activity as part of their programming. All ten churches had some type of community building activity as part of their ministry. These are positive signs that cultural bridges may someday be built in all these areas.

Another cultural issue shared by individual participants in the study included three pastors who had dealt with economic differences within their congregations. In these situations an older, more affluent, educated, original membership was joined with a newer, less affluent, less educated membership from the economically depressed community surrounding the church building. Two of these pastors viewed the differences among their members as bridges to greater ministry rather than communication barriers between factions. These same two churches shared cooperative ministries with the missional outreach centers in their communities, and membership growth was occurring in their congregations. The third church had not yet discovered how to deal with their

differences, and the membership was in decline according to the four participants in the study from that area.

### **Research Question #3**

What has been the impact of cooperative ministries between United Methodist missional outreach centers and churches located in close proximity? The researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol measured the existence and impact of the following cooperative ministries: worship services, youth events, after school children's activities, community service projects, and Bible study groups. Two missional outreach centers and two churches in the study spoke in a positive manner about the cooperative relationship that existed between the centers and the United Methodist church closest to their ministry. Of the thirty-eight participants in the study, twenty-four reported no communication or poor communication between the ten churches in the study and the ten missional outreach centers. At one location the executive director of the mission institution had limited or no communication with the leaders of the church, but the outreach manager, the pastor, and the layperson interviewed reported a pattern of frequent communication between the two entities. Table 4.5 records the number of participants who were aware of a specific ongoing, cooperative ministry between their mission institution and the United Methodist church located in closest proximity.

**Table 4.5 Cooperative Ministries between Outreach Centers and Churches**

Awareness of Weekly Activities	Executive	Outreach		
	Director (N=9)	Manager (N=10)	Pastor (N=10)	Layperson (N=10)
Worship services	1	1	1	1
Youth events	3	3	3	3
After-school children's activities	1	1	1	3
Community service projects	3	4	4	4
Bible Study groups	1	1	1	1

A second executive director and outreach manager reported a cooperative worship service jointly run by the center and another United Methodist church not in the study.

An outreach manager of a third center reported a Vacation Bible School (VBS) cooperative ministry with another United Methodist church not in the study. One outreach manager reported a cooperative youth ministry with the conference youth even though they had no cooperative youth ministry with the local United Methodist church.

### **Called to Serve**

In Chapter 2 an overview of Wesley's theology of Christian faith revealed that Wesley encouraged missional outreach as a means to transform societies from within (Marquardt 119). One major finding of this study was that when the missional outreach centers and the churches in closest proximity to them viewed their positive relationship with one another as a fulfillment of God's call on their life to serve and be obedient to his Word, the churches involved experienced growth in membership and ministry opportunities with the community surrounding the churches. Some of the interview

protocol responses from participants in communities where the above finding is prevalent are noted below:

[speaking about Christian daily living and commitment] This is very important for United Methodists in our community. Living the Word is more important than just saying it. People need to live out their faith. We should make biblical living fashionable in order to transform our communities. (Executive Director/Pastor)

The pastor has been able to help the church buy into the vision that the mission is the church's outreach to the community and it presents an opportunity for the members to live out their faith in the world and let people see how God takes the mission to the world. (Executive Director)

[speaking about what United Methodists believe "being saved" means] It's a feeling that you have invited Jesus into your heart and have a personal relationship with him. Most people see it as a missionary type of calling. Serving is an aspect of being saved. (Outreach Manager)

One mission center in the study has a brochure that lists "spiritual development" as one of the three main emphases for the center:

The core objective of the Center is to share—through service and action—God's promise of abundant life for his people. People need hope, but people in despair also need something to hang onto while hope finds its way into their lives. The Center offers "hope with handles" by combining God's promise with empowering ministries that give people tools and means to change their own lives and break free of the despair of poverty and hopelessness.

In the same spiritual development section of the brochure, the mission center lists Bible classes and worship services sponsored by local churches. This type of Wesleyan theology combining mission service and obedience to the call of God's Spirit on the lives of church members leads to the inner transformation of people's hearts and the outer transformation of entire communities.

## **Shared Resources**

United Methodist mission institutions in Central Appalachia, under the jurisdiction of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, have immense resources at their disposal. One of the most beneficial resources is their list of support churches. With the connectional system of the general church and the technological advances of Web pages and e-mail, support churches can stay “in-touch” with the missional outreach ministries of their choice on a daily basis if necessary. They make regular financial contributions, collect specific items needed for ministry programs, raise funds for specific projects and equipment needs, and visit and/or volunteer in person, frequently sharing their expertise and physical strength.

The United Methodist churches located closest in proximity to the missional outreach centers in Central Appalachia serve the same economically depressed communities as the outreach centers but they do not have the same resources available for their use. If they fail to meet their financial obligations, these churches are threatened by their annual conferences and bishops with closure. The exception to this rule are the churches of the Red Bird Missionary Conference where all of their pastors are United Methodist missionaries with salaries paid through the Advance Special program of the General Board of Global Ministries supported by individual churches; however, even the churches of the Red Bird Missionary Conference do not have the same plentiful resources available to them as do the outreach centers.

This study found that when the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity freely share resources with no strings attached, growth in the churches occurs.

The key point here is “with no strings attached.” With thirty-eight interviews conducted, the issue of sharing resources was a top concern for most of the church participants.

Below are examples of the interview protocol responses relating to this subject:

The way the mission could help the church is to refer people to the church if they need a home church. (Layperson)

If the mission could funnel people our direction it would help. (Pastor)

The mission and the church help each other in that we use each other’s facilities. Financial support is given by the church to the center. There are many annual joint activities at the center. The church is also a part of the center through participation and leadership. (Layperson)

It creates good synergy when the mission and church share resources and work together. The space and location is good. In the past we have tried to see the mission as an extension of the work of the church and have tried to plug new church members into their program ministries. (Pastor)

The church used to use their New Life Center facility to reach youth in the community, but it is no longer operating. (Layperson)

At Christmas time, our church gets gifts from the outreach center to give to kids in the community. Also once a month, the youth of the church use the mission’s gym. (Layperson)

It would be nice to receive a breakdown of what the mission center is offering in terms of programs and the church needs to let them know what we are offering. There needs to be detailed communication on both sides. The mission does tell people to come to our church if they need a handout. (Pastor)

The “no strings attached” issue surfaces when the mission lets the church use its facilities if, for example, the pastor will counsel whoever passes through the programs of the mission and needs counseling. Another situation mentioned was a church that had to pay to use different facilities of the mission center when the church was already struggling financially, and one church made the mission pay to use the church facilities for spiritual



life retreats and communion services for volunteer teams when the pastor was leading the services. One mission was living with the sad state that a former director told all the churches that the mission did not need their financial support and did not want their volunteer help. Now the mission needs support churches under a new director, and the church in closest proximity to it is disinterested and reluctant to be connected.

### **Shared Goals**

Within the United Methodist connectional system, goal setting and strategic planning for the future is an emphasis that cannot be ignored by even the smallest of churches and outreach centers in Central Appalachia. As part of the study, participants were asked to state the central goal of their institution or church in their community today. I found that four mission institutions had the same or similar goal for ministry in their community as the churches located in closest proximity to them. In all four cases, communication was open and frequent. In all four churches, the congregation was growing both in attendance and in their ministry to the rest of the community.

Four mission institutions had similar goals for ministry in their community as the churches in closest proximity, but communication between the entities was limited and strained. Attendance in all four churches was stable or in decline. Little evidence of growth either in numbers or in ministry was noted.

Two mission institutions had completely different goals for ministry in their community than the churches in closest proximity, and communication between the two entities was limited and strained. These same two churches were in decline in terms of attendance and ministry.

A major finding of the study was that when the goal of the mission institution and the church closest to them was similar or the same, the church was growing and expanding in ministry. To illustrate this point, below are the goals as shared by one executive director/pastor, the lay leader of the church, and the outreach director of the mission.

“Our goal is to make disciples and win people to Christ, to know Christ, to grow in Christ, to show the world Christ through a daily witness” (Executive Director/Pastor).

“Our goal is winning people to Christ, not just by what you say but what they see in you in your day to day life, so they see it and want to be a part of it” (Layperson).

“Whether economic, educational, etc., all goes back to spiritual growth. Everything goes back to the heart relationship with Christ. Everything the mission does is geared to get people’s heart right” (Outreach Manager).

The study revealed that when the central goal for the missional outreach centers and the churches are shared, the mission and ministry of both entities increased in degree of impact in the community. The missional outreach center and the church highlighted above helped transform an entire neighborhood from being an urban slum area known for its violence to being a well-maintained community with decent housing and an emphasis on upholding positive family values and economic stability. According to the executive director/pastor, the city received a multimillion dollar urban improvement award several years ago. Leaders from the mission institution and the church served on a planning team with city government housing authorities and other organizations including Habitat for Humanity and Urban Renewal. Together they developed a plan to transform the

community directly across the street from the mission institution from an urban slum to an attractive organized neighborhood. I received brochures and a book written by the executive director/pastor describing the community transformation process (Jennings 84).

### **Awareness of Basic Needs**

Communities across Central Appalachia may be vastly different in terms of their terrain, but certain basic needs are consistent throughout the region. The three core basic needs are generally food, clothing, and shelter. Following close behind the big three are economic, education, and medical (physical, mental, and emotional) needs. When the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate an awareness of the basic needs of the surrounding community, growth in the churches occurs. While all of the missional outreach centers in the study were addressing basic needs of their communities through their varied program ministries, all the churches did not. Four United Methodist churches out of the ten participating in the study were involved in some type of cooperative ministry with the United Methodist missional outreach centers in their area. Only two of these same churches went beyond their cooperative ministries with the mission institutions to establish their own outreach ministries in order to address basic needs in the community. The interview protocol responses below describe some of these ministries of the latter two churches:

The church has a Day Care Development Program that is just beginning. There is a privately run Day Care that meets in the church every day during the week with about twenty kids involved from the community. We realized as a church that we were missing a ministry opportunity with all those people coming in and out of the church all week and we didn't know them. We came up with a Day Care Development Program that involves planning a meal once a month for the families of the day care kids. The meal would be served by church members and an effort would be made to

build relationships with their families. Also we are planning to offer child care on Sunday mornings during church for these families to encourage them to come to church and leave their kids in the child care. (Pastor)

The educational part of the church's ministry is that members are committed to volunteer in the literacy program of the mission and in the public schools. The Economic Development part of the ministry is that the church is opening a restaurant and retail outlet [bookstore, gift shop, and jewelry]. (Pastor)

The church has an Angel Food Basket Giveaway ministry once a month. Other churches help by contributing food. Members of the church deliver a food basket to twenty families a month. (Layperson)

When churches are aware of the existing needs in their local communities, people can be touched in the name of Christ at their point of need. When people of a community are touched, they become aware of the church bringing membership growth, renewal, and new opportunities for ministry.

### **Cross-Cultural Awareness and Respect**

In this study ten groups were interviewed located in ten geographic areas of Central Appalachia. In eight of the areas four participants were interviewed. In two areas only three participants were interviewed because one executive director was also the pastor of the closest United Methodist Church and in one area one executive director was over two different mission institutions. In five of these groups of interviewees, communication problems were so severe between the missional outreach centers and the churches most closely connected to them that the two groups had difficulty finding anything positive to say about one another. The types of communication problems varied from location to location. I was able to isolate six categories as being the most prevalent. These included problems related to culture, lack of cooperation, focus of mission

(evangelism and discipleship practices), leadership (personality conflicts), perceived growth issues, and vision for ministry.

The cultural differences have already been analyzed to some degree in the “Cultural Bridges” section of Chapter 4. The cross-cultural awareness is a major issue because when the leaders of the missional outreach centers and the leaders of the churches refuse to respect each other enough to talk out their differences, cultural or not, effective ministry is basically nonexistent. Three of the five missional outreach centers that have severely strained relationships with the churches have executive directors who have many characteristics of transformational leaders. The communication problems have deep roots that have gone unresolved for years and cast a bitter shadow on every interaction that takes place between the two entities. Following is one example of four participants in one area talking about the communication problems between the mission center and the church. Some of the same four participants are quoted more than once:

In the past everything that happened at the mission revolved around the church and in the church, the youth were more involved. Now it has gotten to be more of a business. (Layperson)

VBS was a joint effort between the mission and the church for many years, but volunteers felt a lack of appreciation from the church. The group didn't feel welcome by the church. They decided to do VBS at the mission only and it caused strained relationships. (Executive director)

The conference superintendent wanted the mission to pay half of the pastor's salary and the pastor would become a mission institution employee. (Executive director)

It would be helpful for the church to know when people are in the mission emergency houses in order to invite them to church. There could be cooperative ministries to reach the young people. In the past there have been scheduling problems and the mission has robbed the church of ports of entry. A disadvantage to the mission and church working cooperatively

is that people in the community would see the church as an extension of the mission agency. The church needs to be viewed as a church for the whole community. (Pastor)

The pastors of the church get too busy to help the mission. The present pastor was approached about helping the outreach center with a drug problem in the community and he didn't have the time. (Outreach manager)

If United Methodist people on the mission staff would attend our church it would help. You can't get growth outside the United Methodist Church in this community. People could grow spiritually if they would come with an openness. (Layperson)

In the community where the above missional outreach center is located, a serious drug problem exists. Within a fourteen mile radius of the missional outreach center and church where the above responses were made, thirty-one drug dealers are operating according to the UNITE state-run drug prevention program personnel. The outreach manager of the mission is acutely aware of what the drug situation is doing to the participants of their programs. Tears came in her eyes as she talked in the interview about the need for counseling people as they try to transition off drugs. The pastor's unwillingness to support the recovery group ministries of the mission to address this issue closed the door for all other ministry with the mission, too.

When the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate cross-cultural awareness and respect in program ministries, growth in the churches occurs. In the case above, the church involved is missing an opportunity to grow because it refuses to communicate about the issue closest to the heart of the outreach ministry of the mission. A noncooperative spirit is hurting the growth of the church, the ministry of the mission, and the community surrounding the church and mission because the drug

problem is not being addressed by two of the most influential voices in the community.

In a second group of participants in another state, a communication breakdown with different dynamics exists. The setup is the same as the first example in that the church is located directly across the street from the missional outreach center. The difference between the two examples exists because the facility where the missional outreach center operates is owned and maintained by the church according to an original agreement. The church is composed of an affluent congregation with professional careers such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, according to the layperson and pastor interview protocol responses. The participants of programs at the missional outreach center are low-income, primarily single-parent households living in public housing as reported by the executive director and the outreach manager. The economic, social, and cultural division between the church and the participants of the mission is deep and complex, and both sides have hesitated to start bridge construction to connect the two groups. Some of their communication problems are highlighted by the interview protocol responses below:

The church lets the outreach center use their van, but currently it needs to be inspected before the mission can transport kids in it. The church has refused to get it inspected so the van just sits, and the mission has to make multiple trips back and forth picking up kids from the schools and taking them home in one van. The trustees of the church have been informed about the situation but there has been no action. (Executive director)

The church sends no volunteers to help at the mission. From time to time the church purchases things for our after-school program. They purchased a video game at Christmas. What we really need is for the furnace to be repaired. On cold days the center has insufficient heat to keep the preschool children warm. It will cost \$1500 to repair the furnace, and the mission doesn't have the funds to get the work done. We've told the trustees and pastor over and over and nothing has happened, no response from them. (Executive Director)

The relationship between the church and the mission is fragmented because of conflicts with past executive directors. The first executive director of the mission, when the church founded the mission, was from the church and she got attacked by people from the church. It was not good. There is also a stigma that is hard to get rid of because of who is in the church. The people at the mission feel inferior to the people in the congregation. We need to break down these barriers. (Pastor)

The church itself doesn't like change. It's harder for the older members to embrace new music and new ideas. (Layperson)

The church doesn't have enough financial means to help the mission all that they need. We are responsible for the big maintenance items. The UMW helps with supplies and provided a play station for the after school kids. (Layperson)

We have no cooperative ministries with the church. Advantages to having cooperative ministries would be that we would have more resources. Volunteers are needed in all our programs. The kids could have some variety in terms of people working with them one on one, helping with homework, listening to them, and exposure to real life. The church people need to come in with a good attitude, ready to play, in good humor, willing to form bonds with the kids. (Outreach manager)

The above outreach manager mentioned that the church people needed to be "in good humor," and the executive director shared that the trustees from the church on the board of directors were not always "in good humor" at the board meetings. I also observed that the layperson from the church was not "in good humor" when she arrived for her interview. She said right up front that she was not ready to be interviewed and did not want to be there. She said she only came because the pastor could not come. The pastor sent word with this same layperson that I would have to come back another time and interview him because he was "tied up." I had driven five hours and paid a hotel bill to interview the four participants in the study from this community. Fortunately, the pastor was willing to be interviewed for the study at a later date in a different location.



The interview with the reluctant layperson proved to proceed more smoothly than expected. As the layperson answered each question she became more and more interested in the subject matter and her “lack of good humor” began to fade. By the end of the interview, she was smiling, and she hugged me before she left the interview room. Some of the casual comments made during the interview indicated that she had previously thought she was being forced by the pastor to participate in something difficult or unpleasant by coming to be interviewed. After finding out that the interview was about her church and that her comments were valued, she was cooperative and pleasant with her responses.

With the above examples, cross-cultural awareness and respect among the leaders of program ministries in the mission institutions and churches contribute to the positive growth of both entities. From a biblical perspective, the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10 could be well applied to these situations when Jabez prays, “Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory.” When the “territory” is very small, the ministry is even smaller. This study found that mission institutions and the churches need to be aware of each other and respect one another in order to widen their scope of influence on the communities surrounding and participating in their programs.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The major findings of the study were drawn from a content analysis of the interview protocol response data, the field notes and interviewer observations, and the additional information retrieved from the audio tapes. Church growth is indicated when evidence of transformational leadership, intentional evangelism, discipleship, community

building, cultural sensitivity, and the number of people attending services and functions of the church exists.

1. When the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches in closest proximity to those institutions share the same central goal for ministry in the community, growth in the churches occurs.

2. When the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches in closest proximity to those institutions are able to articulate and model their faith beliefs to the participants and other leaders of their program ministries, growth in the churches occurs.

3. When the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches in closest proximity to those institutions are transformational leaders, growth in the churches occurs.

4. When the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches are knowledgeable and supportive of the United Methodist Church and faith, are active in a local United Methodist church, and have a vision for reaching others for Christ whatever the ethnic or economic background of the people may be, growth in the churches occurs.

5. When cultural differences in the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity are seen as bridges to greater ministry rather than communication barriers, growth in the churches occurs.

6. When the positive relationship between the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity to those institutions is seen as a means of fulfilling the “call

of God” and being obedient to his Word, growth in the churches occurs.

7. When evangelism and spiritual growth are a major part of the goal and vision for ministry for the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity, growth in the churches occurs.

8. When the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate an awareness of the basic needs of the surrounding community, growth in the churches occurs.

9. When the mission institution and the church in closest proximity freely share resources with no strings attached, growth in the churches occurs.

10. When the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate cross-cultural awareness and respect in program ministries, growth in the churches occurs.

Four mission institutions and four churches in the study were experiencing growth. These four mission institutions and churches had more than one of the above characteristics.

Only two of these four mission institutions and churches in the study demonstrated five or more of the above characteristics as a part of their day-to-day programming. In

Chapter 5, the major findings are evaluated and interpreted, implications drawn,

applications suggested, and limitations explored.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The ten major findings from this study focus on the relationship between United Methodist missional outreach centers and the United Methodist churches located in closest proximity to these centers in the Central Appalachian Region. Research questions guided the interview protocol with each participant around issues of religious culture, evangelism, and cooperative ministries. The hope from the beginning for this study was that the findings would lend understanding as to why some Central Appalachian United Methodist churches located in close proximity to United Methodist missional outreach centers were growing in attendance and ministry and others were not. For those mission institutions and outreach centers that are open to change, the data can be used to design strategies for improved relationships between the different entities and in the process encourage church growth among the churches involved.

As seen in Chapter 2, a theology of mission goes far beyond a week-long home repair project in a poverty zone of the nation. It involves a relationship with Jesus Christ and accepting his way of living and serving in the world empowered by the Holy Spirit as part of the body of Christ, the church. Current literature supports the view that a theology of mission also involves leading others to a saving knowledge and right relationship with God where they can experience forgiveness and join the community of faith as kingdom children. In this study, I found that the leaders of United Methodist missional outreach centers in the Central Appalachian region have different theologies of mission. The challenge for me was to peel away all the service programs and find out where a

relationship with Jesus Christ stood as part of the ministry of each participating center and church for without the relationship, no true church subsists (Van Gelder 86). Without the church, the “mission of God” in the world will not be accomplished.

### **Shared Visions**

A major finding of the study was that when the goal or vision of the mission institution and the church closest to them was similar or the same, it was also true that the church was growing and expanding in ministry. As an organization, the United Methodist church is known for goal-setting and strategic planning that encourages forward movement and broad outreach to local communities and to the ends of the earth through missionary efforts. This practice is biblically based and has proven to be a worthwhile endeavor when the goals and visions of one entity do not clash with the goals and visions of another in the same ministry area.

In my study I found that goal setting and vision casting can be harmful when they become barriers to the ministry of another part of the Christian body. As described in Chapter 4, when the goals and visions of the mission institutions and the churches closest to them are similar or the same, doors are open to cooperative ministries that literally transform entire communities. By contrast, when communication barriers are erected and the goals of fellow workers in the kingdom are ignored or disregarded, the growth of the church and the mission institution is hindered and broken lives remain broken, such as with the drug recovery program described in Chapter 4. The deeper theological tragedy in the particular situation mentioned above is that people who are destroying their lives and the lives of their families are missing an opportunity to meet the one person who can save

them and change their eternal destiny all because of a communication breakdown between two Christian organizations. The point here is that different visions can be all good standing alone, but when those same visions are cast into a community, they need the support of all persons involved. This study shows that keeping the communication lines open with fellow workers in the kingdom can make the difference between a vision that falls flat and a vision that makes an eternal difference.

One additional problem that influenced the growth of the churches was when a vision was out of touch with the reality of the communities within which they were located. For example, one church in the study has a vision of beginning a ministry and visitation team as a way to grow the church. In that particular community, the members of the church are economically classified as middle and upper class. The community surrounding the church is low-income living in government housing projects. Through personal experience of serving as a missionary in low-income communities for over eighteen years in Central Appalachia, I know that the reality of wealthy people visiting en masse and uninvited in the homes of the people of such a community would not be seen as a way to grow the church by the targeted population. A simple matter of human pride and dignity is present.

In Chapter 2, Schaller refers to “visionary” leaders as those who pay attention to the details of their communities and congregations (62). These are the type of leaders who move a church forward in ministry. Ignoring the obvious discomfort of a targeted population is not “paying attention to the details” of a community. In this situation the vision of the mission institution located nearby is more in touch with the needs and

dynamics of the community.

### **Articulation of Beliefs**

In the Great Commission Jesus commands his disciples to perform three tasks: to make disciples of all the nations; to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and, to teach all the nations everything he had taught the disciples. In courses of evangelism and mission at Asbury Seminary students are taught that the Great Commission is one part of what mission is all about: making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them everything Jesus taught his disciples. Disciples in this context include all who decide to accept him as personal Lord and Savior. The second part is the act of ministering in the name of Christ to the downtrodden, the poor, and those who live on the margins of society. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Bible, the Discipline of the United Methodist church, and the teachings of its founder, John Wesley, support this theology of mission. After serving as an United Methodist missionary for over twenty-five years, I would agree that this is what mission is all about for me and for a host of other colleagues serving in missionary service through the United Methodist church around the world.

In this study I found that when the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches in closest proximity to those institutions are able to articulate and model their faith beliefs to the participants and other leaders of their program ministries, growth in the churches occurs. This perception of serving in mission is not the same for all persons in leadership positions at United Methodist mission institutions in Central Appalachia. As described in Chapter 4, two out of nine of the executive directors and two out of ten outreach managers interviewed could not articulate any basic United Methodist

beliefs. Two additional executive directors could share only minimal information about United Methodist beliefs. Five of these same participants also struggled to share anything about basic Christian beliefs. One of the above four executive directors could describe no personal faith experience and did not attend church except to speak on behalf of the mission institution.

The implications of this finding should be disturbing for United Methodist members across the nation. As United Methodist churches pour out funds to support the mission institutions, they do so because these institutions were founded on Christian principles to be faithful to United Methodist principles of polity as forth in the Discipline of the general church. Generous donors believe that the same founding principles are still being taught and upheld in the ministry setting. The problem arises when the primary leaders of these institutions have little or no knowledge base about United Methodist beliefs or basic Christian beliefs. Unless some other staff person at the institution takes on the responsibility of spiritual leader and has the blessing of their director, these key beliefs are not shared. In addition, thousands of people who participate in the programs of these mission institutions are denied the opportunity to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Theologically this failure to make disciples and teach others about Christ means that the Great Commission is not being obeyed. It becomes a question of obedience to the Savior we claim as Lord and a question of fulfilling the “mission of God” in the world.

The second implication is that when United Methodist beliefs and basic Christian beliefs are unknown, they are not practiced nor shared by supporting the work of the local



United Methodist church congregation. This lack of support by the staff of the mission institutions is not received well by the local United Methodist church leaders. Only four out of the ten pastors spoke well about the staff of the mission institutions attending their church or any church in the local area. The pastors of six churches discussed the problem of mission institution staff feeling like they do enough Christian work during the week without having to go to church on the weekend. Hard feelings between the pastors and the staff can build communication barriers that take years to dismantle and prevent effective cooperative ministry from happening.

In the literature review of Chapter 2, Dean and Foster refer to the “godbearing life” where Christ crossed every known boundary to reconcile sinful humankind with a holy God (32). In Central Appalachia boundaries keeping out God are plentiful like every other region of the world where poverty prevails. Drugs, prostitution, lack of transportation, lack of money, lack of education—the list can fill pages of research journals. The good news here is that God has a plan to overcome the boundaries that separate people from himself. The plan begins with a relationship with Jesus. When God’s people “put on” the image of Christ and “bear” his life through unity in the body, the church, light begins to shine in the darkness and the boundaries come down. The connection point for this study comes when the leaders of mission institutions and the pastors and laypeople of churches in Central Appalachia take up the mantle and commit themselves to the “godbearing life,” articulating the faith with accuracy and persistence over, around, and through the boundaries that arise.

## **Transformational Leadership**

In this study it was found that when the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches in closest proximity to those institutions are transformational leaders, growth in the churches occurs. According to the interviewees, particular characteristics of transformational leaders that benefited the ministry of the churches the most were team building skills and an ability and willingness to communicate well. Five executive directors and six pastors in this study exhibited the characteristics of transformational leaders. Four of the executive directors were in mission institutions near churches that also had pastors who were transformational leaders. The other two pastors are in areas where the executive directors are not transformational and unwilling to cooperate with the mission institution.

After analyzing the responses of these ten transformational leaders the following conclusions have been made:

1. When leaders surround themselves with skilled staff, the potential of their ministry is increased greatly. The old expression that “two heads are better than one” is certainly true for this situation. These transformational leaders are able to accomplish much more than they ever could alone because they have been wise enough to listen to the team of experts they have assembled.

2. These transformational leaders have a habit of creating a type of strategic game plan that includes everyone on their team. They work hard not to leave anyone standing on the sideline. Everybody seems to have a responsibility, and they are given the freedom to carry that responsibility to the end of the game (or assignment). A great example is at

one mission center where the executive director gave the economic development director the responsibility of developing a new program ministry. This particular economic development director is a perfectionist, and it has taken him a longer period of time to start the ministry than originally planned. The executive director could have taken the task away from the economic development director and finished it himself, but in the spirit of the team, he has been patient and the task is almost complete with the respect of the economic director in tact.

3. These transformational leaders use a team approach to communication. They meet often with their team, and they pray often. All of the transformational executive directors have a devotional and prayer time with their staff. From the interview protocol responses it was evident that these leaders listen to their staff managers and keep the lines of communication open. In four of the locations the lines of communication are also open with the pastors of the local United Methodist churches in the community. In the church with the second greatest growth, the pastor is the chair of the board of directors for the mission institution. In the church with the greatest growth, the pastor is also the director of the mission institution. In another one of the growing churches the mission executive director is the treasurer of the church. In the fourth growing church, the transformational pastor feels completely comfortable in walking into the office of the executive director and laying proposals for cooperative ministries on the table. Communication barriers are not assumed. By contrast, pastors of the same church in the past have been hesitant because of the past military background of the executive director.

In the Chapter 2 literature review, Arn and Arn use the same terminology when

they describe disciple making as a “team assignment” (64). In their view, when disciple making becomes more than another ministry option, community building results that, in turn, brings unity that bears fruit for God’s kingdom. In this study transformational leaders recognize this divine connection between team building and disciple making and the union of these two emphases results in positive growth for the churches.

One of the characteristics of generational poverty victims is that polarized thinking becomes common (Payne, DeVol, and Smith 70). Change is not valued as an option. People enjoy a superficial comfort in the sameness of life situations. When transformational leaders in Central Appalachia collide with the dynamics of polarized thinking among their staff, participants of program ministries, and congregations, challenging days come quickly and often according to the responses to the interview protocol. In the literature review, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr describe transformational leaders as those who can maintain the respect and trust of staff and participants, even when radical change threatens to derail vision and ministry (96). The end result of transformational leadership as found in this study is effective ministry and a transformed community.

### **Knowledge and Cross-Cultural Ministry**

A major finding of this study is that when the leaders of the mission institutions and the leaders of the churches are knowledgeable and supportive of the United Methodist Church and faith, are active in a local United Methodist Church, and have a vision for reaching others for Christ whatever the ethnic or economic background of the people may be, growth in the churches occurs. Part of this finding has already been

analyzed and interpreted under the “Articulation of Beliefs” section of this chapter.

Joining beliefs, faith, and local church involvement with cross-cultural evangelism opens a direct connection to the work of God’s kingdom in the world. In Chapter 2 Macchia writings describe the need to unite believers together in a common faith so they can become mature followers of Christ and be formed in his image (119). In this study the two mission institutions and churches that are willing to cross the cultural boundaries prevalent in their communities are experiencing the greatest growth in mission and ministry. In one of the growth situations the United Methodist church is the first denomination in the city to begin a hispanic worship service and outreach ministry, often using the facilities of the mission center. In the second growth situation, the church is composed of a small number of highly educated upper middle income members and a large number of low-income poorly educated members. A cooperative ministry of the church and the mission institution is reaching out to over seventy business people every Wednesday for lunch and Bible study.

These type of growing ministries one characteristic in common. They are unafraid to take risks for the sake of furthering the kingdom of God. In fact, furthering the kingdom of God in a world full of darkness is always a part of the strategic plan for all entities involved. Knowing that people in their community speak different languages, have different income levels, perhaps have a different faith background—none of these factors present barriers to ministry opportunities for these churches and outreach centers. In this study, these churches keep their eyes on the ultimate goal of furthering God’s kingdom.

## **Cultural Bridges**

Closely related to the previous discussion is the next major finding from this study. When cultural differences in the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity are seen as bridges to greater ministry rather than communication barriers, growth in the churches occurs. In the situation highlighted above where a hispanic ministry has been started, the conclusion might be drawn that numerous hispanic persons were attending that United Methodist church prompting the need for a new ministry. In reality, only one hispanic family, originally from Puerto Rico, began attending the church. The wife of the family declared God gave her a vision for beginning a hispanic ministry in the city. The pastor of the church respected and supported the call of this member of his church, and a new ministry was born. The pastor saw the Porto Rican family as a cultural bridge sent by God to enable his church to reach a population untouched by other denominations in the city.

In Chapter 2, a review of Hunter's research reveals that most people want to belong before they come to believe (Celtic Way 55). When different cultures first come together natural barriers come up because of insecure personalities, language differences, economic, social, and religious mores that challenge common ways of communicating. If cultural bridges can be found, those natural barriers can be overcome so that true sharing in God's kingdom can take place. In this study, one of the churches that is growing has a pastor that knows all about finding those cultural bridges. His gift is finding those bridges through the young people of the community. When he was first appointed to his current assignment, no youth were attending his church. He put up a basketball net outside the

church and started shooting hoops. Within two months he had a large group of youth and had brokered a deal with the mission institution to use their school gym every Wednesday night to play basketball and study the Bible. By the third or fourth month he had baptized ten new members into his church. The youth led the pastor to adults in the community searching for a church home, and in the process, increased God's kingdom by ten.

The theoretical framework of this study focused on Vygotsky's sociocultural cognitive theory. In the literature review, the discussion of Vygotsky's theory revealed that cognitive skills are rooted in social relations and culture (Santrock 47). The communities in which people live, the language they speak, and their interaction with others all contribute to the cognitive functioning of people (48). In this study Vygotsky's theory lends understanding to why certain endeavors in Christian ministry in Central Appalachia result in effective growth and others fail to progress despite years of effort. When the leaders of the mission institutions and the churches fail to build deep-rooted relationships with the people in the communities they are serving, disregard the unique language participants of programs speak, and fail to respect the strength of family connections, the ministries of the mission institutions and the churches suffer. The people of the community are disconnected cognitively with the efforts of the leaders; and thus, they are disconnected spiritually, too. Spiritual growth begins with trust relationships, and trust relationships cannot be built when the community is cognitively disconnected from the ministry efforts.

## **Called to Serve**

A major finding of the study was that when the positive relationship between the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity to those institutions is seen as a means of fulfilling the “call of God” and being obedient to his Word, growth in the churches occurs. Van Gelder describes the church as being “missionary by nature because God through the Spirit calls, creates, and commissions the church to communicate to the world that the redemptive reign of God has broken into human history” (125). In this study, being “called to serve” by God was mentioned by a number of the participants in their responses as a means of explaining actions or beliefs. A sense of call was especially true for participants from missional outreach centers and churches that were growing in mission and ministry. As members of the Christ’s body, the church, in the world, these participants view their mission and ministry as much more than a job or assignment. It is a call by God to them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as members of the universal church, to use their gifts and talents to spread the good news and bring others into the kingdom.

In many ways, it is a continuation of the call given to the original twelve disciples by Jesus as they were sent out into the world to make disciples of all nations with the Great Commission. The missionaries and church leaders of today are joining their call with the first disciples, as they strive to be faithful and obedient to God’s Word and call on their lives and ministry.

## **Evangelism and Spiritual Growth**

In this study when evangelism and spiritual growth are a major part of the goal and



vision for ministry for the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity, growth in the churches occurs. The key in this finding is centered on the word “and.” If one or the other of the entities has a goal or vision for ministry that leaves Christ out of the picture, the ministry for both entities is negatively impacted. George Morris, Senior Professor of World Evangelism of the World Methodist Council described growing churches: “Growing churches are committed to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus Christ while being open to the power of the Holy Spirit. Declining churches are usually deficient in these areas” (5). The churches in this study that have indicated growth within the last five years have a goal and vision for ministry that is centered on Christ and growing his kingdom on earth. The mission institutions in closest proximity to these churches have the same or similar goals and visions for ministry. The practice of Christian disciplines such as worship, prayer, and Bible study opens the door to deeper spiritual growth. As the Holy Spirit teaches and empowers, participants eagerly search for opportunities to share Christ with those who do not yet believe. United Methodist Bishop William H. Willimon writes that “evangelism in the Wesleyan spirit ought to mean bringing people into disciplines to save them from the world” (247). According to the interviewees, because the United Methodist mission institutions and churches are working together cooperatively, the end result is that more and more people come to know Christ in their communities each year and thus “saved from the world,” as Wesley might say.

In this study, one outreach manager at a mission institution described in the interview how he shared Christ with a man after an economic development seminar that

centers on biblical principles. A second outreach manager of a different mission institution described a prayer time with a young mother's health group where Christ was introduced. The local church members in both these locations are actively involved in the ministries of the mission institutions, and their goals are the same.

### **Awareness of Basic Needs**

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Central Appalachia, poverty is a way of life for a large portion of the population. Securing the basic necessities for living consumes time and energy and often dictates decisions for the future. All of the churches and missional outreach centers participating in the study deal with poverty issues every day. A major finding of the study was that when the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate an awareness of the basic needs of the surrounding community, growth in the churches occurs.

This "awareness of the basic needs of the surrounding community" is key because needs of communities change over time, and when the churches and missional outreach centers fail to change with the communities, problems arise. One positive example from the study was when a missional outreach center saw a need for better housing in their community and made a change in programming from recreation to economic development to meet the basic needs of the surrounding community.

Wesley saw the need for education for poor children in England and started schools. Missionaries throughout history have seen the basic needs of communities and given their lives to meet those needs in Jesus' name and for his sake. This is one of the ways that the love of Christ is shared by the church to all the nations, and it is part of

learning to live as citizens in God's kingdom.

### **Shared Resources**

One of the major findings in this study was that when the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity freely share resources with no strings attached, growth in the churches occurs. This sharing of resources is important because without adequate resources the degree in which ministry can be accomplished is limited. In this study participants were interviewed in four annual conferences of the United Methodist church in Central Appalachia. Five out of ten mission institutions had more resources than the churches in closest proximity. In the four situations where the churches were growing, two mission institutions had more resources and two churches had more resources. The uniqueness of the finding was that all four of these groups had a policy for sharing resources. Key ministry opportunities would have been missed if those resources had not been shared.

Once again, as is the case with other findings, the barrier that keeps the other five groups from sharing resources is communication problems. When the lines of communication have been damaged because of past disagreements, forgiveness and a willingness to start afresh are necessary to move forward around the barrier. One example was found with an executive director who refused to consider the thought of any type of cooperative ministry with the church across the street that would be a positive experience. In the interview this director expressed a disbelief that the church would ever want to interact with the participants at the center because they were a different class of people. The irony of this situation was that the church founded the center to help those low-

income families.

When the mission institutions and the churches are willing to share resources, bridges of trust and confidence are built that open the doors to ministry in the community. A positive relationship also gives a Christian witness to non-believers in the community and teaches them what it means to be more like Christ and be formed in his image through peaceful relationships.

### **Cross-Cultural Awareness and Respect**

Within the region of Central Appalachia a kaleidoscope of humanity exists. Poor people live and work beside the rich. The highly educated population and the under educated population call the mountains home. The churches and missional outreach centers serve one and all. In this study, when the mission institutions and the churches in closest proximity demonstrate cross-cultural awareness and respect in program ministries, growth in the churches occurs.

The most common problem under this topic found in the study was economic and position differences where barriers of inferiority or superiority were strictly kept in place. As the interviewer I could understand how the barriers worked. Even though I dressed professionally for the interviews, on several occasions I was treated as if I was an inconvenience and somehow unworthy to be allowed to do the interview by secretaries, receptionists, and even the people I was interviewing on at least two occasions. After the interview began the barriers began to go down and by the end, the interviewees and I were on an equal level.

My interpretation of this phenomena is that many of the executive directors and

pastors have traveled a long road to reach the positions that they hold where authority and respect is almost demanded. The executive directors have staff under their authority, some have over a hundred, others have less than ten. The pastors also have staff. The key here is learning to execute the authority and receive respect without using it to alienate themselves from the people God has called them to serve.

In the case of all four mission institutions and churches that were experiencing the most growth in the study, the executive directors and pastors were difficult to get interviews scheduled with because their secretaries or administrative assistants protected them from interruptions. Achieving an interview with these people was clearly a privilege for which I should be thankful; however, when the interviews finally happened, all of these participants were enthusiastic to share about their ministries and were warm and welcoming. None of the barriers present in some of the other interview situations were apparent with these four groups. In several of these ministry settings I also observed these same executive directors meeting and greeting participants of different programs in the same manner in which I was received.

Another key problem was the cultural issue, where the directors and pastors did not understand the cultural context of the people they served. As described in Chapter 2, the culture of Central Appalachia is unique. Some of the differences have developed because of factors like generational poverty, and others have just existed as part of the mountain culture since the arrival of the Scotch-Irish centuries earlier. When the leaders of missional outreach centers and churches in Central Appalachia take the time to learn about the local culture and respect the people for who they are, hearts become more

receptive to the gospel that is shared by these ministries. The end result is that “the mission of God” is furthered in the Appalachian region to his glory.

### **Implications of Findings**

Implications of the findings point to the future relationships between United Methodist missional outreach centers in Central Appalachia and the United Methodist churches in closest proximity to them. I hope the outreach centers and the churches will be interested enough to take these findings and apply them to their specific situations. All ten major findings reveal that no substitute exists for open lines of positive communication. When barriers are raised, the Christian witness is negatively impacted in the community, and the missional outreach centers, the churches, and the communities are all harmed in the war that ensues. When these organizations work together and communicate openly, communities are transformed and the kingdom of God grows.

The findings of this study impact some of the existing bodies of knowledge in the greater connectional United Methodist Church. The average church member living outside the region of Central Appalachia may have a limited knowledge of the relationships that exist between missional outreach centers and the churches located in closest proximity to them. Close relationships are assumed because the churches and the outreach centers are from the same denomination. The sharing of resources between the churches and missional outreach centers may also be wrongly assumed. These findings may change the perspective of the wider United Methodist membership and what they know about the missional outreach centers that they have been faithfully financially undergirding through the years.

A final implication is that these findings can be applied to the relationships between missional outreach centers and churches outside the Central Appalachian region where economic and cultural differences exist to the same degree. United Methodists serving in these other states and ministry areas can possibly improve their ministry effectiveness and encourage growth in churches experiencing decline.

### **Contributions to Research Methodology**

This study utilized a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview protocol method. The topical questions provided the freedom to probe deeper into conversations as the interviewees opened up and shared from personal experience. The advantage of this type of research was that more information could be gathered in a shorter period of time from multiple sources. The second most significant advantage of this type of research was that a previously unknown topic could be explored for the benefit of improving the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church all over the Central Appalachian region.

### **Relation to Previously Published Studies**

As highlighted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the research field addresses a number of issues relating to church growth, Wesley's theology, and effective styles of leadership. Economic issues come to the fore when the research lens is focused on the Central Appalachian region. Each missional outreach center included in this study has a rich historical past. The executive directors from three of the missional outreach centers referred to books that were written about their history (see Appendix G). With the exception of those three centers, no other participants mentioned any type of study

concerning the relationships between the churches and the outreach centers ever being conducted. After extensive research on the Internet and in the archives of the seminary, no dissertations or prior theses publications could be located that related directly to the topic of this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The scope of the study was limited by the number of United Methodist missional outreach centers located in the Central Appalachian region. I also limited the study to outreach centers related to the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Time and travel distance were also factors that impacted which missional outreach centers were chosen for the study. The United Methodist Church was the only denominational mission work included in the study because it was the denomination relevant to my personal ministry as the researcher.

### **Unexpected Conclusions**

The unexpected conclusions from the study centered around the fact that so much positive ministry was happening in the United Methodist Church throughout the Central Appalachian region at a time when so much of the published information in mission and evangelistic circles on the national level share the negative side of the story. Though changes need to be made for church growth to increase, the United Methodist Church is still alive and well in Central Appalachia, especially in the field of mission service. Thousands of people are helped and empowered daily through the work of the churches and missional outreach centers. Much more is left to be done, but what has been accomplished until this point in history is astounding. The good should not be discredited



by the difficulties of the present.

### **Speculation about Further Studies**

The findings from this study encourage speculation about further studies. Because of the limitations noted above, non-Methodist denominational churches located in close proximity to the United Methodist missional outreach centers were not included in the study. An interesting addition to the study would be to explore the relationships of the non-Methodist churches with the missional outreach centers and to note whether or not they were growing or declining in membership. A second further study could be to explore the same relationship issues with the Alaska Missionary Conference and the Oklahoma Missionary Conference of the United Methodist Church. A third study of interest to me was with the donor churches of the United Methodist missional outreach centers. A fourth study could explore how the donor churches perceive the ministry of the missional outreach centers and how that perception impacts the growth of the donor churches.

## APPENDIX A

### Sample Introduction, Mission Institution Letter

[Date of Interview]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region. I would like to interview you as the executive director of your institution and your outreach ministries supervisor as a part of my study.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships with the leaders of the local United Methodist church in your area, so I will not ask for your name on the survey. The data will be collected and categorized according to a code and all of the interviews will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one mission institution or church.

I believe that the relationships that exist between United Methodist missional outreach centers and the United Methodist churches in closest proximity to them are intricately related to the growth of the churches. My hope is that the relationships between churches and missional institutions around the Central Appalachian region will be strengthened and improved because you and others like you have taken the time to participate in this study.

Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual interview notes and keep the data electronically for an indefinite period of

time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions in the interview. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is 1-800-811-8233 and my e-mail is [wallinsumc@aol.com](mailto:wallinsumc@aol.com).

Thank you for your help. If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation.

Sincerely,

Carol D. Crawford

-----  
I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name and institution:

\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Sample Introduction, Church Letter**

[Date of Interview]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region. I would like to interview you as the pastor of your church and a layperson in leadership in your church as a part of my study.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships with the leaders of the missional outreach institution in your area, so I will not ask for your name on the survey. The data will be collected and categorized according to a code and all of the interviews will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one mission institution or church.

I believe that the relationships that exist between United Methodist missional outreach centers and the United Methodist churches in closest proximity to them are intricately related to the growth of the churches. My hope is that the relationships between churches and missional institutions around the Central Appalachian region will be strengthened and improved because you and others like you have taken the time to participate in this study.

Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual interview notes and keep the data electronically for an indefinite period of

time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions in the interview. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is 1-800-811-8233 and my e-mail is [wallinsumc@aol.com](mailto:wallinsumc@aol.com).

Thank you for your help. If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation.

Sincerely,

Carol D. Crawford

-----

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name and church:

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Permission Letter

[Date of Interview]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

As described earlier by letter, I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of the relationship of missional outreach to United Methodist church growth in the Central Appalachian region. I would like to interview you as the pastor of your church and a layperson in leadership in your church as a part of my study.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships with the leaders of the missional outreach institution in your area, so I will not ask for your name on the survey. The data will be collected and categorized according to a code and all of the interviews will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one mission institution or church.

I believe that the relationships that exist between United Methodist missional outreach centers and the United Methodist churches in closest proximity to them are intricately related to the growth of the churches. My hope is that the relationships between churches and missional institutions around the Central Appalachian region will be strengthened and improved because you and others like you have taken the time to participate in this study.

Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual interview notes and keep the data electronically for an indefinite period of

time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions in the interview. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My number is 1-800-811-8233 and my e-mail is [wallinsumc@aol.com](mailto:wallinsumc@aol.com).

Thank you for your help. You have already indicated your willingness to participate as a volunteer in the study by signing the earlier letter.

I have already received your voluntary participation form. Now I would like permission or not to do the following forms of data collection described below.

Sincerely,

Carol D. Crawford

---

May I tape record the interview today? Circle Yes or No.

May I take field notes of the interview? Circle Yes or No.

May I quote you verbatim by only mentioning your job title? Circle Yes or No.

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name and institution or church.

---

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol Instrument for Missional Outreach Participants

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

General Instructions: We will begin this interview protocol by talking a while about the religious culture and evangelism practices of this area. By *religious culture* I mean such things as worship habits, personal Bible study, group Bible study, personal prayer time, group prayer time, fellowship/ community-building activities with other Christians, and personal theology of mission and faith.

1. How many programs does your mission institution have that touch the community in some way?
2. How many programs would you classify as outreach ministries?
3. How many participants do you have in these outreach ministries on an annual basis?
4. Of these participants, what percentage would you classify as Christian? Non-Christian?
5. What religious denominations are represented by the participants who are served by the outreach ministries of this institution?
6. How many outreach staff are there at this institution?
7. What religious denominations are represented by your outreach ministry staff?
8. What do United Methodist in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
9. What do United Methodist in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?



10. What do Missionary Baptist in this area believe about being saved? About the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
11. What do the Pentecostal in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
12. What do the Pentecostal in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
13. What do Church of God in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
14. What do the Church of God in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
15. Do you have any programs as part of your outreach ministries where participants have the opportunity to study the Bible individually or in a small group? Talk about God? Pray? Accept Christ as their Savior? Grow in their Christian faith? Can you describe these opportunities and a little about the participants without giving names? (For example are they children, youth, adults)
16. What kind of Christian education experience or background do the staff that lead these particular programs have?
17. In what ways do these staff demonstrate awareness, respect, and understanding of local beliefs and cultural practices in the leading of the programs mentioned in question 15?

General Instructions: The next group of questions will be relating to the churches in your local community and any cooperative ministries that may or may not exist between your institution and these churches.

18. Are participants of outreach ministry programs encouraged by staff to attend church? If so, are suggestions made of where these participants should attend?

19. Are participants of outreach ministry programs ever discouraged by staff from attending the closest United Methodist church in the area? If so, why or why not?
20. Does the outreach ministry of this institution have any ongoing cooperative ministries with any United Methodist Churches in this local community? If so, please describe them. If not at present, have there been cooperative ministries of any type in the past? If so, please describe them.
21. If no cooperative ministries with the closest United Methodist Church exist at present, why do you think this is the case? Have circumstances or events in the past led to this current situation? If so, please describe without using names of individuals involved.
22. In your opinion, what would be the advantages to having cooperative outreach ministries with the local United Methodist Church? What would be the disadvantages?
23. This organization is an mission institution of the United Methodist Church. What do you see as the most important mission of this institution today in this community?
24. Is there any way that the United Methodist Church in this community could help your institution be more effective in fulfilling the stated mission of your institution?
25. What steps would it take to realize your vision for cooperative ministry as stated in the answer to question 24?

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Protocol Instrument for Church Participants

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_

General Instructions: We will begin this interview protocol by talking a while about the religious culture and evangelism practices of this area. By *religious culture* I mean such things as worship habits, personal Bible study, group Bible study, personal prayer time, group prayer time, fellowship/ community-building activities with other Christians, and personal theology of mission and faith.

1. How many programs does your church have that touch the community in some way?
2. How many programs would you classify as outreach ministries?
3. How many participants do you have in these outreach ministries on an annual basis?
4. Of these participants, what percentage would you classify as Christian? Non-Christian?
5. What religious denominations are represented by the participants who are served by the outreach ministries of this church?
6. How many different people participate in outreach ministries as a part of this church?
7. What religious denominations are represented in your local community?
8. What do United Methodist in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
9. What do United Methodist in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?

10. What do Missionary Baptist in this area believe about being saved? About the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
11. What do the Pentecostal in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
12. What do the Pentecostal in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
13. What do Church of God in this area believe the experience of “being saved” means?
14. What do the Church of God in this area believe about the Bible? Prayer? Preachers? Christian daily living and commitment? Church attendance?
15. Do you have any programs as part of your church where participants have the opportunity to study the Bible individually or in a small group? Talk about God? Pray? Accept Christ as their Savior? Grow in their Christian faith? Can you describe these opportunities and a little about the participants without giving names? (For example are they children, youth, adults)
16. What kind of Christian education experience or background do the persons that lead these particular programs have?
17. In what ways do these persons demonstrate awareness, respect, and understanding of local beliefs and cultural practices in the leading of the programs mentioned in question 15?

General Instructions: The next group of questions will be relating to the United Methodist mission institution in your local community and any cooperative ministries that may or may not exist between the institution and your church.

18. Are participants of outreach ministry programs at the institution encouraged by staff to attend your church?

19. Are participants of outreach ministry programs ever discouraged by staff from attending the closest United Methodist church in the area? If so, why or why not?
20. Does the outreach ministry of this institution have any ongoing cooperative ministries with your United Methodist Church or any other United Methodist Church in this local community? If so, please describe them. If not at present, have there been cooperative ministries of any type in the past? If so, please describe them.
21. If no cooperative ministries with your United Methodist Church exist at present, why do you think this is the case? Have circumstances or events in the past led to this current situation? If so, please describe without using names of individuals involved.
22. In your opinion, what would be the advantages to having cooperative outreach ministries with the local United Methodist Church? What would be the disadvantages?
23. What do you see as the most important mission of your United Methodist Church today in this community?
24. Is there any way that the mission institution in this community could help the United Methodist Church be more effective in fulfilling your stated mission?
25. What steps would it take to realize your vision for cooperative ministry as stated in the answer to question 24?

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