

## ABSTRACT

### HOLISTIC CHRISTIAN FORMATION FOR ENDURING LEADERSHIP

by

R. Stephen Gober

During the last sixteen years, I have served as a missionary committed to leadership training in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica. Both informal observation and previous research demonstrate that finishing well in ministry represents a great challenge for those called to this vocation. Numerous leaders prematurely abandon their calling or find themselves disqualified to continue. One of the factors influencing desertion or removal from ministry is the absence of holistic Christian formation among believers and ministers within the Church.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of three five-day retreats on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of holistic Christian formation. The retreats that shaped the ministry intervention considered eight core values of Christian leadership, explored elements of emotional maturity in the life of the leader, and pursued the development of relationships that nurture maturity in Christ.

The findings of the research demonstrate a need for healing of past brokenness, an absence of vital spiritual friendships, and an opportunity to build on the current experience of the Methodist Seminary in Costa Rica to assist the students and pastors in processes of holistic Christian formation. The study also revealed the presence of mature, healthy leaders experiencing significant relationships, who can teach and mentor other leaders.

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FOR ENDURING LEADERSHIP

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by

Robert Stephen Gober

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

During the last twenty years, the Methodist Seminary of Costa Rica has produced graduates who have emerged as the key leaders in the life of the Methodist denomination. The growth in their local congregations and the recognition of their ministry by the governing bodies of the Church affirm the effectiveness of these leaders. However, ministry has always tested the faith and endurance of church leaders in both their personal and corporate lives. J. Robert Clinton's studies of leaders in the Bible, history, and North America reveal that 70 percent of leaders will finish poorly in ministry. They will do things such as lose their learning posture or lose their vibrant relationship with God or their Christian character (1). Percentages may vary in Costa Rica, yet the same challenges manifest themselves in the lives of pastors and leaders who grow stagnant or distant from God, leave ministry, and fall prey to immorality. In the face of these realities, the future of the church and its leadership is at risk.

Because I have served as a seminary professor and administrator for the Methodist Church of Costa Rica (MCCR) during the last fifteen years, I understand these risks on a personal level. In 1993, Bishop Dr. Luis Fernando Palomo invited me to become part of the seminary faculty. The first course that I taught in the seminary was on spiritual formation. A few months later, I taught a course on discipleship. My own training and experiences in discipleship had emphasized the importance of spiritual friendship and covenant relationship as a follower of Christ. However, while teaching these courses, I soon discovered that my students, the majority being male pastors,

resisted these practices. As I grew closer to my students, I learned that they did not trust one another to maintain confidentiality; therefore, they would not share their personal struggles and temptations, and they certainly would not confess personal sins.

Furthermore, the men would not reveal any sense of weakness or vulnerability to one another. I encountered situations in which those helping me with cultural transitions in Costa Rica would go so far as to discourage me from showing any indication of vulnerability as a leader. In light of my observations and experiences, I anticipated discovering a connection between the absence of trust and the unwillingness to acknowledge weakness and the experience of authentic community and spiritual friendship among Costa Ricans.

Leaders tend to isolate themselves in ministry, and the church faces the challenge of determining not only what creates the isolation among leaders but also what will prevent them from lapsing into it. Any adequate answer must point to connectedness to Christ and connectedness to his body. Outside a dynamic relationship with Christ, a person becomes vulnerable and susceptible to temptation, unbelief, and separation from the source of life. When people live their lives disconnected from the body of Christ, no one is available to encourage or lift them up when they struggle or fall. Authentic Christian community takes both the divine and human relationships seriously.

In order to keep connected, Scripture and church history offer numerous resources. The Christian tradition includes such essential elements as the Eucharist, abiding in Scripture, constant prayer, and worship. However, the contemporary church approaches these means of grace with highly individualistic tendencies, causing modern believers to understand and practice these disciplines separated from the body. In the

early Church, these practices shaped believers' lives and activities as a community. When the believers broke bread, received the Word, and prayed, they did so as a body. Christ-centered fellowship and authentic community became a reality through these shared practices (Acts). Today, the people of God need to return to the original spirit and dynamic life of community present in these practices.

Unfortunately, the church in Costa Rica has limited models of holistic Christian formation (HCF), and this deficit negatively affects the life of its leaders. In a recent article, Richard Foster addresses the challenges facing the church over the next thirty years. He reasons that the conversation on spiritual formation has revived, but believers still must "incarnate this reality into the daily experience of individual, congregational, and cultural life" (30). This challenge also extends to the Methodist Church of Costa Rica. Spiritual formation shapes parts of the leaders' conversations, and they share convictions concerning its importance. However, the reality of spiritual formation is still not incarnate in the lives of individual pastors, congregations, and the surrounding culture.

In order to resist these trends and unveil hope for the future, the Church must reflect on the causes of this great dilemma. As I listen to the stories of different Costa Rican leaders, their passionate spirituality, hunger for God, and commitment to family stand as great strengths. Nevertheless, the inability to become vulnerable and enter into an authentic relationship with other leaders creates isolation in life and ministry. Having heard many of their stories, I believe that these leaders need and long for the intimacy provided by spiritual friendships. Recognizing the realities faced by leaders in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica, I worked with them in developing strategies and

practices that would assist them in overcoming these challenges. Together we sought to develop the leadership lifestyle and relationships that would sustain them for a lifetime of ministry and faithfulness to God.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes among key leaders of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica who participated in a five-day retreat and two follow-up seminars on holistic Christian formation over a six-month period.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions serve as a compass and set the course of a study. They provide essential tools for investigation, writing, and evaluation of the results. The following three research questions helped to guide and evaluate this research project.

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

What were the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the key leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica prior to their participation in the five-day retreat?

#### **Research Question #2**

What cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes occurred in the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants following the intervention?

#### **Research Question #3**

What elements of the intervention most influenced the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants?



### **Definition of Terms**

The rich concepts of spiritual formation and discipleship have acquired narrow connotations that stir up images of programs instead of a way of life. I have chosen key words for this study that best convey the intended meaning as used throughout this project.

*Holistic Christian formation* refers to the process by which the body of Christ works together according to its gifts and ministries to build up all the members of the body as whole beings (integrating physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions) into the likeness of Christ. In this way the witness of the church becomes salt and light in its community. I have intentionally selected this expression in place of spiritual formation or discipleship because these terms have lost their meaning through overuse and misuse.

*Spiritual friendship* refers to a relationship between two or more Christians built on trust and confidentiality. Open sharing, vulnerability, and intentional support that encourage mutual growth in Christ characterize these relationships. For cultural and linguistic reasons in Costa Rica, I have adapted this concept from the term “holy friendships” used in *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* in which Bob Wells writes, “[Holy friendships] have a larger purpose beyond the friendship itself: they help point us toward God. Holy friendships are about truth telling, encouragement and accountability.”

### **Ministry Intervention**

In conjunction with the International Leadership Institute (ILI), I coordinated a five-day retreat to consider the practice of holistic Christian formation with an emphasis on spiritual friendships. The participants received a manual with outlines of the core

values and lectures presented during the retreat. The speakers encouraged integration and contextualization through strategically planned activities and small group discussions. In this way, the retreat design provided opportunities for cognitive growth and experiences in these practices. At eight-week intervals following the five-day retreat, Bishop Palomo and I led two overnight leadership seminars that provided the opportunity for additional experiences of learning, the mid-intervention focus group meeting, and the post-intervention questionnaire and focus group interview. District superintendents, key pastors, and ministry leaders of the MCCR received invitations to the retreat, creating a group of approximately thirty participants. However, only twenty leaders who met the study criterion completed questionnaires and participated in the focus groups as part of this research project during the fall of 2009.

The retreat and seminars formed part of a yearlong emphasis on holistic Christian discipleship in the Evangelical Methodist Church of Costa Rica. Bishop Palomo, Latin American leaders from ILI, and I led the retreat. The teaching sessions further developed the discipleship theme by considering principles of leadership, multiplication, and formation that laid foundations for the overarching theme, “Holistic Christian Formation: Practices and Relationships for Enduring Leadership.” A model of HCF from Acts 2 and the theological implications of the doctrine of the Trinity served as specific transcultural lenses for reflection during the retreat and follow-up seminars. Through the development of these themes, the retreat and seminars provided insights and experiences that led to renewed practices of HCF and spiritual friendship among the leaders of the church. In order to accomplish their goals, the retreat leaders employed relevant devotional reflections, teaching sessions, guided personal and small group activities, the focus group

interview, and recreational time. Through the seminars, the leaders received biblical and theological training to facilitate a process of guided discussions that applied new insights gained in the teaching sessions to personal life, relationships, and ministry.

The church and the seminary joined forces to promote the seminars that formed part of the initiative, and the events took place at the Methodist Center in Alajuela. The facilities granted access to an excellent setting for the celebration of this particular retreat. The center offered comfortable accommodations and generous meals for the large group of pastors and leaders. The chapel, terraces, green areas, and conference rooms afforded a variety of venues in which different activities occurred and the people dispersed during free times. The center provided adequate parking for those who arrived in cars, and public transportation made stops near the main entrance. Because this retreat offered leadership training and formed part of the discipleship initiative, the Methodist Seminary and MCCR covered the cost of room and board at the Methodist Center.

Through the yearlong initiative and this retreat with follow-up seminars, the Methodist Church in Costa Rica endeavored to do more than create a contextualized discipleship movement limited to the life of local congregations. The seminars sought to develop a perspective of HCF that encompassed the scriptural call for the Church to be missional. Eddie Gibbs writes about the nature of the missional church:

[A missional church] emphasizes an incarnational, servant approach and sees church not as a once-a-week gathering but as a community to which one belongs that relates to the whole of life. It is a community in which each person makes an active contribution, during gathered worship as well as dispersed service. These churches emphasize hospitality and are therefore small. They are not small because of their limited appeal but because they are committed to maintaining their values of community, accountability, and service, and to being reproducible on an exponential scale. (xiii)

This view of the missional church actively shaped the retreat, though it remained in the background. The church advanced toward an approach to HCF that flows out of a missional understanding of its calling and identity. These seminars endeavored to cultivate this vision by developing biblical practices that penetrated and surrounded every dimension of the life of the church, its leadership, and its involvement in its community.

### **Context**

The Methodist Church and the Methodist Seminary of Costa Rica, where I have served the last fifteen years as a missionary, provided the context for this study. Costa Rica is a Spanish-speaking country, and the majority of the leaders of the MCCR speak only Spanish. In October 1989, Dr. Palomo established the Evangelical Methodist Seminary of Costa Rica in response to the deficiency of trained leaders in the MCCR. Approximately thirty-five churches extended across the small nation; however, these congregations struggled to survive in the absence of adequate leadership. Only three ordained clergy served the Church at that time. Lay preachers and local pastors filled the pulpits and struggled to lead the small congregations. Dr. Palomo opened the seminary for all the lay preachers and local pastors to attend. During the next three years, twenty-five leaders came to the seminary each month for a week of training, while continuing to serve their local congregations. The ministry of the seminary and the ensuing leadership development marked a dynamic change of direction in the life of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica.

In the Costa Rican context, the approach of training leaders through intensive weeks of study represented an innovation that responded appropriately to contextual challenges and realities. The leaders had received no formal training and limited informal

training, yet the local congregations depended upon their presence and ministry. They needed on-the-job training. Furthermore, the economic realities of the country and families made a residential program unfeasible. The seminary emerged as an appropriate response to the specific needs of the MCCR and its pastors; nevertheless, it still operated according to many of the traditional forms and structures of the Church. Following the extant paradigm, the seminary provided training for usual expectations and responsibilities of pastors such as preaching, pastoral care, worship liturgy, counseling, and church administration.

I joined the team of leaders and professors at the seminary in August 1993. During the first ten years of my service with the seminary, it operated more like a movement than an institution. Programs and curriculum adapted to the changing needs of the pastors and local churches. The seminary worked in close relationship and conversation with local leaders, responding to their needs. A dynamic tension existed between meeting the concrete, immediate needs of pastors and fulfilling academic requirements. Generally, the seminary erred on the side of meeting the pressing needs of pastors. The seminary trained the participants in the study during this stage of its life. Because these leaders held deep appreciation and love for the seminary leadership team, the current intervention and research built on a strong, trusting relationship.

The seminary and leadership team of the MCCR recognize the importance of the emphasis on holistic discipleship, due to the changes occurring in Costa Rica. Living in Costa Rica during the last fifteen years, I have observed significant cultural changes. The family has acted as the society's controlling force, providing great stability in values, principles, and relationships (Biesanz and Biesanz 125, Foley and Cooke 76). Young

people still maintain many traditional values; however, they have become increasingly mobile, and their ties to their family and natal community increasingly become strained (Biesanz and Biesanz 167-72). Over the last decade, more members of the younger generation have moved away from their family roots in pursuit of better education, jobs, and opportunities. Relationships outside the context of family generally function at a more superficial level than domestic relationships. People tend to distrust nonfamily members, and men are especially individualistic. In light of new relational dynamics, the Costa Rican church and seminary must equip its leaders with both personal as well as ministerial resources to confront new challenges. Discipleship ministries can begin by capitalizing upon the strength of family relationships still present in the lives of most people.

Two cultural artifacts defy HCF's emphasis on relationships. First, the Catholic Church has traditionally played a dominant role in society, though that role has weakened. Endeavoring to maintain membership and its position of dominance, the Catholic Church has attacked the Protestant and evangelical churches (Escobar 583, 595). These assaults have created a divisive spirit between Catholic and Evangelical leaders that influences relationships of the congregants of both bodies. The Catholic Church and its leaders orchestrate many community-based activities, and evangelical Christians find themselves excluded from both the activities and the community. These prevailing attitudes create tremendous challenges for the unification of the Christian community in Latin America. This vast divide between Catholicism and Protestantism has also created division between family members participating in opposing traditions. Among evangelical Christians, negative reactions to certain practices such as confession, infant

baptism, and the celebration of significant events in the Christian calendar hinder HCF. These negative attitudes extend to the writings of the Church fathers and other elements of Christian heritage. The Protestant believers have surrendered these vital relationships and valuable traditions because they erroneously deem them as belonging solely to Catholicism. This anti-Catholic spirit creates a barrier for the consideration of many valuable resources for HCF.

The second artifact impedes spiritual friendships specifically among men. The predominance of *machismo* (comparable to an exaggerated male chauvinism) still shapes the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of men in Costa Rica. Randall S. Coleman writes concerning the *caudillo* leadership style exercised in Ecuador, which causes men to assume a place of absolute authority in their marriage, family, and leadership (38). This attitude also shapes a form of leadership where trust and vulnerability become liabilities. Coleman brings together thoughts on *caudillismo* described by Eugene A. Nida and a discussion on *machismo* by Jorge Adoum to establish the prevailing influence of *machismo* in the Ecuadorian society. He proposes that *machismo* acts as the source of the *caudillo* leadership style (Coleman 40-41; Nida 34; Adoum 202). The presence of *machismo* shapes many common views of leadership in both the church and society in Costa Rica. This attitude creates resistance among Costa Rican men in leadership toward expressing weakness or vulnerability. Positive changes toward collaborative leadership styles progressively reshape thought and life in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica, yet the resistance still negatively influences relationships among men.

## Methodology

This study developed according to a research design of mixed-methods triangulation. The design included a quantitative pre-intervention and post-intervention survey. Qualitative focus group interviews comprised another element of the design during a five-day retreat and in two follow-up seminars.

I used quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. First, I designed/adapted a participant survey for the pre- and post-intervention quantitative evaluations. Second, I developed three sets of questions for guided focus group interviews during the five-day retreat and follow-up seminars. The sets provided pre-, mid-, and post-intervention data.

The focus group reflections not only served research purposes, but they formed part of the pedagogical experience by stimulating dialogue and imagination among the leaders. The leaders processed feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, which enabled them to discern how to apply the truths learned and how to engage the communities where God has placed them. David L. Morgan identifies three fundamental strengths of qualitative research: exploration and discovery, context and depth, and interpretation (*Focus Group Guidebook* 12). The focus groups capitalized upon these strengths and provided particular benefits in the retreat and seminars. Because the Costa Rican leaders live embedded in their context, they needed to participate in the process of exploration and discovery, so that the outcomes might flow out of their settings. Morgan discusses the benefits of the focus group for this process:

In a lively group conversation, the participants will do the work of exploration and discovery.... [T]hey will not only investigate issues of context and depth but will also generate their own interpretations of the topics that come up in their discussions. (12)



Since the leaders participated in the process of interpreting the obstacles and barriers to effective HCF, they achieved a deeper understanding of the challenges faced in life and ministry. The needed paradigm shift began as they wrestled to understand and apply the theological truths and biblical narrative within their context. The groups participated in the genesis of a new ecclesiology and missional understanding of the MCCR.

The time for rest, relaxation, and relational sharing represented another important dynamic of the retreat. The pastors and leaders required time to assimilate the new perspectives and values into their own lives and context. The focused reflection groups provided a formal setting to initiate this process. The times of relaxation allowed the participants to discuss issues in their communities informally or to seek time alone to reflect on the activities of the day prayerfully.

### **Participants**

Though the retreat hosted a group of approximately thirty leaders, the research project participants were a selected sample of sixteen key leaders. Due to historic and cultural factors, only men formed the pool of Methodist pastors available for selection. Bishop Dr. Palomo helped me identify the leaders who met the criterion of the study. The selected participants shared the following characteristics:

- They held ordination as elders of the MCCR.
- They graduated from the Evangelical Methodist Seminary.
- They served the church for ten years or more.
- They held positions of leadership in the conference or their district.
- They participated in a leadership development program with the bishop.
- They attended a seminar on discipleship in January 2009.

These leaders are native Costa Ricans and married with children. The maturity of the group's leadership emerges from both life and ministry experiences since the median age of the group members is forty-five. This shared experience had created a preexisting camaraderie and a culture of team leadership. The research intervention built on the existing relationships in order to strengthen the practices of HCF and consider the issues of trust and confidentiality among leaders as observed in spiritual friendships.

### **Instrumentation**

A pre-intervention questionnaire was administered on the first day of the five-day retreat to establish the baseline for comparison purposes. Also, on the first day of the retreat, I divided the participants into groups of eight to reflect on the pre-intervention focus group questions. The focus group sessions endeavored (1) to evaluate dynamics of the retreat, (2) to develop contextual action steps, and (3) to measure initial reactions of the participants in their knowledge and attitudes toward HCF. Eight weeks after the retreat, the participants gathered for the first follow-up seminar, and I facilitated an intermediate focus group to evaluate cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes among the participants. Then, eight weeks after the first follow-up seminar retreat, the participants met a final time for follow-up training. The administration of the post-intervention questionnaire occurred 28 January 2010 during a servant leadership retreat. On 26 January 2010, the leaders also participated in a final focus group conversation to discuss changes in their practices of HCF.

### **Variables**

The independent variables active in this study were the five-day retreat with teaching and guided dynamics and two follow-up seminars. The dependent variables

were the changed understanding, feelings, and practices of the participants following their participation in the intervention. The anticipated intervening variables included (1) greater cultural resistance than expected, (2) a loss of participants, (3) weather, (4) preconceived notions or expectations for the retreat based upon past experiences, and (5) cues discovered in the administration of the first questionnaire that influenced subsequent input.

### **Data Collection**

I administered and collected the pre-intervention questionnaires during the first session of the retreat. On the first evening of the retreat, I met separately with the eight-member focus groups to discuss the prescribed questions, and I recorded in video/audio format the data they shared during the session. The first follow-up seminar provided the opportunity to collect data from a second focus group interview. The session occurred on the first day of the seminar, and it was recorded in video/audio format. During the final seminar retreat, I administered and collected the post-intervention questionnaire at the beginning of the event. The administration and recording of the final focus group interview proceeded according to the same dynamics of the previous sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

As the body of information grew, I organized data around the major themes of cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in the practices of HCF. I entered the quantitative data into a spreadsheet and organized the qualitative data transcripts in a word processor. I evaluated the completed questionnaires and used narrative analysis of focus group dialogues to determine how individuals changed. Then I evaluated potential

triangulation between individual and focus group changes. Ultimately, I considered the general impact of the retreat upon the participants.

### **Generalizability**

The study provided insights regarding the effective implementation of three five-day retreats that served to initiate cognitive, affective, and behavioral change in the lives of key leaders. Changes in the lives of the leaders stand as significant steps in their journey toward spiritual maturity and establish the need to implement the retreat model for other leaders and pastors. Recognizing that similar retreats have operated during the last twenty years in the United States, which studies have proven to be successful, I believe the current research builds upon this body of knowledge (see Hofecker; Wesley). The experience in Costa Rica demonstrates the generalizability of the principles and traditional practices of Christian formation across cultures when appropriate steps are taken to contextualize them.

### **Theological Foundation**

Scripture provides insights into the resources and practices vital to Christian formation. These resources and practices benefit leaders so that they might finish well in life and ministry. The book of Matthew records how Jesus revealed the heart of the Christian's life and ministry. When the lawyer interrogated Jesus concerning the greatest commandment, the Lord responded by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39, NRSV). In Jesus' response, he established the call for a holistic love of God that includes heart, soul, and mind. Kimberly Winston affirms the importance of this

first commandment when she writes, “Advocates of spiritual practices say that ignoring this commandment results in an incomplete experience of God, which should be one of the whole person, heart, soul and mind.” Winston also suggests that the writings of Paul on allowing the Holy Spirit into the life of the believer and giving him freedom to move stands as the ultimate goal of spiritual formation and provides the theological cornerstone for the spiritual practices.

The second commandment given by Jesus will naturally flow out of the fullness of a person’s holistic experience of God. To the first commandment, Jesus immediately adds the vital dynamic of love for one’s neighbor. He calls his disciples to love God holistically and to love their neighbor. This call clearly involves loving God with the entire being: spirit, mind, and body. It also means that community, loving one’s neighbor, emerges as a central piece to an obedient life in Christ. The authors of the New Testament continue to develop this theme. Paul teaches that every believer forms part of the body of Christ, and James exhorts believers to confess personal sins one to another.

The author of Hebrews adds the following pertinent exhortation:

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (3:12-13)

These teachings describe and prescribe authentic relationships of mutual accountability, encouragement, and trust that disciples of Jesus should experience. These relationships form a vital part of the life of every believer, yet they hold a particular significance in the life of a leader. Leaders who fail to develop holy friendships damage the congregations they serve. However, when they nurture such friendships, not only will they themselves benefit, but the whole body will share in the gain as well. Kyle Childress states,

“Biblically, health is salvation and/or shalom, which in our group, as in the church, now has a concreteness that previously was abstract.... Salvation and friendship are connected” (qtd. in Wells).

In Christian history and tradition, the people of God discovered the benefits reaped from the regular use of rules and practices for spiritual growth. The church and seminaries teach classic Christian disciplines as means of grace that will strengthen the inner person; however, they often only focus on individualistic practices and the spiritual dimension of the person, failing to communicate a holistic view of the person and life in Christ. Nonetheless, in the contemplative tradition, rules of life and spiritual practices pursue holistic Christian formation. *The rule of Saint Benedict* provides particularly helpful insights as it extends a call to “stability, *conversatio*, and obedience” (Taylor 15). These foundational commitments embody a holistic view of Christian living in which one offers all of one’s life in obedience to God, following Christ in the context of community. A return to the practice of life in Christ as seen in Scripture and Christian history affords a hopeful response to the church for today.

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 presents an examination of the literature on the subjects of the classic practices of Christian formation in the early Church; the theological implications of the nature of the Trinity in Christian formation; the formative processes undergirding effective, holistic Christian formation; and a consideration of cultural contextualization issues in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica. Chapter 3 outlines in detail the methodology used in conducting the study. Chapter 4 examines the collected data, and Chapter 5 assesses and interprets the data.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The Methodist Church in Costa Rica has demonstrated clear signs of transformation and growth during the last two decades. The Methodist seminary has provided trained individuals to pastor, teach, and lead at various levels in the denomination. However, the Church still faces a tremendous challenge. Informal observation reveals superficial transformation in the lives of believers and many leaders who fail to finish well in ministry. These troubles demand attention to enable the leaders of the church to continue in the ministries of their calling.

The problems facing the church and its leadership emerge from living out of the wrong story. As the church grew into an institution, the structures and programs that facilitated initial growth and stability became the ends instead of the means to achieving kingdom purposes. Following Enlightenment thought patterns, the pursuit of knowledge and right doctrine replaced transformational processes of disciple making. These structures and programs produced inadequate results because the system achieved the wrong ends according to its design. Emerging church leaders share the conviction that the church must change how it does things in order to reach the contemporary world (Lewis and Cordeiro 107; Hirsch 15-17; Rasmus). In a recent personal conversation, a young Christian leader shared his struggles with theological education and “church as usual,” which fail to respond to the challenges of his life and ministry. He cried out for fresh biblical authentic approaches to Christian faith and formation.

In order for the MCCR to hear this cry and develop culturally appropriate processes rooted in solid biblical foundations, a paradigm shift needed to occur. This new paradigm would pursue a holistic approach to Christian formation, ministering to the whole person—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically. It would also involve transformational processes of radical discipleship, which effectively shape the life of contemporary believers. Therefore, to facilitate this process, I coordinated a retreat and a follow-up seminar on holistic Christian formation, focusing on spiritual friendships and to evaluate its impact on the lives of the participating leaders.

### **The Biblical and Theological Foundations of HCF**

The leaders in the MCCR hold a high view of Scripture’s authority and inspiration; therefore, a convincing view of HCF should flow out of the biblical text. A strategic passage providing key insights on HCF appears in Acts 2. In this text, the essential foundations of the early Church come into view. Too many contemporary Christians, even Christian leaders, build their Christian lives on shaky foundations, or they fail to build adequate supporting structures into their lives once they discover the sure foundation: Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37-47 provides a biblical example of a well-built Christian life:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who



believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This passage presents the image of a young church experiencing radical individual and corporate transformation that produces exponential growth in numbers. Because of the growth, changes, and challenges experienced in the life of the early Church, the testimony of the early Church appropriately calls modern leaders and believers in Costa Rica to consider the principles and practices presented here that undergird this dynamic change and increase.

First, the passage reveals that the believers devoted themselves to four essential practices. Devotion represents a dominant attitude in their lives. It communicates a level of commitment that endures. These disciplines were not occasional occurrences; rather, they constantly shaped the lives of the early believers (Wall 71). This persistence did not materialize from their efforts; rather, a deeper transformation of their hearts created this motivation and earnest dedication. Cantalamessa reflects on the thoughts of Augustine concerning the necessary transformation of the human heart:

To be able to achieve all of this, our human free will is not enough. An ascetic, disciplined desire to purify ourselves of our passions will not get us there, and neither will knowledge of the truth suffice nor the wisdom to do what is right. Our very will itself needs to be transformed, the entire orientation of the depths of the human heart turned around. Only the Holy Spirit can achieve this, and the Spirit does it by awakening the love of God in us and with it arousing the desire to obey God in all things. (263)

The first believers experienced this transformation through the Word of the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit as beautifully described by Raniero Cantalamessa. Acts 1:8 communicates the key to the book: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes

upon you.” Luke emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the empowering agent of the Church’s witness (Hays 193). Therefore, the coming of the Holy Spirit produces a transformation in the heart and nature of the disciples so they can be witnesses of Jesus. The infilling of the Holy Spirit exists as an essential element in Christian living. His ministry in the life of the disciples, in Peter specifically, and in the multitude manifests the divine workings of God. Furthermore, the power of the gospel to move across religious, social, ethnic, and cultural barriers demonstrates what only God can accomplish. Recognizing and experiencing the overwhelming presence and work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marks the first step of living into a life of holistic Christian formation as observed in the life of the early Church.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter’s inspired sermon pierced the hearts of the multitude, and they asked, “‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:37-38). The act of repentance initiated their life-changing relationship with God. Then the work of the Holy Spirit generated the earnest desire for them to commit themselves to the essential practices described in Acts 2:42 and emerging from the activity of God, the sure foundation of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. This passage provides the earliest description of Christian worship in the corporate gatherings of the early Church (Webber 55). These exercises, experienced both individually and corporately, shaped the life, growth, and maturity of the early Church. Jaroslav Pelikan believes that this verse not only offers a description of the early Church, but it also provides a prescription for the life of the Church in any age (58). According to

these scholars, this verse reveals the best practices of the people of God, and specifically the Methodist Church of Costa Rica, for all ages.

Luke presents the teaching of the Apostles as the first practice in this essential list. According to Matthew, part of Jesus' final mandate calls for his disciples to go and make other disciples by "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). This verse indicates that the apostles' teaching involved communicating what they received from Jesus. The teaching of Jesus consistently refers to the Law and prophets, which today make up the Old Testament. Jesus also establishes that his words come from the Father (John 14:24). These words spoken by Jesus provide the primary material for the formation of the New Testament. Furthermore, as Jesus taught the twelve disciples in a life-changing fashion, he called them to teach others to obey. The lessons always call for obedience, the application of truth.

The new disciples committed their lives to the life and teaching of Jesus. They recognized that Jesus embodies all truth and stands as the Word incarnate. Jesus modeled the life that pleases God. In order to follow Jesus' example, the Church and every believer still receive the call to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles—the Word of God. In the development of HCF, first, the Methodist Church of Costa Rica committed itself to the Bible, the primary authoritative source of the apostles' teaching. The history, tradition, and experiences of the Church offer needed assistance for proper understanding of biblical truth. In authentic discipleship, right understanding produces a commitment to the truth, which believers will incarnate in real-life situations.

Next, Luke speaks of devotion to the apostles' fellowship. Not all versions of the Bible maintain the direct possessive link between the apostles and fellowship;

nonetheless, this link provides an invaluable insight into the nature of fellowship consistently practiced by the early believers. The Apostle John provides insight into the nature of the fellowship that pertained to the apostles in 1 John 1:3. He writes, “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” According to John, this fellowship involved the mutual connectedness shared among the believers as well as the divine connection to the Father and the Son.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an inspired theologian, writer, and prisoner of war succinctly states, “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this” (21). This perspective identifies a vital element of the life and practices of the Church in Acts. Jesus Christ stands at the center of the community. Therefore, the body of believers devoted themselves to a dynamic relationship with God and with one another in Christ. That relationship with God shaped their relationships with one another, and their relationships with one another influenced their relationship with God. Bonhoeffer recognizes that God lays the only sure foundation for the fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ (28). The leaders in Costa Rica participated in such a fellowship as a gift from God because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Another important element of the apostles’ teaching and fellowship is the role that Christian fellowship assumes in sustaining faith. Bonhoeffer recognizes, “The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth” (23). This thought stands on the principle of mutual exhortation presented in Hebrews 3:12-14, which believers require, and acts as a key

deterrent to falling into unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin. Unfortunately, leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica express feelings of isolation in the midst of the challenges and struggles of ministry. Through their confessions, they demonstrate their deep need for another Christian who can offer words of encouragement and exhortation. Certainly, the practice of fellowship with God and other believers exemplifies another strong column needed in the lives of the church leaders in Costa Rica, and this connection will add an essential layer of strength and resistance to their lives and ministries.

Building upon the devotion to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, Luke moves to consider the third core practice. The believers celebrated their fellowship as the body of Christ as they shared in the breaking of bread. This practice commonly refers to sharing a meal together, indicating intimate fellowship. However, some scholars also believe that it refers to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Pelikan 58). The context emphasizes the place of fellowship, and the breaking of bread stood as a powerful cultural expression of intimate fellowship among the Jewish people. In Costa Rica, the sharing of a meal represents a similar relational intimacy, so this dimension of the context holds particular relevance for our leaders. However, as Robert E. Webber demonstrates, "Because the act of breaking bread is structurally separated from fellowship, and the term *breaking bread* [original emphasis] was used for Jewish meals, one could suggest that Christians used the term to refer to the Holy Bread of Christian Communion" (58-59). This use would indicate a remembrance of the Last Supper, which called for the memory of the Lord's Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This practice represented one of the highest forms of worship in the early Church and served to generate and sustain life, faith, and passion for the Lord among the early believers. Miraslov Volf sees the Lord's

Supper as a summary of Christian life because it celebrates God's self-giving love for humanity and the hope of reconciliation between God and his redeemed people (*Exclusion* 249). Volf's insight reveals how deeply the fellowship with God and with one another interweave in the breaking of bread. Therefore, the best interpretation recognizes both realities. This breaking of bread concretely expresses the centrality of Jesus Christ in the believers' lives in communion with God and one another, and it encourages another essential practice in the life of the community of believers and for the leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica.

Prayer emerges as the final practice presented by Luke. According to William H. Willimon, the prayers refer to the Jewish hours of prayer (*Acts* 41). This insight reveals that the prayers wove throughout the life and activities of the disciples because they paused for times of prayer about every three hours. The Apostle Paul further expands this commitment to prayer by exhorting the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 *Thess.* 5:17). The practice of the daily office provides a modern-day example of weaving prayer throughout the day, demonstrating the believer's dependence and focus on Jesus Christ. Pausing for focused moments of prayer enhances the exercise of constant prayer.

The significance of these practices for the leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica cannot be overstated. The immediate context demonstrates the life-transforming impact and essential nature of these disciplines for the corporate and individual life of the community of believers. However, the following chapters of Acts reveal the challenge of finishing well in life and ministry. Luke tells of the deception, disobedience, and death of Ananias and Sapphira and the strife between the Hebrews and Hellenists (*Acts* 5:1-10; 6:1). His book even relates the heated discussion between Paul

and Barnabas with the Judaizers as well as Paul and Barnabas' separation (Acts 15:1-2, 36-41). Each of these incidents demonstrates a different dimension of the challenge of enduring leadership. Even in the church born of the Spirit and devoted to these essential practices for formation in Christ, struggles existed. The difficulty presented throughout the book of Acts highlights the need for all believers to live in relationship. Only then do they have someone to provide support, correction, and guidance for living faithfully. In spite of hardships, Paul offers a wonderful testimony of finishing well in his Christian witness and leadership. He writes, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). He recognizes the fight yet gives witness to his victory. The practices of holistic Christian formation will not eliminate the struggles of life and ministry for Christ. However, they play an essential role in the life of every leader in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica desiring to finish well.

The discussion of Acts 2 holds another insight that seldom receives adequate attention in the life and teaching of the Church. A model of Trinitarian life and ministry shapes these events and, therefore, sustains all holistic Christian formation. Each of the four practices and the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of growing in Christ demonstrate the relational dimension of HCF. The relationships present throughout the process bind the believer to the triune God and to other believers. The passage also displays the activity of the distinct persons of the Trinity. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 proclaims the work of God the Father in and through the person of Jesus. Then, Acts 2:37-41 demonstrates the crucial role of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, in the lives of the believers. Furthermore, the emphasis on the place of the apostles' teaching points directly to the living Word, the second person of the Trinity, as

the model and content of their teaching. Throughout Acts, the Spirit works to glorify Jesus who, in turn, glorifies the Father. The development of the role of the Trinity in Acts 2 as promoter, enabler, and sustainer of holistic Christian formation serves as a key transcultural element for introducing a contextualized approach to holistic Christian formation among Costa Rican leaders of the Methodist Church.

### **Practical Theology of HCF**

The appropriate theological underpinnings of holistic Christian formation, according to the model of the Trinity, rest on a clear understanding of the nature of theology. Thomas F. Torrance writes about the pivotal foundation presented in Scripture, “It is the Gospel of God’s revealing and saving acts in Jesus Christ that provides ... perspective for a formulation of the Christian Doctrine of God” (14). The Incarnation and saving work of Jesus stand at the heart of a proper understanding and approach to sound doctrine and to HCF. The pursuit of an adequate theology for Christian living demands that the quest be more than intellectual or academic. Volf confirms this view:

My contention is that at the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within the pursuit of this way of life. (“Theology” 247)

Holistic Christian formation involves a way of life. Therefore, the beliefs undergirding its practices ought to ground and develop themselves naturally in real life. In order for a practical theology of the Trinity to serve as a dynamic, life-giving model for HCF, it will need to connect with the joys, challenges, struggles, and authentic relationships of real people. Theological reflections will necessarily emerge from those individuals practicing the Christian faith. Scholars standing outside the pursuit of life in Christ do not have the necessary tools or experiential perspective to develop an applied Christian theology.



Therefore, a theology of HCF for Costa Rican leaders will ground itself in the corporate and individual life of believers as seen in Scripture and expressed in contemporary situations. Dorothy C. Bass writes concerning the Christian practices streaming from theological reflection:

Christian practices are patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ. Focusing on practices invites theological reflection on the ordinary, concrete activities of actual people—and also on the knowledge of God that shapes, infuses, and arises from these activities. Focusing on practices demands attentiveness to specific people doing specific things together within a specific frame of shared meaning. (3)

Bass expresses essential elements of holistic Christian formation, and she affirms the corporate nature of the Christian practices. Together, men and women follow Christ and live according to the example he provided through his Incarnation. The practices shaping their lives form part of a process that takes place over time. The Methodist Church and its leaders in Costa Rica should carefully avoid falling into the trap of viewing HCF as a program because programs have an established beginning and end. Though HCF will involve programs and events, it exists as a continuing process. As demonstrated, the practices serve as a response to God in light of knowing him in Jesus, the incarnate Word. The formative processes of the believer's life depend on God's love, grace, mercy, and activity toward humanity that open the doors to a relationship with the triune God. Finally, the emphasis of the practices involves specific people, concrete situations, and clearly defined activities. These elements serve to guide the process of developing an approach to HCF that connects to contemporary life and to the model of the Trinity as expressed in Scripture.

The Trinitarian approach to HCF in the Costa Rican context provides an invaluable alternative to traditional approaches to spiritual formation and Christian discipleship because the Trinity transcends place, time, and culture. Significant cultural barriers have diminished the impact that discipleship ministries have attained in the life of the MCCR. Some of the difficulties arise because the models were culturally biased and inadequately contextualized; however, in other areas Costa Rican cultural realities stand contrary to biblical principles. For example, the sinful attitudes and practices associated with *machismo* and *caudillismo* (a dictatorial approach to leadership) require transformation.

Though these cultural obstacles exist, the Costa Rican people offer significant strengths that serve as points of entry for HCF. The people in general are social, kind, and open to friendship. The leaders of the MCCR share a deep commitment to the Word of God as well as a passionate faith. Therefore, a biblical, Trinitarian approach to HCF will open a dialogue that cultivates fresh perspectives and priorities. The theological foundations taught and experienced during the retreat engaged national leaders in the process of encouraging biblical confrontation of cultural sins where necessary.

### **Individualism versus Personhood**

The way in which the people of a given culture understand the emergence of personhood plays a vital role in HCF. In some cultures, people believe that personhood emerges out of relationships, and relationships exist prior to and give shape to the person. A person's relationship to and interaction with others determines his or her personhood. This view stands in contrast to the Western conception of personhood as substantive and prior to relationships and significantly influences the sharing and receiving of the Gospel

(Rynkiewich 165-66). Cross-cultural change agents need to recognize and understand the culture that shaped their understanding of personhood as well as the views of the culture in which they serve.

Individualism exists as a dominant attitude in Western societies that shaped the thoughts and ministries of North American missionaries who served in Costa Rica. Though individualism exists in Costa Rica, it has particular roots and expressions. Personhood first emerges in relation to the family and other significant relationships. The family name can open or close doors for a person in their community. However, Elizabeth E. Brusco observes, “As economic activity becomes more individualistically oriented, a family identification, especially for men whose labor becomes almost entirely extra-domestically situated, is undermined” (90). This growing individualism among Costa Ricans complicates relationships and the pursuit of a Trinitarian approach to HCF. In addition to the challenges presented by changes in economic activity, Stephen Seamands suggests that following Augustine’s *Confessions* a highly introspective approach to knowing God and being Christian emerged. This approach created a distorted view of human personhood that viewed persons as separate instead of relational selves (*Ministry* 33).

The missionary movement arrived in Costa Rica through two different sources with distinct approaches of proselytizing or evangelizing the people. The first European explorers and settlers came from Spain in the mid-1800s, bringing Catholicism. The Catholic Church allied itself with the government and gained a central place in Costa Rica’s communities. Through syncretistic practices, it soon dominated religious life and liturgy. Then, in the early 1900s, Protestant missionaries began to enter the country. The

Protestants emphasized personal conversion that involved an encounter with Jesus, an awareness of the forgiveness of sins, and a new moral life. These principles brought a fresh dynamic to the Christian faith and practice of Costa Rican converts, but they also tended to uproot people from their natural communities and produced growing individualism, participation in voluntaristic communities, and increasing subjectivity among Costa Ricans (Bonino 60-61). These results developed from the failure to maintain an emphasis on personal conversion within the dynamic of biblical community. Both religious traditions imported distinct liturgies and practices, yet they shared an introspective approach to knowing God.

Religiously reinforced individualism creates roadblocks to discovering many of the truths that creation and everyday life teach humans, especially believers. Dennis F. Kinlaw discusses the importance of discovering the symbols present in everyday life that give witness to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He observes that the church approaches Scriptures with a narrow paradigm built upon an inadequate understanding of personhood (104). The leaders of the MCCR operate with such a paradigm and need a reorientation of their mind-set. By considering the nature of the triune God and the personhood of Jesus, the retreat facilitators endeavored to move the Costa Rican leaders toward a biblical understanding of personhood. Kinlaw observes, “[The] concern for personhood is somewhat foreign territory for modern and postmodern thinkers. The reason is that our interest has been not with the *person* [original emphasis] but with the *self* [original emphasis]” (75). This focus on self plays a central part in Costa Rican individualism.

## Personhood in Relationship

In contrast to the reigning individualism among congregations of the MCCR, Jesus' personhood provides a model for understanding and developing the personhood of every believer. As the incarnate Word of God, he replaces the fallen Adam and becomes the new and perfect Adam. He provides the ideal example of human personhood. Kinlaw identifies the following key elements of personhood as understood through Jesus:

- Jesus had a clear consciousness of his own identity as the Son (79);
- Human persons never exist outside of the context of relationships (80);
- Jesus lived in a relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit (82);
- The triune God created human persons to live in openness (94-95); and,
- The triune God created humans to relate to others in trusting love (98).

These insights flow from a clear understanding of the person of Jesus and the biblical principles of personhood emulated by him. They provide the starting point to determine how believers and leaders, immersed in contemporary Costa Rican society and church, can transition toward a new-old paradigm of the meaning of being a follower of Jesus and a person created in the image of the triune God.

Like Jesus, believers always live in reciprocal relationships. All believers become a part of the Christian community, the body of Christ, when they believe in Jesus; however, they may choose to overlook, ignore, or neglect this reality in their experience. One of the primary goals of HCF pursued during the retreat involved sharing in activities that caused the participants to discover the community that already existed. A biblical understanding of humanity requires that relationships form an integral part of human

personhood (Kinlaw 80). This belief should form a foundational part of every leader's and believer's identity because the triune God created humans in his own image.

The Trinity also defines the nature of these relationships. God the Father, Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit exist in reciprocal relationships. Historically, the term *perichoresis* defines the relationships within the Trinity. Seeking to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son presented in John 14:11, John of Damascus used this term to refer to the way in which each member indwelt the other two members (82-83). Though the members of the divine Trinity indwell one another, they maintain their distinctiveness in the midst of their communion. Torrance explains, "They have their being in each other and reciprocally contain one another, without any coalescing or commingling with one another and yet without any separation from the other for they are completely equal and identical in Deity and Power" (170). This communion and this reciprocal relationship stand as the model for human personhood.

The human experience will face the challenges of imperfections; however, the model stands as an unchanging point of reference. Kinlaw appropriately adds that Jesus stands as the model of perfected humanity; therefore, he demonstrates that *reciprocal relationships* form a vital element of being human (83). When applied to the practices of HCF, the reciprocal nature of the Trinitarian relationships should shape the fellowship of the believer with God and with other believers.

The nature of the relationships modeled by Jesus illustrates intimate interaction that extends beyond the common contemporary association of persons. Through the life of Jesus, the will of the triune God for relationships becomes apparent. He created human persons to *live in openness*. This openness involves both: an "other-orientedness" that

enables humans to see beyond themselves and the “inner necessity to relate to the world beyond the self” that exists in every person (Kinlaw 94-95). Living according to God’s purpose involves a life of openness that recognizes the need within each person to connect with others and the possibility of acting for the sake of another. Seamands writes about the God-given ability to enter into relationships:

As human beings created in God’s image, we have been endowed with a general capacity to open ourselves to others. Without it, human relationships would not exist. Our most joyful and fulfilling experiences of intimacy in marriage, family and friendships are bound up in knowing and being known by them. (*Ministry* 149)

The presence of Christ in the life of the believer brings reconciliation with God and with other people. The follower of Christ discovers a new dimension of relationships shaped by openness and a growing capacity to participate in a knowing relationship. These relationships will commonly find expression through spiritual friendships and covenant relationships.

The final element discovered in the Incarnation of Jesus reveals that the triune God created humans *to relate to others in trusting love* (Kinlaw 98). This particular element will stretch the Costa Rican leaders to consider how they will overcome the barriers of *machismo* and the common failure to maintain confidentiality. These particular barriers have undermined previous attempts at creating relationships of trust. Past failures reinforce the present difficulties and demand serious reflection, prayer, and intentionality in order to lead a process of successful and enduring HCF. Recognizing the challenges that lay ahead in the process of HCF, especially in forming spiritual friendships, the following statement from Kinlaw can serve as an opening challenge to grow and extend as leaders and whole persons:

Since Jesus is the original pattern—the prototype, for the human person—who demonstrates what a normal and perfect person is, it is safe to say that to be a person, even a perfect person, is to be *incomplete* [original emphasis], that no person is ever complete in himself or herself. The persons completeness lies in an other[sic]. The Son is not complete in himself. He draws life from the Father and lives life to please his Father. (97)

This focus on Jesus reminds the believer that the pattern for HCF flows from the person of Jesus and his life in the Trinity. Just as Jesus, the perfect human, finds completeness in relationship, all believers discover their completeness only in relationship. Therefore, in the face of tremendous cultural challenges, the Costa Rican leaders must look to Jesus and allow him to transform the depths of their being and experiences.

These relationships involve more than learning to connect with other believers. Scripture invites the disciples of Jesus to participate in the Trinitarian relationship. Seamands discusses the invitation for every follower of Jesus to enter into this circle of divine relationship. He writes, “The mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity not only leads to an exchanged life and ministry as Christ abides in us and we abide in him; it also leads to an exchanged life with others” (*Ministry* 149). The mutual indwelling of the Trinity in and through the believer leads to a mutually connected life with other believers. This interconnectedness stands as a primary ingredient in the fellowship of the church in Acts. The Costa Rican leaders will benefit from this experience and its propagation.

The pastors of the MCCR need biblical fellowship as modeled in the life of Jesus and the early Church. Seamands considers the *koinonia* of the Church to involve a dynamic relationship with others as well as with the Trinity. This *koinonia* “implies an intensely close relationship with one another beyond mere human camaraderie” (*Ministry*



39). The triune God demonstrates diversity in unity, and the Church needs to do likewise. “Equality, intimacy, submission and deference ought to characterize relationships in the Christian community as well” (150). Different gifts, personalities, and cultural backgrounds form part of the diversity of the people of God, but the unity of purpose and faith flow from the nature of God. The Church discovers its unity in the work of God as expressed by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (4:4-6)

Clearly, unity for the Costa Rican leaders comes from God, and biblical *koinonia* only emerges in the life of the Church through the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### **Personal Wholeness**

At Eaton Rapids Camp Meeting in July 1989, John Oswalt preached of God’s love and the greatest gift to every person, which he defined as the gift of oneself. The discovery of this gift and the experience of God’s deep love transform all other relationships. Cantalamessa describes a deeper sense of personal wholeness that emerges out of the self-acceptance found in Christ:

This is the most beautiful moment of any creature’s life: to know that one is loved, personally, by God, to feel oneself lifted to the bosom of the Trinity and to find oneself in the flood of love that flows between the Father and the Son, enfolded in their love, sharing their passionate love for the world. (145)

The Lord speaks of his love through his Word, and he gives the witness of his Spirit to the human spirit. The wholeness of the person produced by knowing and experiencing God’s love dynamically affects authentic relationships and community in Christ. Therefore, the leadership retreat utilized the existing community among the pastors to

foment opportunities for the participants to enter into this experience, which formed a vital part of their journey. Only as they journeyed toward personal wholeness could they participate in healthy spiritual friendships.

The Costa Rican leaders need first to know the deep love and gracious acceptance of God before attempting to minister to others. God's love and acceptance encompasses the whole person. David P. Koppel rightly states, "Only by seeing persons as entire entities, whole creatures, will people be able to grow in the way in which they are meant, in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and humanity" (83-84). Experiencing the fullness of God's acceptance prepares individuals to discover their identity in Christ and to hear Christ's call. These formative experiences affirm that life and ministry begin with relationship. One's relationship with God gives birth to all ministries, and all ministries extend to others in relationship. Seamands writes, "Like the persons of the Trinity, human selves in proper relationships, rooted in love and characterized by dynamic interdependence, are never separate from one another nor subsumed by one another" (*Ministry* 41). Biblical relationships consistently involve respect for the personhood of the individual and the connectedness of the individual to the body of believers. True personhood and wholeness always include community.

The Costa Rican leaders generally do not experience the wholeness and dynamic relationships available to and necessary for their lives and ministries. They often live disconnected from significant relationships and meaningful small group support.

Seamands writes about leaders who lack connections to an intimate small group:

Consequently, they have no place to go when they are weak, vulnerable or discouraged. They have no brothers or sisters in Christ with whom they can honestly bare their own soul, share their struggles, be challenged and held accountable, be supported and prayed for. (*Ministry* 45)

Leadership in the context of the church presents particular challenges for pastors. Their congregations frequently look to them as models, and I have observed that the traditional Latin American *caudillo* leadership style demands that they assume a position of strength and control (cf. Coleman 7). The common expectation that the leaders stand above those whom they lead isolates them from the relationships that serve to sustain an enduring life of ministry.

As a faculty member, I have observed that Costa Rican pastors share with North American seminary professors their feelings of isolation. Therefore, they need help intentionally pursuing the mutual intimate relationships that will guard and sustain their lives in Christ and ministry for him. The retreat considered historical models that have provided these relationships through spiritual friendships, small group involvement such as John Wesley's bands, covenant relationships, and healthy family relationships. Opportunities for reflection and dialogue in small groups generated a forum for contextualization and allowed for community building among the leaders. Living in such relationships requires intentionality in any context, especially in the life of the leader.

### **Relationships and Community That Undergird HCF**

The apostles' fellowship stands as one of the pillars in the discussion of Acts 2 as a model of HCF. The practice of this fellowship stands as a primary challenge among the Costa Rican leaders. Seminary faculty members observe that pastors fail to experience open disclosure with more mature leaders within the MCCR because they fear that such openness might jeopardize their ministerial career. Also, the concerns surrounding clergy-laity friendships tend to create distance between clergy and the members of their congregations. However, writing on behalf of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

colloquium, Wells says, “[F]riendships between clergy and laity pose special challenges, but . . . those are not insurmountable.” Even though these problems exist, the ministry intervention endeavored to neutralize their power and to prevent the isolation of church leaders.

The previous reflections on practical theology also establish an important link among personhood, relationships, and the Trinity. The relationships that undergird HCF involve personal wholeness, a bond to the triune God, and participation in the fellowship of believers. The leader must never fall into the trap of focusing exclusively on personal wholeness, the Divine relationship, or human fellowship; rather, the relationship with God and his work in the body of believers creates the wholeness, community, and health among individuals that enable them to enter into spiritual friendships and authentic community.

The absolute necessity of the leader’s connectedness to the triune God indicates the urgency of always abiding in relationship with God. Not only do the formative events in the journey play an imperative role, an ongoing bond with the triune God is equally necessary. Seamands declares, “Without regular experiences of the Father’s embrace, we forget whose we are and our focus shifts from relationship to work. Working for God becomes more important than loving God” (*Ministry* 67). As powerful as one’s concrete experiences of God’s love and grace might be, the real risk of losing focus on the heart of life and ministry never dissipates.

The regular use of classical Christian disciplines is indispensable, yet these practices prove insufficient in the absence of authentic community and spiritual friendships. The emphasis easily shifts to doing ministry while neglecting relationship.

The devotional reflections, teaching sessions, and small group activities of the retreat provided opportunities for renewed experiences of God's love as a response to the inertia that weakens the relationships supporting HCF. John R. Morley, Jr. emphasizes the vital place of relationships:

In being made in God's image, the Three existing in Oneness, each person has within them a desire for relational fulfillment that can only be met through living in community with others. This is why disciples cannot grow in Christ in utter isolation and aloneness.... Human beings were made to reflect God's character and live life together in community. (42)

As a reflection of God's image, every believer and every Christian leader needs to live in relationship with others. Life and maturation in Christ require both the practice of classical Christian disciplines and the *koinonia* offered by the body of believers. Together they facilitate ongoing and renewed encounters with God for the Costa Rican leaders.

This connection with God deepens and extends through human relationships. God, who is perfect in all ways, shapes the divine-human relationship, yet humans relate to one another as imperfect individuals. Their shared imperfections often lead to pain and suffering. Nonetheless, God can take pain and suffering and transform them into the means for growth and future ministry. In *Wounds that Heal*, Seamands writes of God's unique use of suffering:

We believe that God's solution to the problem of suffering and evil is not to eliminate it, nor to be insulated from it, but to participate in it and then, having participated in it, to transform it into his instrument for redeeming the world. (169)

Because of the existing barriers to spiritual friendships and to authentic community among individuals, this pain and suffering may occur in the relationships that the leaders pursue as part of their HCF. Often, the Costa Rican leaders seek deliverance from suffering failure to see that God can use it as an instrument to refine their lives and draw

them unto himself. However, in the midst of pain and suffering, relationship with God and persistent engagement with others assumes a prominent role in facilitating a healthy response.

The experiences, sufferings, and failures bring believers to an understanding of the essential place of Christian community and spiritual friendships in HCF. Christian fellowship flows naturally from one's acceptance by and participation in the Trinity. The Trinity first reveals the relational nature of personhood because the triune God exists as one in the communion of three persons. Seamands writes, "In the fellowship of the Trinity, self-giving and self-sacrifice equals self-fulfillment and unspeakable joy" (*Ministry* 81). Each person of the Trinity exists in such perfect unity with the others that the interest of the other always comes first. All followers of Christ receive the call to imitate this same attitude when Paul writes, "Love each other as brothers and sisters and honor others more than you do yourself" (Rom. 12:10). The Costa Rican leaders will enter into this dynamic fellowship through the practice of gracious self-acceptance. This experience enables the individual to accept the invitation into the open communion and fellowship of the Trinity. The mutual indwelling experienced in and with the Trinity brings one to comprehend that "[p]ersonhood is ... freedom *for* [original emphasis], not freedom from, another" (118). Participation in the mutual indwelling of the Trinity will enable leaders to encounter freedom from false self and brokenness, permitting the transformation of relationships and the creation of community.

Life in Christ entails becoming a part of the body of Christ. In the moment that a person believes in Christ, he or she enters into community (Seamands, *Ministry* 39). Unfortunately, the modern church in Westernized societies and in Costa Rica tends to

overlook this reality. The reigning individualism that exists in the church causes people to define themselves by their separation from others. However, Seamands clearly challenges this idea when he writes, “Taking our cue from divine personhood, we conclude that persons exist not separate from, but in relationship with, others” (*Wounds* 29). However, the failure to confront the reigning individualism has left the leaders and believers in churches with a pervading vacuum of significant relationships. Individual followers of Christ independently commit to serve a local church, participate in its programs, and enjoy its activities; yet they fail to experience *koinonia* in the life of this church. Unable to discover their divinely ordained personhood in relationship with others, they experience isolation or turn to Christian counselors, seeking succor. The deep longing of these souls reaches out for connection. Leaders such as Larry Crabb recognize that authentic Christian communities bring healing to disconnected souls (32). The appropriate cultivation of authentic community in the life of the church acts as an essential means of bringing wholeness to the people of God.

The Costa Rican Christian leaders will benefit not only from pursuing a dynamic experience of *koinonia* for their own lives, but they also serve others by cultivating opportunities that encourage the people who follow them to share in these intimate relationships. Seamands offers four aspects of ministry where leaders might promote and nurture *koinonia*: empathetic listening, intercessory prayer, team ministry, and marriage intimacy (*Ministry* 150-55). Pastors and leaders should integrate these particular practices into their own lives and ministries. Recognizing the challenges presented by contemporary, Western societies, the cultivation of these practices requires intentional effort.

In the context of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica, the ministries and processes that enrich and nurture relationships in and through each of these aspects of life together merit consideration. Small group ministries, prayer ministries, spiritual friendships, and marriage enrichment retreats or seminars provide opportunities for *koinonia*. However, Costa Rican leaders need to abandon the negative dimensions of *machismo* and *caudillismo* and remember Bonhoeffer's words: "In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon its being clear right from the beginning, *first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic reality* [original emphasis]" (26). The leaders of a ministry do not create brotherhood or community, but when necessary they need to discard dysfunctional approaches to leadership and strategically plan and create distinct opportunities that nourish the relationships and experience of God-given community in their lives and among the believers in the ministry settings they serve.

The nature of the *koinonia* shared among believers stands in contrast to the common view of relationships, which tends to focus on meeting the emotional needs of the ego. Individuals often seek significant relationships as a means to meeting felt needs in their lives. However, Scripture reveals a selfless approach to relationship. Even though relationships define human personhood, the Trinitarian model manifests an other-centered approach to experiencing community. Richard Hays communicates the radical nature of this orientation:

The community expresses and experiences the presence of the kingdom of God by participating in "the *koinonia* of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Jesus' death is consistently interpreted in the New Testament as an act of self-giving love, and the community is consistently called to take up the cross and follow in the way that his death defines. (197)



Community and *koinonia* in the lives of believers follow the example of Jesus. Real relationship involves self-giving love, servanthood, and sacrifice. Volf writes, “Indisputably, the self-giving love manifested on the cross and demanded by it lies at the core of the Christian faith” (*Exclusion* 25).

These attitudes will emerge in the lives of believers who have entered into the *perichoretic* relationship of the Trinity. Such attitudes will not flow from the unregenerate heart, and the practice of such attitudes will require nurture. Allen Verhey suggests in a private correspondence to Hays, “Christian discipleship involves the resocialization of the individual into the social patterns of a new community” (qtd. in Hays 204). The believer learns to live as a part of this other-centered community through the foundational practices of Word, fellowship, worship, and prayer, as previously mentioned. Therefore, the transforming work of God in the life of every believer and the dynamic processes of discipleship emerge again as central pieces of HCF and relationships that follow the Trinitarian model.

### **An Ecclesiology That Promotes Community**

The absence of authentic Christian community, *koinonia*, stands as one of the greatest needs in the lives of the leaders of the MCCR. In addition to the presence of personal and corporate sin, the poor practice of community stems from a lack of understanding of the Trinity, misconceptions about personhood, and an inadequate ecclesiology. The existing systems and structures present great challenges for the Costa Rican leaders. The problem goes beyond current practices and stems from paradigms that inhibit the experience of authentic relationships.

Because of an exaggerated, nonbiblical separation between laity and clergy, leaders often isolate themselves from their congregations. The laity tends to turn primarily to professional clergy in times of need, which undercuts the greater *koinonia* of the body and exacerbates the distance between leaders and the people of God. R. Paul Stevens states, “Community (John Stott’s term) is the only biblical way of describing the relationship of leaders and the rest of the people. Each member contributes to others in a diversity of functions that contributes to a rich social unity” (53). This conception of community materializes as the renewed paradigm that the church and its leaders need to grasp. The people of God and their leadership exist as a single integrated community.

The individuals called and gifted for leadership do not emerge as part of a separate class. Firmly established within the people of God, they facilitate the building up and ministry of the whole. The leaders of the church should understand that they form an integral part of the community, as members of the whole people of God. Friendships between pastoral leaders and the laity do present unique challenges; however, together the whole people of God can overcome these challenges. God calls all believers to be Christian and serve him according to their unique gifting. Childress states, “If Church is to be the body of Christ and yet we don’t have any friends, then something is wrong” (qtd. in Wells). Unfortunately, the current misconception of church membership that focuses on personal salvation instead of participation in the mission of God contributes to the problem (Guder 244). The people of God in Costa Rica, both leaders and laity, should reflect upon their participation in the community of God, and their need of the spiritual friendships provided by and for the whole body.

The Church and its leaders must reflect on what will shape their community.

Simply changing particular programs and activities of the church will be inadequate.

Thomas Merton writes on the deeper issues of spiritual transformation:

Too often, people who take the spiritual life seriously may waste all their efforts on the scaffolding, making it more and more solid, permanent and secure, and paying no attention to the building itself. They do so out of a kind of unconscious fear of the real responsibilities of the Christian life, which are solitary and interior.... One has very little evidence of progress or perfection in this interior sphere—while in the exterior, progress can be more easily measured and results can be seen. (56)

The very nature and ecclesiology of the Church require transformation. Darrell L. Guder insightfully exhorts congregations to become a combination of centered and bounded sets. The centered set will encompass the full congregation, inviting new people into the church, but within the church, a bounded set must draw people into covenant community. A growing core will take shape to embody visible commitments to Christian disciplines, mutual accountability, and biblical discipleship (207-09). The people of God will represent the kingdom of God in all places. They will not just look like the Church when they gather to worship; they will represent the Church at all times and in all places. Faith becomes most visible through demonstrated love, mercy, and justice. This transformation must take shape among the Costa Rican leaders and existing congregations through the renewal or radical replacement of existing paradigms.

Many pastors of the MCCR desperately need a changed leadership model that is theologically and biblically sound, rather than copied from secular models. Willimon admonishes the church to grow in community according to a clearly Trinitarian view:

Reality, the world as intended by God in Creation, is now taking visible form in the re-creation called the church. God is by nature communal, mutual, as we learn God's nature as Trinity. God's world is therefore

inherently communal.... Fellowship, koinonia, is a principle [sic] criterion for worship that is truly Christian. (*Pastor* 80)

The challenges presented by culture, human sinfulness, and old paradigms outweigh what even a single Spirit-empowered individual could achieve.

Recognizing the need for community transformation, Guder asserts that the action of the Spirit does not just focus on the individual soul but on communities as well (142-43). The congregation and its leaders, as the whole people of God, assume an attitude of dependent listening and obedience, which allows the Holy Spirit to work in their midst. The best approach to developing this Trinitarian view of church and ministry may well exist in the relational brokenness and longing for community already present (Seamands, *Ministry* 32). Discovering authentic paths to live out the Christian community that already exists among all believers will determine much of the success or failure of the church. These changes will involve a fresh commitment to HCF as seen in Acts, which will become a contemporary expression and witness of Trinitarian relationships.

The needed transformation can only take place if the church and its leaders depend upon the Holy Spirit for the required anointing. Cantalamessa states, “The actual anointing does not depend on us, but the removal of the obstacles that prevent the anointing from shining forth does depend on us” (167). As the Costa Rican leaders allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in them, they obediently permit the removal of every obstacle to living in holistic relationships. This transformation allows them to envision the renewed ecclesiology required for HCF and authentic community.

### **Dynamics for Nurturing Community**

Since the MCCR finds itself immersed in a new cultural milieu, the new ecclesiology must include structures and processes that respond to contemporary realities.

Individualism, privatized moral standards, and personal needs represent some of the challenges that increasingly dominate a consumer-driven society. People take a voluntaristic approach to church and reject notions of absolute authority. Truth becomes subjective rather than objective or absolute. People shift their values, reorient their focus, and no longer view the church as the center of their communities. Therefore, the church should consider its rich theological heritage, draw from inherent principles, and determine how Costa Ricans experience the gospel today and grow in relationship with the triune God and the body of Christ.

The church in Costa Rica needs to reflect upon the changing dynamics of social relationships. Studies, work, and economic challenges have led the current younger generations to become highly mobile. Many youth find themselves living significant distances from family, mentors, and friends. Parker J. Palmer has reflected insightfully on ways of nurturing community that respond to the contemporary lifestyles and its challenges:

*Community* [original emphasis] does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other. It is not about the presence of other people—it is about being fully open to the reality of relationship, whether or not we are alone. (*Hidden Wholeness* 55)

This perspective espouses a deeper concept of relationship and community that extends beyond traditional physical descriptions and boundaries. Emerging Internet social networks provide one example of these changes. In these communities, the key element in relationships becomes intentionality instead of proximity. In order to respond to contemporary society, Christian leaders will intentionally pursue and cultivate meaningful relationships and biblical *koinonia*, both personally and corporately. This deliberate pursuit of community, or fellowship as expressed in Acts 2, ought to include

purposeful devotion to the other essential practices of the Word, worship, and prayer. In this way, the leaders can set a renewed direction for the Methodist Church of Costa Rica that reflects a HCF founded upon the Trinitarian model of life and community in Christ.

### **Summary of Biblical Foundations and Practical Theology**

The preceding pages have established a portrait of life in Christ and a practical theology for leadership that will endure. Costa Rican leaders implementing these principles in their lives can avoid the potential isolation and the barriers to an enduring ministry. Furthermore, they will need to create opportunities for their followers to join them in devoting themselves to the same experiences and practices. Acts 2 provides the biblical foundations for the pursuit of HCF according to a Trinitarian model. The pivotal experience of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the repentant person unites the sure foundation of God's activity and the ministry of Jesus Christ to the life of the new believer. Then the Holy Spirit births within individuals a desire to devote themselves to the essential practices of the early Church.

These practices establish a pathway for cultivating relationships with the triune God and the body of Christ, and they serve to edify the follower of Christ and build an enduring Christian life. The community experienced in the Church comes as a gift of God. Therefore, it does not require creating; rather, it calls for nurturing. Fellowship with the body of Christ is a necessity in the life of all believers because their personhood reflects the nature of a relational God as seen in the Trinity. Christian leaders practicing HCF remember that all the programs and activities of the church act as means for developing relationships and community with the triune God and fellow believers. The processes of HCF must adapt to contemporary and cultural realities while retaining

biblical truth, so the people of God will flourish according to the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through their lives.

### **Models for Holistic Christian Formation in Costa Rica**

In light of the biblical foundations and practical theology, the research proceeded to consider endeavors toward HCF in Costa Rica. Preaching on the importance of “Reclaiming the Biblical Story,” Elizabeth Achtemeier provides a valuable perspective for this pursuit of HCF. She proposes that Christians must understand the biblical story in order to connect it to the stories of their contemporary lives. Daniel Fountain applies this model for cross-cultural ministry that involves the interplay among the story of the target population, the story of the missionary, and God’s story. According to this model, cross-cultural change agents must first listen and discover the strengths that exist among a people. Then they determine where their own story and God’s story intersect with the people’s story (44-45). This process revealed particular methods of Christian formation that already existed among the pastors and leaders in the Methodist Church, patterns that significantly shaped and influenced their lives and ministries. Two approaches have dominated among the leaders and local congregations. Generally, either the leaders have intentionally employed a methodology developed around the movement called *El Encuentro* [The Encounter], or they have followed a passive attractional model. Following the attractional model, churches invited people to come and hear the gospel within their churches and communities. They depended on the official church activities of worship, preaching, and teaching to evangelize and disciple people (Frost and Hirsch 41; Roxburgh and Romanuk 168).

The present study focused on the model of *El Encuentro* because it influenced the majority of the leaders. It also represented the greatest potential for channeling existing passion among the leaders toward creating a holistic and missional view of Christian formation for their lives and communities. Already, through this model, congregations have extended the ministries of the churches outside the walls of their sanctuaries, and their witness has dynamically influenced civic activities, work places, young people, and homes (“Análisis de los Encuentros”). However, the leaders needed to guard against potential dangers native to this movement, to develop a sustainable perspective of this ministry, and to adapt its principles to the Costa Rican context. Following a brief description of *El Encuentro* is a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the movement in light of the biblical foundations, practical theology, and other models of Christian formation. During the ministry intervention, the leaders participated in this analysis. Through the process, an appropriate approach to HCF for both the leaders and their congregations in the MCCR emerged.

### **A Brief History of *El Encuentro***

*El Encuentro* has existed for nearly twenty years in Latin America. Cesar Castellanos initiated the movement in Bogota, Columbia. He at first copied the cell-church ministry of David Yongi Cho of South Korea, but he did not obtain the desired results. Then in 1991, he adapted it to his context and developed his ministry according to the *G12 Vision* (Comiskey, *Groups of 12* 22-23). This vision, received and propagated by Castellanos, focused on a new structure designed around groups of twelve. He selected twelve couples in whom he and his wife would invest directly, so these couples could consequently each invest in twelve others, who would then continue the same pattern.



The groups formed along homogenous lines, men with men, women with women, and youth with youth. From this point forward, his church, the International Charismatic Movement (ICM), began to experience explosive growth. The ministry has grown to have an international scope and churches from around the world have copied, adapted, and renamed the *G12 Vision* for use in their context.

The *G12 Vision* fine-tuned the cell-church structure enabling it to preserve fruit, enhance pastoral care, and increase accountability. However, Joel Comiskey notes that the structure alone does not produce the outcome. The results flow from the core values of the leaders and of the church that include God's blessing, a high-level of commitment, submission to pastoral authority, and passionate spirituality expressed through prayer, fasting, and holy living (*Groups of 12* 15, 32-33). In the life of the ICM, the vision of Castellanos moves the church forward according to clearly established leadership and a tightly developed plan and structure that guide every dimension of the church's life and ministry.

The tremendous success of the ICM soon led to imitation throughout Latin America and the United States. Some ministries such as Bethany World Prayer Center in the United States and *Un Lugar Para el Encuentro con Cristo* [A Place for the Encounter with Christ] in Mexico City successfully adapted Castellanos' model to their context. However, other churches and denominations failed to distinguish between function and form. They copied the methods but missed the principles (Comiskey, *Groups of 12* 89). Other ministries have fallen prey to the dangers inherent within the original vision by abusing authority, manipulating outcomes, and seeking acclaim over obedience (Martinez). Though the stories abound of dysfunctional and imploding ministries, the

biblical principles underlying the vision and the potential for leadership formation merit serious reflection.

### ***El Encuentro* in the MCCR**

Numerous Costa Rican leaders have chosen *El Encuentro* as their model for Christian formation. Nonetheless, many pastors have found themselves consumed by the activities surrounding the celebration of weekend retreats. Some have abandoned *El Encuentro* because of the fatigue they experienced. These pastors realized that no time or energy remained to disciple the potential leaders. However, a few pastors spoke of personal renewal and growth of relationships. They experienced revival during the extensive times of prayer and preparation with the team of leaders directing the retreats. These contrasting stories demonstrated both the positive elements present in the current practice of *El Encuentro* as well as the shortcomings.

In October 2006, Bishop Palomo called together select pastors, seminary faculty, and key leaders participating in *El Encuentro*. The meeting agenda focused on reflection and analysis of the manner in which this movement affected the lives of leaders and local congregations. As the leaders shared their personal and congregational experiences, a sense of euphoria swelled in the room that resembled a spirit of revival. Nonetheless, as the conversations continued, warning signs emerged. Most leaders conveyed an absence of follow-up after the initial impact of the weekend retreats. Opportunities to develop relationships and provide counsel for the new converts and revived believers received haphazard attention (“Análisis de los Encuentros”). The Methodist leaders copied the original *G12 Vision*. However, they focused only on the weekend retreats, omitting the intentional approach to discipleship and leadership training, and ignored the cell-group

structure of the church, both of which formed an intrinsic part of the original program (“Vision G12”). If these issues did not receive consideration and redirection, the current path would soon lead to dysfunction and collapse. Unfortunately, at the time of this research project, the path has not changed and the churches have suffered loss of individuals who experienced disillusionment following their participation in *El Encuentro*.

The dangers and pitfalls present in *El Encuentro* demanded attention, yet the potential also held great merit. Some of the benefits manifested in this model include

- weekend retreats that provide healing for broken persons,
- intentional pastoral care offered at multiple levels,
- a consistent endeavor to minister to the whole person,
- dynamic relationships shared within cell groups,
- high levels of commitment demonstrated by leadership and laity,
- dependence on God displayed throughout the church,
- spiritual passion maintained through disciplined spiritual practices,
- leaders committed to team ministry, and
- ministry provided for the ministers.

Each of these elements joined to create a ministry that responded to the needs of the whole person. When it functioned properly, people experienced holistic formation in Christ, and leaders discovered renewal and healthy relationships. In the Costa Rican context, if these benefits go through adequate adaptation and come under the Lord’s sovereignty and direction, they can bring lasting renewal to the lives of individuals, congregations, and their leaders.

### **Redeeming *El Encuentro* as HCF for the Leaders of the MCCR**

The energy and passion that surrounded the churches faithfully committed to *El Encuentro* in contrast to the disenchantment in others called the Church to reevaluate the principles of *El Encuentro* and their application in the context of the MCCR. The poor and incomplete adaptation of the original model has resulted in a dysfunctional approach to HCF. Many leaders and congregations have experienced disillusionment with the program when fatigue and desertion began to develop. In order to redeem the model, the leadership of the Church committed to a process that provided urgent care by seeking to contextualize the core values and principles of this model.

In the process of recovering and adapting the principles that undergird *El Encuentro*, I focused on three areas that needed adaptation and reinforcement within the Costa Rican context. During the retreat, the participants evaluated the application of the Acts 2 principles in their experience with *El Encuentro*. They also reflected on the relational dimension of the cell-church structure. The leaders discussed how they had adapted the model or their church structure to apply this principle in their context. Finally, they analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership style displayed at ICM according to the Costa Rican context and biblical principles for leadership.

#### **The Acts 2 Principles in *El Encuentro***

This chapter opened with the biblical foundations of HCF based on Acts 2. From the very beginning of the Church, the apostles established the core practices that would guide the church in the process of taking on the image and likeness of Christ. However, these practices have disappeared from our churches. Comiskey describes the weakness of his church, but also of many other churches, when he writes, “An exceedingly small

percentage of the Sunday worshipers actually participated in prayer, training, and small groups. Our unbalanced Sunday morning emphasis produced few leaders. We were doing all the work and seeing little fruit” (*Leadership Explosion* 23). Comiskey mentions three of the four core practices from Acts 2:42 that his church overlooked.

Comiskey’s church had grown significantly through strong Sunday worship gatherings, yet this troubling reality motivated him to seek another approach to ministry. He not only wanted to attract people to the church, but he desired deep and lasting transformation in the lives of people. Therefore, he chose to focus on training and mentoring leaders. Recently, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek confronted a similar reality. In spite of the growing number of people worshipping in their facilities, the leadership recognized that they had not effectively led many of these people in the process of spiritual growth or Christian formation. Their recognition led to a shift in ministry strategies that would facilitate ongoing transformation and spiritual growth in the lives of the people at Willow Creek (Hawkins and Parkinson 3-4, 24).

*El Encuentro* properly adapted, developed, and utilized provides a structure that encourages and creates the space for the core practices of the Church. It emphasizes the teaching of God’s Word through intensive retreats, cell groups, and a school of leadership training. This focus connects with the challenge that Latin American activist and author Gustavo Gutierrez extends. He calls the people of God first to return to the scriptures, while not neglecting the spiritual traditions that lead the community into an encounter with Christ (33). In this call, the challenge goes forth for the people of God to receive the Apostle’s teaching in the context of their Christian heritage and community. When *El Encuentro* operates according to its original design, it brings the people of God to

participate in this important practice of learning from Scripture in the fellowship of believers, both past and present.

Through the cell groups, ICM pursues authentic relationships and community. Everyone belonging to the church belongs to a small group of twelve. As a cell-church, these groups represent the core of the church. In these settings, the people of God share their struggles and temptations, discover biblical answers to life's challenges, and enjoy authentic relationships and community in the body of Christ. The primary nurture and pastoral care of the members comes through these groups.

Finally, *El Encuentro* promotes regular, intentional prayer among the leaders. The practice of prayer forms a significant part of every small group gathering, yet the retreats of *El Encuentro*, *Post Encuentro*, and *Re-Encuentro* place a particularly strong emphasis on the importance of prayer and fasting. Leaders attribute the success of the retreats to the intense times of preparation. The pastors and team members coordinating an event dedicate an entire week to prayer, reflection, and fasting, called the “week of sanctification.” This time of preparation focuses on centering lives and hearts on God, his purposes for the weekend, and intercession on behalf of those who will participate in *El Encuentro*.

### **A Latin American Leadership Model for HCF**

Leadership styles can significantly influence relationships and Christian formation among leaders; therefore, the model of leadership present in *El Encuentro* demanded careful consideration. Castellanos acted as the *spiritual caudillo* of his ministry. The first chapter of this study mentioned the challenge presented by the *machista* or *caudillo*

character traits among Costa Rican men. These characteristics also influenced the leadership style practiced by many of the pastors.

Generally, the North American missionary or leader rejected this leadership style altogether because such leaders demonstrated resistance to trust, vulnerability, and accountability. However, Phil Thornton describes healthy models that he discovered in Colombia where the strong leaders embodied the strong opinions, charisma, communication skills, and confidence that the Latin American followers desired. These *spiritual caudillos* led growing churches and invested in the lives of a core group of loyal leaders while not neglecting ministry to the larger congregation (236-37). These leaders mastered the strengths of the *caudillo* model that formed part of a culturally appropriate leadership style. They provided stability during difficult times, shared a vision that unified the people, clarified leadership, honored age and experience, and motivated followers toward a selfless ambition that advanced the organization (Coleman 51). Such leaders offered a strong leadership style that Costa Ricans would also respect and accept, yet this leadership remained consistent with the biblical foundations of Christlike leadership.

These leaders demonstrated certain distinguishing elements in the way they applied the model of the spiritual *caudillo*. In Costa Rica, Bishop Palomo stands as such an example. Over the last thirty-five years, his witness and ministry have influenced the growth and advancement of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica. The rest of the church leaders unquestionably have viewed him as the spiritual leader of the church. His leadership has also reflected resolve, humility, and a deep commitment to the interests of the organization that Jim Collins discovered in his extensive study of companies that

moved from good to great. Collins describes leaders who exemplified what he identifies as “Level 5 Leadership.” Such leaders demonstrated a paradoxical combination of modesty, humility, and professional will. These leaders also operated in the best interest of the organization, rather than acting according to their own personal benefit (12-13).

The principles that undergird such leadership reflect a biblical approach.

Jesus Christ offered a parallel to Level 5 leadership in his selfless, other-centered pattern of leadership. Not only did he exemplify the modesty and humility of such leaders, he also demonstrated unwavering resolve. His leadership displayed great strength and authority. However, the identity, call, and life purpose of Jesus flowed from his connection to God the Father and nothing swayed him from that relationship (Reynolds 120). Through submission to God and dynamic life in the Spirit, Christian leaders can live as Jesus did and manifest Level 5 leadership qualities. Christ establishes the path to a healthy leadership style that the Costa Rican leaders need.

The task of Christian leadership demands both culturally appropriate and biblically consistent styles of leadership. Authors on Christian leadership suggest that a dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit stands as the essential ingredient to successful spiritual leadership. Kent A. Reynolds communicates the vital importance of not only discerning the will of God but also knowing the ways of God. Christian leaders must accomplish God’s will in such a way that it glorifies God and not themselves (124). Henry T. and Richard Blackaby believe that a spiritual leader moves people into God’s purpose, in God’s way, in dependence on the Holy Spirit (20-23). This definition allows for flexibility according to the distinct contexts in which leadership occurs because such leadership emerges from a solid relationship with God and with the people of God. The



vision, purpose, and plan all originate from God. Timothy C. Geoffrion provides a comprehensive definition of leadership:

Christian leaders need to be transformed from the inside out by fully integrating their spiritual life and leadership. Transformed leaders will be deeply spiritual people who seek to lead from a spiritual vitality that propels them into leadership roles, responsibilities, relationships, and opportunities. Such leaders will seek top-quality results, affiliate with others in meaningful ways, and become people of influence—but all for the right reasons; that is, because they are devoted to serving God’s purposes, they are seeking to be good stewards of their spiritual gifts, they are called to leadership, they are being transformed inwardly, and they are empowered by God to serve effectively. (27)

This quote presents the core of *The Spirit-Led Leader* and provides an excellent overview of spiritual leadership. This definition evidences how spiritual vitality and solid practices of leadership unite in the life and ministry of the effective spiritual leader.

At this point, the development of the Costa Rican leader must take into account the discussion of the negative influence that the sociological tendencies toward *machismo* or *caudillismo* can have on the development of HCF and healthy spiritual friendships among leaders. Osias Segura observes unhealthy examples within the mega-church movement in Costa Rica. Some senior pastors claim absolute spiritual authority, cling to power and, in some instances, have members sign contracts of total obedience and submission to their leadership (279-80). These actions show both the dangers present in these sociological tendencies as well as those inherent to the *G12 Vision* and *El Encuentro*. Leaders can easily abuse the spiritual authority and respect generated through their charisma, positional leadership, and cultural standing.

Initial progress has taken place in the MCCR through Bishop Palomo’s leadership style and emphasis on teamwork. He has invested significantly in the next generation of leaders by facilitating learning experiences, involving them in decision-making

processes, and maintaining a constant flow of communication with them. Bishop Palomo's approach to building a team has followed the pattern described by Wayne Cordeiro. The formation of his team has not depended as much on technique as it has pursued a certain kind of heart. He has shared both the challenges and joys of leadership with the men surrounding him. This approach emphasized God's design for humans to work as a body, in teams, in relationships (177). This group of leaders has made tremendous advances, and they now use team language and approaches in their own leadership. However, their response to given situations demonstrates that their hearts still lag behind. At times, the cultural tendency toward unquestioned authority and domineering leadership still surfaces among them. The numeric growth and fame of churches following unhealthy patterns tempts the Methodist leaders to follow their models. Therefore, the work must continue to overcome obstacles and establish deeply rooted convictions concerning the culturally appropriate leadership styles that retain biblical foundations.

Patrick Lencioni states, "Members of great teams trust one another on a fundamental, emotional level, and they are comfortable being vulnerable with each other about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors" (7). These attributes run contrary to *machismo*, which seeks to provide a self-portrayal of strength, unwavering courage, perfection, and dominance. Lencioni adds important insights, discussing the five dysfunctions of a team. Two of the dysfunctions that he identifies present particular challenges for the leaders in the MCCR. The absence of trust and the avoidance of accountability act as great liabilities within the *machista* or *caudillo* leadership style

(Coleman 48; Lencioni 7). Team leadership has to overcome these challenges in order to thrive among Costa Rican leaders.

The path of least resistance does not produce the desired results. One's human nature must come under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the heart of a servant-leader must emerge. Lencioni suggests that the leader and team members need to answer two vital questions: "Are we really a team?" and "Are we ready for heavy lifting?" To answer these questions affirmatively, the leaders in Costa Rica should focus on smaller subsets to discover the common goals and relationships that facilitate team ministry and mutual support (9-10). Through team ministry, the leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica discovered the relationships that facilitated a holistic approach to Christian formation for their own lives and the people to whom they ministered.

### **Spiritual Friendship**

By adopting a team approach to leadership, the Costa Rican pastors opened their lives to richer relationships and expressions of community. This change caused the leaders and their ministries to become healthier. Wendell Berry believes that the community represents "the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms." His thoughts place community at the heart of health and wholeness. Childress supports this view from Scripture when he writes, "Biblically, the concepts of salvation and shalom describe a condition of community wholeness, in which each individual is in good health only when he or she is an integrated member of God's people." In light of this perspective of wholeness, the leaders of the MCCR will only have enduring ministries and finish well through a life in community.

The behavioral sciences, history, and Scripture demonstrate the need for community; however, the leaders still struggled to experience the reality that pertains to them as members of the body of Christ. The challenge flows from a truth common to this generation. Randy Frazee asserts that the present generation was not born into a culture of community but into an individualistic worldview (43). Though this idea emerged in a Western context, the presence of *machismo* has created the same effect among Costa Rican leaders. The stronghold of *machista* attitudes demands more than individualistic attention to create a real paradigm shift.

An editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compares the studies of two dietary programs that operated according to different paradigms. The first study followed a traditional individualistic method, while the second took a community approach. Based on the results of the study, the author proposes, “[O]besity may be a problem that cannot be solved by individual persons but that requires community action” (Martijn 924). I observed an interesting parallel in Christian formation among the Costa Rican leaders. The change from the isolating attitudes of the *machista* to the practice of authentic community requires community-based action.

At the outset of this study, the appropriate time for a paradigm shift in the MCCR appeared to have arrived. The unrest among pastors and leaders created by their brokenness and frustrations in ministry opened a door of opportunity. The ministry intervention endeavored to support and enrich the pastors in their connectedness to God, to a supportive group of friends, to their congregations, and to their families (“Theological Reflection Week”). Only healthy relationships would enable the pastors to enter into the process of HCF and find the resources to finish well in life and ministry.

God designed the human being—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—to encounter health through community (Frazee 32). Only by committing to community can pastors and leaders find the help and healing that they desperately need. This commitment to others moves leaders into a place of openness, allowing them to experience the healing and change that communities provide (Wilhoit 184).

Concerning these relationships, Wells writes, “These are not casual connections among acquaintances, but abiding and sustaining relationships among clergy and laity—and between clergy—rooted in the very nature of church and the Christian story: they are ‘holy friendships.’” The development of these relationships requires that leaders discover the common set of beliefs, values, practices, and dispositions and a commitment to a certain way of being that consistently prompt community-supportive disciplines (Wilhoit 178; Frazee 50-54). Because of deep cultural barriers, the presence of sin, and dysfunctional systems that influence the leaders, the transformation takes time and demands more than will power. Russell J. Levenson recognizes that these leaders need mentors, spiritual directors, and spiritual friends:

[The] disciples did not learn to be “Christ-like” in classroom settings, but by actually sharing life together—meals, travel, fears, joys, worship, prayer, study, tears, laughter. It was through this kind of intimate daily contact that the apostles grew to be the very pillars of the early Church. (6)

Only through a similar process will today’s disciples and leaders grow into Christlikeness and lead the church according to God’s plan.

### **Educational Theory**

The initial reflections on the educational approach chosen for the ministry intervention took into account the previous endeavors in theological education among the Costa Rican pastors and leaders. The advances in pastoral training have reshaped the

lives of the leaders and local congregations in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica; nonetheless, elements of the education that the pastors received have reinforced certain dysfunctions in their own formation and their approach to forming their congregations. The Costa Rican people heed the intuitive senses of the spiritual realities that surround life, and they have avoided the dichotomy between the visible and spiritual worlds common in Westernized societies. Palmer said, “With that separation we diminish life, capping off its sources of healing, hope, and wholeness” (*To Know as We Are Known* 10). However, theological education came to Costa Rica through North American and European missionaries that used educational models shaped by such dichotomies. The seminaries focused more on providing the information and cultivating aptitudes for ministry that the pastors would need for the functional roles of preacher, teacher, counselor, and caregiver. The students and pastors developed these skills but often failed to encounter the answers to the questions that tormented their souls.

The state of Christian education and spiritual formation in the lives of the leaders and the MCCR faced great challenges. In order for the leaders to endure in ministry, they had to adopt new approaches to life, ministry, and Christian formation. They needed to discover their stories and fresh approaches to telling them. Israel Galindo writes, “[Christian leaders practicing education for spiritual formation] will take seriously the conviction that in order to be authentic, the methodology of Christian education needs to be authentically Christian” (426). The biblical, theological, and historical research indicates that the nature of holistic Christian formation involves relationships. Galindo suggests that this element is essential:

The methods as well as the content of a Christian Education for spiritual formation need to grow out of the basic Christian assumptions of the

nature of church as community and of the nature of the person as relational. Christianity's foundational and epistemological assumptions, intrinsically, are relational. (415)

Recognizing that an authentically Christian formation must flow from relationships, the methods used to assist the Costa Rican leaders in learning these vital principles followed a carefully selected educational design.

The ministry intervention for the dissertation project developed according to a retreat model. The Costa Rican leaders of the Methodist Church have participated in formative retreats in the past, and they have displayed openness to this model. The majority responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to continue learning and growing. However, the key reason for selecting the retreat model involved its connection to the nature of HCF. The Costa Rican leaders did need to receive information that tested their spirituality and guarded them against mere sentimentality; however, they also needed experiential and formative experiences that promoted learning and behavioral change. Comiskey writes, "Christ knew that theoretical information separated from practical experience would have little lasting value" (*Leadership Explosion* 85). For this reason, the intervention endeavored to maintain the interplay and balance required to communicate vital information while providing formative experiences (Galindo 416; Mulholland 61).

During the retreat, the participants engaged in activities that pursued Christlikeness but also received the teaching of foundational principles of HCF in the context of community. Susanne Johnson emphasizes the importance of community, proposing that spiritual formation provides the organizing key for Christian education. She also writes, "Spiritual formation simply is not intelligible apart from the communal

context and faith tradition in which people are formed” (19). By using a retreat model, the leaders learned in the community of small groups, which formed an integral part of the learning experience.

*Studies on emotional intelligence further substantiate the need for experiential learning in the lives of the leaders of the MCCR. Daniel Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence has demonstrated the numerous ways in which feelings dominate thought (4). Behavior will not change through simple cognitive learning; rather, transformation must occur at the level of feelings as well. D. Bruce Roberts writes, “If emotional intelligence is learned slowly through communities of trust involving opportunities for practice and feedback, what changes will we need to make in our programs to help pastors learn creative leadership?” (124). He continues this dialogue by suggesting that peer group models provide a better approach to learning and formation among adults. The group identifies needs, determines goals or objectives, experiments with alternative approaches to attaining goals, and evaluates the endeavors as a group through theological and experiential lenses (126).*

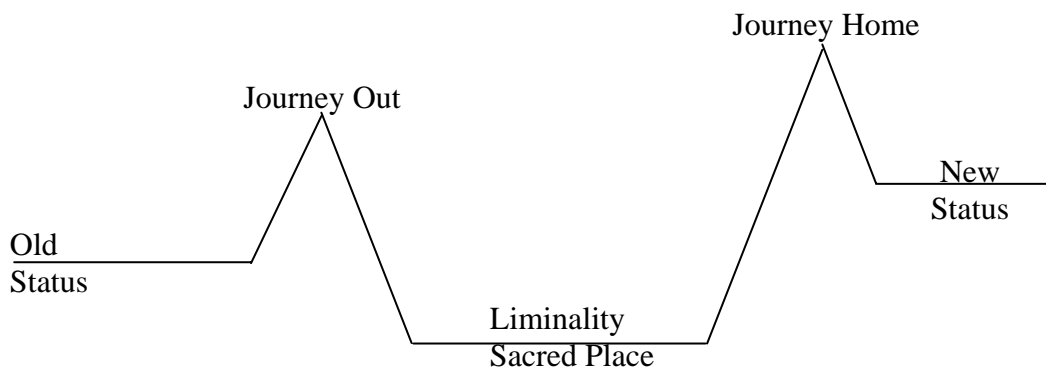
The retreat model also provided many opportunities for dialogue between the professors and leaders. Learning, relaxing, and eating together existed in a dynamic relationship that allowed the leaders to experience the principles conveyed in the reading, conferences, and small group discussions. Henri J. M. Nouwen writes, “Perhaps we have paid too much attention to the content of teaching without realizing that the teaching relationship is the most important factor in the ministry of teaching” (4). These words from Nouwen affirm the importance of the intentional spaces for relationship throughout the retreat.



The importance of the retreat setting took on greater significance in light of the theoretical framework provided by the concept of liminality. The work of Arnold Van Gennep first presented the concept of liminality in the three-stage structure of rites of passage. The initiate goes through a process of separation, liminality or transition, and reincorporation. A move outside the normal state of life and activities to an independent state characterized the liminal stage (10-11). This understanding of liminality and the structure of the rite of passage coincide with the structure behind Christian retreats and conferences. They act according to a three-step journey structure:

- The participants journey out;
- They gather in a sacred place; and,
- They journey home, having experienced transformation.

These journeys provide rich opportunities for nurture and formation (Zahniser 140). A. H. Mathias Zahniser created a figure to depict the process (see Figure 2.1).



Source: Zahniser 140.

**Figure 2.1. The pilgrimage as a rite of passage.**

The majority of the participants in the ministry intervention experienced this three-step process. They left behind their families, ministries, and daily routine to join the other participants in a place outside their usual structures to share in a time of learning, reflection, and transformation. This separation from routine and structure created the space and place conducive to reflection, relaxation, and the shared joy of simply being together. Through this time of separation, the participants emerged from each retreat with fresh ideas, renewed passion, and invigorated convictions that facilitated personal transformation in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF.

### **Research Design**

For this dissertation project, I selected a research design of mixed methods triangulation. The project began with the Practices of HCF questionnaire and focus group interviews, which collected data that established a baseline for the study. In the first follow-up seminar, focus group interviews provided qualitative data concerning the initial impact of the ministry intervention on the lives of the participants. In the second follow-up seminar, the Practices of HCF questionnaire and final focus group interviews provided data on the change in the participants and the most significant experiences of the intervention. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research results, rather than the use of a single method, rendered a better understanding of the problem (Creswell and Clark 5, 7). The questionnaire provided objective data that allowed for easy scoring, while the qualitative data facilitated the observation of affective dynamics displayed in the group dialogue.

The questionnaire offered an efficient and anonymous way to collect basic data (Patten 1-2). This quantitative information provided a means of following objective

cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in practices of HCF. However, the questionnaire presented particular weaknesses that included potentially poor response rates, inaccurate responses to the questions, and the fact that the questionnaire did not expose deeper emotions and attitudes (2-3). In order to compensate for some of these weaknesses, focus groups provided qualitative data. These groups provided access to the more complex behaviors and motivations that have influenced or hindered a holistic approach to Christian formation in Costa Rica (Morgan and Krueger 16-17).

### **Summary**

The review of the literature established the biblically founded practices of HCF as seen in Acts 2 and affirmed the essential nature of healthy relationships and authentic community at the heart of the process of becoming whole persons in Christ. The reflections on practical theology further developed the centrality of relationships by considering the relational nature of the Trinity. The literature asserted that human personhood does not define itself as separate from others; rather, its definition grows out of connection to others. Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, demonstrates true personhood and wholeness lived out in perfect relationship with the rest of the Trinity and with humanity. The experience of personal wholeness initiates relationship with the triune God and necessarily brings the believer into the community of the body of Christ. Therefore, the literature affirms that healthy relationships and authentic community must form part of HCF.

The leaders of the MCCR faced significant challenges that emerged from sinful attitudes, cultural barriers, and dysfunctional approaches to leadership and Christian formation. Therefore, they needed to come to a common understanding of the core

practices and applied theology that would bring them to the experience of their unity in the body of Christ. To accomplish this goal, the pursuit of Christian formation in the MCCR through the maladapted use of *El Encuentro* needed to be redeemed. Though *El Encuentro* represented a ministry that had been adapted and developed within the Latin American context, it grew out of the organizational structure of a cell church. Furthermore, the vision placed the authority and leadership of the church in a single person. The core principles of *El Encuentro* required proper contextualization within the structures and leadership models of the MCCR. Following this adaptation, they could serve as healthy, dynamic processes of Christian formation, facilitating the Christian practices and relationships that nurture HCF. In order for transformation to occur, the leaders needed to learn through experience and practice. The experiential learning would allow them to make their own discoveries and acquire a culturally and biblically suitable leadership style. They also needed to develop Christian practices and supporting relationships that would sustain HCF in their own lives. Therefore, the ministry intervention involved a carefully designed retreat experience and follow-up seminars that initiated a transformational process in the lives of the leaders of the MCCR.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Problem and Purpose

The changing society and times in Costa Rica test the leaders of the MCCR in both their personal lives and ministry. They often have days saturated with the activities of a consuming commitment to *El Encuentro*, yet their endless work only partially achieves the desired Christian formation in their congregations. These leaders also discover that their personal resources—spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical—have dissipated. If these issues do not find resolution, the Costa Rican leaders will eventually lose their disposition to learn, allow their character to weaken, or lose intimacy with God. Without a new paradigm for life and ministry, they will not finish well.

In light of these challenges, this dissertation project sought to provide paths of renewal and transformation for these leaders and their ministries. A five-day retreat and two follow-up seminars formed the heart of the ministry intervention. These events provided the opportunity for evaluation of the impact on the lives of the selected participants. A Trinitarian view of ministry provided the theological foundations for a holistic approach to Christian formation based on Acts 2. The deeper participation in the triune fellowship achieved through the retreat and seminars shaped these leaders' approach to ministry and life practices. Seamands' book *Ministry in the Image of God* provided a framework adaptable to the context and particular challenges of developing a process of HCF in Costa Rica. Seamands identifies seven characteristics that mold Christian understanding of life, ministry, and worldview (18). This dissertation project

applied key principles from *Ministry in the Image of God* to the realm of Christian living as part of an HCF process.

### **Research Questions and/or Hypotheses**

The following research questions acted as primary tools throughout this dissertation project. They served to maintain a clear focus and to achieve the desired purpose established at the beginning of the process. The research tools sought to establish the baseline, demonstrate changes, and discover the elements of greatest influence in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF among the participants.

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

What were the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the key leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica prior to their participation in the five-day retreat?

The questionnaire, the Practices of HCF, provided a baseline of the spiritual practices and experience of spiritual friendships prior to the intervention. The first day of the intervention, the focus group interviews included two primary themes. The group first answered the question, “Describe ways that the practices of Christian formation play a regular part of your journey with Christ and formation in him?” Then the group discussed the context in which they had previously experienced relationships characterized by open sharing, vulnerability, and intentional support that promoted mutual growth in Christ.

#### **Research Question #2**

What cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes occurred in the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants following the intervention?

In January 2010 during the servant leadership course, the group again completed the Practices of HCF questionnaire. This follow-up survey provided the quantitative data that demonstrated concrete changes in practices of HCF. This data also permitted triangulation with the qualitative data gathered from the focus group interviews. Questions from the mid-intervention and post-intervention focus group interviews provided qualitative data used to analyze the influence of the retreat and follow-up seminars in the cognitive, affective and behavioral practices of HCF among the participants. In the mid-intervention focus group interviews, the participants discussed the question, “How did your participation in the retreat influence your views, feelings, and practices of HCF?” In the post-intervention interview, the leaders discussed the question, “Share examples of how your understandings, feelings, and practices of HCF have changed through your participation in the retreat,” and, “In the context of your life and ministry, what else do you need to change in response to what you discovered through this seminar?” The data gathered from these interviews provided information concerning the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes of HCF as well as pending challenges among the leaders.

### **Research Question #3**

What elements of the intervention most influenced the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants?

The mid-intervention and post-intervention focus group interviews also provided data that was employed to determine the most significant experiences of holistic community and spiritual relationships provided during the retreat. During the focus group interviews, the following questions elicited the necessary data: “Briefly share some of

your stories of how the retreat assisted you the most in your personal experience of community and spiritual friendship,” and, “What elements of the final seminar intersected with your life and provided the most significant experiences and challenges toward maintaining practices of HCF?”

### **Population and Participants**

The research project participants included sixteen key leaders selected from the MCCR. Because the majority of these leaders are monolingual, Spanish served as the principal language for the entirety of the ministry intervention. Only two female pastors serve in the MCCR, and men form the core group of pastoral leaders; therefore, primarily men participated in this study. Bishop Palomo facilitated the selection process and extended a personal invitation to the leaders. I limited the number of participants to ensure intimate group dynamics. The following characteristics define the participants:

- They hold ordination as elders of the MCCR;
- They graduated from the Evangelical Methodist Seminary;
- They served the church for ten years or more;
- They held positions of leadership in the conference or their district;
- They participated in a program with Bishop Palomo that involved ongoing leadership training with informal elements of mentoring; and,
- They attended a seminar on discipleship in January 2009.

Because these leaders have all served more than ten years with the MCCR, participated together in leadership development programs with Bishop Palomo, and shared as a group in other training seminars, a good sense of camaraderie existed among the participants



prior to the intervention. The pre-existing relationships facilitated the formation of groups and a rapid development of community during the intervention.

### Design of the Study

I coordinated a five-day retreat in conjunction with ILI and led two follow-up seminar retreats at eight-week intervals in an overnight format. In the month preceding the retreat, I conducted informal interviews with leading pastors, which provided additional contextual data for the preparation of the retreat and follow-up seminars. The retreat model allowed for experiential learning, and the intervals separating encounters permitted integration of the experiences in between the retreats.

**Table 3.1. Chronological Flow of Research**

July 2009	Aug. 2009	Sept 2009	Oct./Nov. 2009	Jan. 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preliminary Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-day retreat</li> <li>First day:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire</li> <li>• First round of focus group interviews</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up seminar 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up seminar 2</li> <li>Second day:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second round of focus group interviews</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group interviews</li> <li>• Questionnaire</li> </ul>

The dissertation project followed a design of mixed-methods triangulation. The methods employed included quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus group interviews. The use of triangulation created the corroboration of results through the comparison of information that confirmed the sufficiency of the data (Wiersma and Jurs 256). The focus group interviews relied on the interaction within the groups based on the questions or themes of interest in this study. David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger observed that focus groups do not face the danger of conformity or groupthink because

they are not being pushed to make a decision (7). The focus group methodology produced results that emerged from the interaction of the group that would not have surfaced outside of that context (Morgan, *Focus Groups* 2, 6). The approach proved especially valuable due to the cross-cultural context of the present study. Furthermore, the focus groups presented both the advantage and disadvantage of occurring within a controlled environment when compared to participant observation. This control maximized the quantity of data gathered in a limited time, yet it created an unnatural setting (8, 13).

The collection of data in the focus group interviews included written notes and a video/audio recording. The written notes allowed me to record my first observations during the interview, while the video/audio recording permitted a detailed analysis of body language and expressions that may have gone unobserved in the group meeting. The video/audio recording also created the opportunity for me to focus on my role as the moderator. Throughout the process, I gave careful attention to the group dynamics and guarded against the exercise of too much influence upon the data being collected (Morgan, *Focus Groups* 14-15).

### **Instrumentation**

I designed a pre-intervention questionnaire, the Practices of HCF, utilizing the *Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Maturity*, the *Moberg Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire*, and the *Abbreviated Loneliness Scale: Version 2* (Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*; Moberg; Paloutzian and Ellison). The questions from the *Abbreviated Loneliness Scale* (ABLS) provided insight into the experience of isolation among the leaders, and the questions from David O. Moberg and Peter Scazzero helped determine cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of spiritual and emotional maturity. I

utilized Peter Scazzero's inventory as the core of my questionnaire, and I added thirteen questions that probed into the participants' experiences with the practices of HCF found in Acts 2. Scazzero's inventory used a four-point Likert scale, which I also chose to use due to language limitations. Questions one through five dealt with quantitative dimensions of personal piety following Moberg's questionnaire (375, 380). Questions six through twenty were adapted and expanded from the section on "General Formation and Discipleship" in the *Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Maturity* (Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church* 60). The final section of my questionnaire utilized the questions on the "Emotional Components of Discipleship" in Scazzero's inventory but omitted questions twenty-six through thirty (60-63). The study participants completed the questionnaire on the first day of the five-day retreat and at the conclusion of the second follow-up seminar. In order to enrich the data, I also developed a series of nine open-ended questions to facilitate discussion in focus group interviews. I allowed for initial dialogue concerning the broad opening question. Then I prompted the group toward further discussion of the themes particularly relevant to the research project. The first three questions guided the focus group interviews on the first day of the five-day retreat. Questions four through six facilitated discussion on the first day of the first follow-up seminar, and questions seven through nine directed conversations on the last day of the second follow-up seminar.

### **Pilot Test**

Mildred L. Patten suggests that researchers can improve questions and attain greater face validity by trying out items before using them in the main study (55). Therefore, I chose five native Costa Rican leaders, who represented different levels of academic and theological training, to evaluate the items from the questionnaire and focus

groups to confirm that the questions achieved adequate contextualization and clarity.

They utilized a questionnaire that provided space in the margins for them to comment on words, phrases, or statements that were confusing or needed explanation. In addition to an expert review of these questions, I employed parallel testing to estimate the reliability of the results (Wiersma and Jurs 325). Ten students of the Methodist Seminary in Costa Rica, who did not participate in the research project, provided a pilot test of the questionnaire to evaluate reliability of the instrument.

### **Variables**

The study included these independent variables: the three five-day retreats that included teaching conferences, small group activities, community worship experiences, and recreation. The ministry intervention produced changes in feelings, behaviors, and understandings among the participants, which acted as the dependent variables. The potentially confounding variables included (1) overly resistant cultural barriers, (2) participants dropping out during the sequence of retreats, (3) impassible highways due to rains, (4) preconceived ideas that limited the experience of the retreat, and (5) skewed answers on the questionnaires because of cues that influenced responses.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In pursuit of reliability, I designed the questionnaire based primarily upon existing surveys that other researchers previously translated and utilized in Spanish. Scazzero did not report statistics of reliability or validity with his *Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Maturity* nor did Moberg provide measures of reliability in his questionnaire. However, in a study conducted by Raymond F. Paloutzian and Craig W. Ellison, they provided information on validity, establishing a correlation coefficient of 0.70 between their

*Religious Well-Being Scale* and Moberg's *Personal Piety Index* (Moberg 376). The ABLIS rendered a test-retest reliability of 0.85 and an internal consistency of 0.68 in the work of Ellison and Paloutzian (229). In the selection and adaptation process, I respected the categories and scales of the existing materials, and I chose the questions relevant to the specific themes of this study.

Establishing the reliability of focus group interviews as qualitative research presented a challenge. William Wiersma and Stephen G. Jurs write, "Because qualitative research occurs in a natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies. Nevertheless, a well-organized, complete persuasive presentation of procedures and results enhances external reliability" (215). In pursuit of reliability, the focus group questions developed in direct relation to the research questions, and I endeavored to use simple language and structure for these questions to avoid inconsistencies between languages. In addition, I conducted a pilot test of the pre-intervention focus group questions with a group of eight superintendents to assess the face validity of the questions.

Jennifer Mason recognizes that establishing the validity of qualitative research presents particular challenges because it does not provide the type of evidence traditional research has pursued. Still, through the careful operationalization of concepts, the researcher demonstrates the relationship between the collection and analysis of data and the concepts that have been observed, identified, and measured (38-39). Recognizing these issues, I gave careful attention to maintaining consistency in the tools employed for the collection of data and the procedures utilized in the analysis of that data. I solicited the assistance of expert reviewers, three of them being bilingual, to establish the validity

of the questionnaire and the focus group interview questions. My dissertation committee, Bishop Palomo, Oscar Aguilar, and Osias Segura, provided the expert reviews of the questionnaire and focus group questions. The expert reviewers deemed the instruments truthful and consistent with the projected instrumentation and procedures.

### **Data Collection**

I classified data at each phase of the intervention according to the date and location, and I utilized a coded identification for each participant in the given step of data collection. During the first session of the retreat, I distributed the pre-intervention questionnaires. The collection of the questionnaires immediately followed their completion. This approach eliminated the problem associated with the poor return of questionnaires (Patten 2). The administration of the questionnaire in the final seminar retreat followed the same procedure. At the end of the first day of the opening retreat, the two focus groups met to consider the first set of questions. I moderated the interview and recorded the data in writing and by video/audio. Eight weeks after the initial retreat, an overnight seminar retreat created the opportunity to facilitate the mid-intervention focus group session. The interview took place on the first day of this retreat and the data collection followed the same proceedings as the first set of focus group interviews. Before lunch on the first day of the final seminar retreat, the participants received and completed the Practices of HCF questionnaire to provide the post-intervention quantitative data. Then during the morning of the second day of this seminar retreat, the focus groups gathered for the final set of interview questions.

### **Data Analysis**

I organized the increasing amount of data with a spreadsheet for the quantitative data and with a word processor for the qualitative data. I also ordered the information around the major themes of cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in the practices of HCF. The evaluation of the completed questionnaires occurred by tallying the results of answers given on the Likert scale within the established sections. The Likert scale provided clear results, but it posed the disadvantage of depending upon the respondents' definition of undefined options in the questionnaire (Wiersma and Jurs 171). The quantitative data effectively measured objective change in the practices of HCF; however, it did not reveal the deeper issues surrounding feelings, behaviors, and relationships of the participants.

Qualitative research methods provided the additional data to analyze impact on feelings, behaviors, and relationships. Corrine Glesne suggests that qualitative research offers a means to attain greater contextualization, understanding, and interpretation amid complex social realities (5-6). Because the present dissertation project involved cross-cultural, behavioral, and relational dimensions, the qualitative instruments offered an appropriate methodology. In order to obtain qualitative data, I utilized focus group interviews that followed a narrative analysis of the major themes emerging from the conversations to measure the degree of change among participants. Catherine Kohler Riessman discusses the value of narrative analysis. She observes that modernist assumptions have proven inadequate for considering social realities, and she proceeds to say, "Storytelling ... is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us" (1). Based on these insights, I gave careful attention to the stories told by the

participants during the focus group interviews, and then I sought to discover themes that emerged in the conversations. According to the initial findings, I appraised potential relationships between the quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the results and convergence of quantitative and qualitative data provided the means for a general evaluation of the impact of the retreat upon the participants.

Because I have served as a missionary in Costa Rica for the last sixteen years, I had to take special care during the collection and analysis of data to maintain objectivity of observations and interpretations. Mason recognizes that when ethnographers draw on their personal experiences and perceptions, they face the particular challenge of guarding against bias. She recommends that these researchers should record carefully how they came to their conclusions and consistently question their assumptions (77). In order to guard against my personal bias, I asked a bilingual expert reviewer to evaluate selected focus group interview videos and my corresponding observations, interpretations, and conclusions.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The judicious use of ethical procedures guarded the participants from any harm that could have occurred due to their participation in this project. In order to maintain confidentiality, I utilized the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews exclusively within the study itself. The participants provided the last four digits of their *cedula* as the means for classifying data. This protected their identity by maintaining anonymity. As an additional measure of privacy, I guarded the collected documents in my home office where only I had access to them. Confidentiality of the gathered information from the focus group interviews has been carefully exercised throughout the



dissertation project. The participants in the ministry intervention received a letter of invitation and a separate consent form to participate. They signed the agreement of informed consent and protection of privacy prior to their commitment to the project. I initiated each focus group with a reminder of the confidentiality of the conversations. Finally, recognizing the high level of trust invested in the relationships that facilitate qualitative research, I have carefully reviewed the accuracy of my judgments, the validity of generalizations made in my research, and the measures taken to guard confidentiality throughout the research (Mason 201).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

When I initiated the residential year in the Beeson Pastor Program, I brought with me fifteen years of experience as a missionary dedicated to theological education with the Methodist Church in Costa Rica. I also carried a burden in my heart for leaders who had started out well in ministry but were failing to finish well. Through my personal participation in leadership training, I recognized that enduring leadership requires more than personal charisma, a solid theological education, and effective tools for ministry. Though all these elements hold an important place, I believed that those who survive and finish well in leadership demonstrate distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioral traits of holistic Christian formation. Therefore, I conducted a ministry intervention designed to influence primary areas of HCF in the lives of key leaders in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica. Through the three retreats, the research revealed change among the participants in all three dimensions of their HCF.

#### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this study: (1) What were the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the key leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica prior to their participation in the five-day retreat? (2) What cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes occurred in the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants following the intervention? (3) What elements of the intervention most influenced the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants?

### **Timeline**

The first research reflection team recommended that I combine the two follow-up seminars into a single five-day retreat. They believed this format responded better to the pastors' schedules without significantly affecting the outcome of the study. Recognizing the validity of this concern, I chose to implement their recommendation. This change led me to include a final leadership retreat scheduled for January 2010 as the opportunity for post-intervention data collection. This retreat with Steve Martyn and twenty-one students from Asbury focused on servant-leadership. The material of the teaching sessions closely paralleled themes present throughout the ministry intervention. These conferences provided opportunities to enrich and reinforce the objectives of the intervention. Asbury students and Costa Rican participants interacted in small groups. Two of the Asbury students spoke Spanish fluently and four of the Costa Rican leaders spoke English. Several other participants had previously studied Spanish or English as a second language. The groups considered questions related to the teaching sessions of the morning that led to open dialogue about the challenges and opportunities present in the lives of the participants. In this setting, the cross-cultural exchange augmented their reflections and experience. The resulting intervention unfolded according to the *timeline* presented below.

**Table 4.1. Ministry Intervention *Timeline***

20 July 2009	1-5 Aug. 2009	2-6 Nov. 2009	25-29 Jan. 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot test: preliminary focus group interview with superintendents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-day retreat</li> </ul> Day one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-intervention questionnaire</li> <li>• Pre-intervention focus group interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up five-day retreat with all participants</li> </ul> Day one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-intervention focus group interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final retreat on servant-leadership with all participants</li> <li>• Day two: post-intervention focus group interviews</li> <li>• Day four: post-intervention questionnaire</li> </ul>

The changes allowed for intervals of approximately three months in between retreats for the primary study group and a period of six months dedicated to the ministry intervention. The additional time and opportunities for my contact with the leaders and their assimilation of the materials considered in each retreat enhanced the outcomes. I originally included the final retreat on servant leadership only as a point of data collection. However, the final focus group interviews and the testimonies of the participants demonstrated that the presence of Steve Martyn and the Asbury Seminary students, the content of the seminars, and the dynamic of the week significantly influenced the overall intervention. Though this final retreat enhanced the experience of the participants in the six-month intervention, it also acted as a confounding variable in the study.

### **Participants**

On 3 July 2009, I had the first of multiple conversations with Bishop Palomo to discuss final details for the commencement of the ministry intervention. He shared decisions made during the past General Assembly of the MCCR that influenced the

selection of participants. The list of ordained pastors serving in the Church numbered forty-one, including three women. Because this number approximated the established space limits, we decided to invite the full list of ordained elders and deacons. Desiring to maximize the opportunity for our leaders and to create a small group of women, we chose to include four other women who exercise significant leadership in the church.

Ultimately, twenty-two leaders participated in the retreat. Eighteen men and four women comprised the group of participants. The eighteen men met most of the original criteria for participant selection and reflected the following adaptation of characteristics:

- They held ordination in the MCCR;
  - They graduated from the Evangelical Methodist Seminary;
  - They exercise significant leadership in the conference or their district;
  - They participated in a program with Bishop Palomo that involved ongoing leadership training with informal elements of mentoring; and,
- They attended a seminar on discipleship in January 2009.

Though the ordained women did not attend the retreat, those who participated in the primary study group had graduated from the seminary and exercise significant leadership in the life of the Church.

### **Research Question #1**

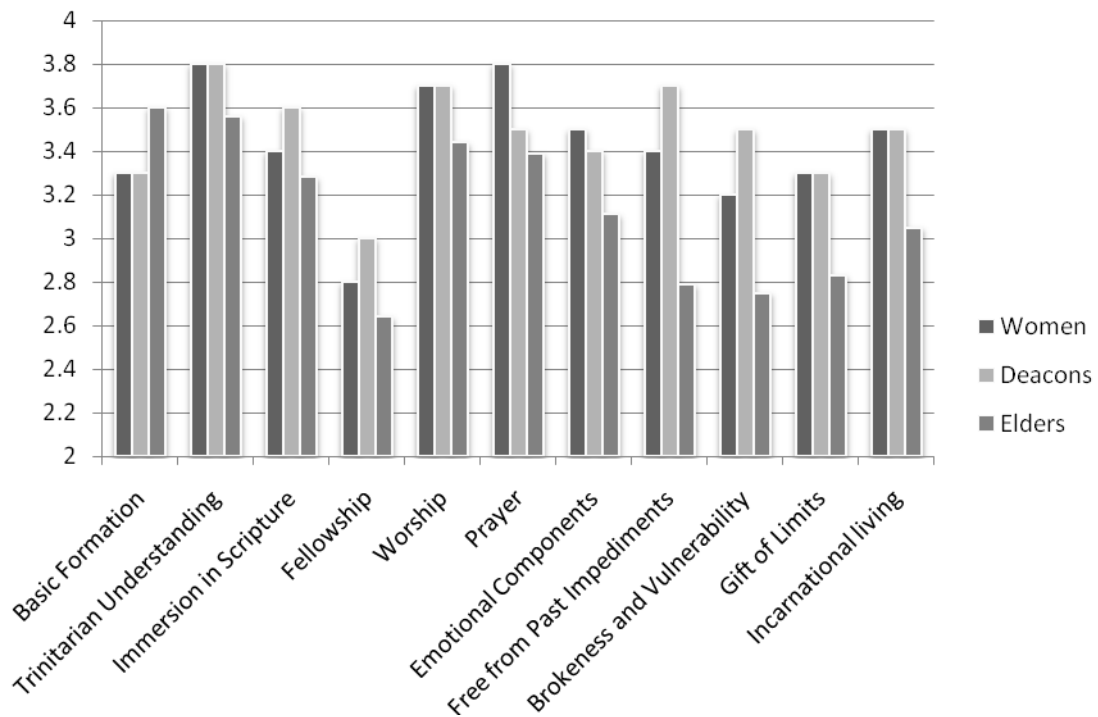
Research Question 1 examined the cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the key leaders of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica prior to their participation in the initial five-day retreat. On the first day of the retreat with ILI, the participants responded to a questionnaire concerning various dimensions of holistic Christian formation. I utilized a researcher-amplified

version of the questionnaire “Inventory of Spiritual/Emotional Maturity” (Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church* 60-63). This instrument focused on spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of Christian formation. In addition, on the first day of the retreat, I divided the participants in two groups of eleven to conduct focus group interviews. The creation of focus groups occurred according to random selection; which placed the four women in the same group. The questionnaire and focus group interviews created a pre-intervention baseline of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns of HCF present in the participants.

The questionnaire obtained objective data in preestablished categories that could be compared to the qualitative data collected throughout the study. Following the model of the “Inventory of Emotional/Spiritual Maturity,” the questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale. The four-point scale established clear, easily translatable points for participant scoring. A six-point scale would have increased the sensitivity of the questionnaire and provided the opportunity to measure subtle changes, yet the absence of adequate descriptors (in Spanish) that the participants would consistently understand led to maintaining the less sensitive four-point scale. According to Patten, questionnaires “provide only a snapshot rather than a rich, in-depth picture of an area of concern” (3). This snapshot played an important role and provided an opportunity for anonymous responses to questions that participants might not answer openly or truthfully in a group setting (2).

Responding to the questionnaire, the group of participants generally scored themselves between two and four on the Likert scale. Given the nature of the questionnaire, the mean score of 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.9, represents an

anticipated result because of the general characteristics of these leaders. Though the questionnaire did not render subtle discriminations, it provided valuable insights into the areas of greatest need among the participating leaders in their journey toward spiritual, emotional, and relational maturity. The results of the pre-intervention questionnaire revealed potential issues emerging from the participants' pasts. Therefore, I adjusted the questions planned for the final focus group interview to consider training received in the families of origin. The mean score for all three groups (women, deacons, and elders) was lowest in the area of fellowship. Figure 4.1 shows the scores of the distinct groups of participants in the areas measured.



**Figure 4.1. Pre-intervention questionnaire results.**

The quantitative research acted like a parenthesis around the ministry intervention, while the primary research utilized a qualitative approach to provide insights concerning more subtle changes. Wiersma and Jurs explain that qualitative research is descriptive in nature with little technical language (206). Recognizing this dynamic of qualitative research, the report of the findings employs frequent quotes from the participants to convey their stories and reveal the changes they experienced through the intervention. Additionally, the holistic nature of the qualitative research coincided with the nature of my study. It provided an intrinsically open and flexible process that would adapt to emerging ideas and themes as the intervention progressed (201). Because of my extensive experience in leadership training in Costa Rica, I held tentative hypotheses concerning HCF among the pastors and leaders of the MCCR. Therefore, when I initiated my research, I needed to utilize an approach that endeavored to maintain openness, allowing for the addition, deletion, and modification of hypotheses throughout the research (43).

The intervention focus groups provided the primary means of collecting qualitative data throughout the research. These interviews provided additional insights to enhance the baseline understanding of current cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF among the participants in the ministry intervention. In order to preserve the qualitative data obtained through the interviews, I took written notes in Spanish during the sessions and recorded the preliminary and pre-intervention conversations in audio format (also in Spanish). I utilized a webcam to record the remaining focus groups, providing a video and audio format. After the focus groups, I translated the Spanish narratives to English and reviewed the audio or video recordings to



check the quality and completeness of the notes. The recordings provided a means for confirming the quoted material. The participants in the study responded to the same questions considered by the superintendents in the pilot test (see Appendix B). Wiersma and Jurs state, “Meaning is as perceived or experienced by those being studied, it is not imposed by the researcher” (201-02). By listening to the stories of the participants, I realized that their perceptions took precedence over my ideas as researcher, providing a clearer measure of reality.

The practice of prayer emerged as the descriptor used most often by the study group in their narratives. The participants related stories of moments in their lives when prayer played a dynamic part in their ongoing journey with Christ. Two of the leaders told of their practice of praying and waiting on God in silence and solitude to hear from him. One of the leaders said, “Sometimes we talk too much when we pray.” In another interview, one of the women related, “I responded to the crisis I was facing with prayer and reading God’s Word. I often got up early in the morning, and I asked the Lord what was going on.” The recurring theme of prayer in the focus groups converged with the relatively high scores established on the questionnaire in the area of prayer.

Even though the pre-intervention focus group interviews included multiple groups and more participants, they did not offer as many relational narratives as did the superintendents in the pilot test. Nonetheless, references to spiritual friendships stood as the second most common theme in the focus group interviews. One of the leaders related, “When I entered into the ministry and started studying at the seminary, I encountered many friends among the pastors and leaders.” Another pastor shared of a time when God led him to go visit a friend from seminary. His visit came at a time of particular need, and

his prayer with the family provided encouragement. These stories represent a contrast with the results of the questionnaire. However, the pre-intervention groups talked about friendships in theory; the superintendents told personal stories. The full list of descriptors is included in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.2. Pre-Intervention Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of HCF	Pre-Intervention Focus Group n
Prayer	9
Worship	2
Study of God's Word	4
Spiritual friendships	8
Mentored relationships	4
Relating to God	4
Desiring and committing to God	4
Fasting	2

These two groups of leaders also discussed some of the challenging moments in their Christian formation. Two of the women shared about times of loneliness. One of the pastors said, "Ministry is beautiful, and at the same time it is painful. The commitments and responsibilities isolate us." However, a couple of the participants shared comments that pointed toward an existing solution. One of the women stated, "Sometimes, when you feel alone and that no one understands, the greatest understanding will come from others in ministry." One of the pastors shared that when he began studying at the seminary, he encountered many friends among the pastors and leaders there. Another told of an occasion when God led him to go visit one of his friends from the seminary. He arrived at a time when his colleague needed a friend and fellow minister to pray with him

and his wife. These narratives demonstrate that opportunities to connect with fellow students and ministers already exist. However, the focus group interviews also suggest that the leaders do not consistently form or maintain the needed spiritual friendships because of the responsibilities and demands of ministry.

### **Preliminary Focus Group**

Prior to initiating the ministry intervention, I had a series of conversations with Bishop Palomo. Our discussions helped shape the preparation for the ministry intervention. I had planned preliminary interviews concerning the Encounter movement. However, when we discussed this movement, he shared that it was losing its impulse and that many of the leaders had eliminated or significantly decreased their involvement. Due to limited availability of the leaders still involved in the Encounter movement, he encouraged me to focus my time preparing for the first retreat. In addition, he provided an opportunity to meet with the eight superintendents of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica prior to initiating the intervention. I utilized the meeting to conduct a preliminary focus group interview, which served as a pilot test of the pre-intervention focus group questions. Major themes emerged in the preliminary focus group with the superintendents that guided the organization and coding of data collected with subsequent focus groups.

The superintendents who participated in the preliminary focus group represented leaders who have successfully endured in ministry, serving fifteen years or more as pastors. Over the course of ninety minutes, the interview considered the practices and relationships that have played a vital part in the Christian formation of these leaders (see Appendix B). I opened with this request: “Please share about the practices of Christian formation that have played a regular part of your journey with Christ and formation in

him.” One leader initiated the responses, naming prayer as one of the first priorities. The other superintendents briefly mentioned several other classical spiritual disciplines such as study of God’s Word, fasting, meditation, and participation in small groups as modeled and led by the bishop. Another superintendent said, “[HCF] is part of a style of life.... It becomes a vital part of the Christian life.”

Then they returned to the theme of prayer and began to share their stories. One of them opened with an example of intercessory prayer, telling his story that commenced twenty-six years ago. He shared, “I participated in a youth seminary on missions.... [T]hey showed a movie, *The Peace Child*, and it left me with a deep burden in my heart.” Through this experience, God gave him a burden for Africa, and he felt that he was called to missions. A pastor encouraged him to begin by buying a map of the countries he felt a burden for and praying. For six months, he prayed daily with several friends for Africa. He told the group, “During this time, I received a vision of a trip to Africa, which was the vision of my trip to Africa that I took two weeks ago. This was the fulfillment of a dream from twenty-six years ago.” He went on to say, “This kind of experience with a spiritual discipline affirms you, and makes you believe the discipline is worth the investment.”

Three of the other leaders shared stories about significant times of prayer when God had led them in their ministry and calling. They spoke of getting up early in the morning or having the Holy Spirit wake them in the middle of the night and hearing from God. One leader shared how God spoke to him one night saying, “I have brought you here to serve me.” He responded to the Lord, telling him of the difficulties and challenges of ministry. He asked God for a piece of land to build a church, and God responded, “Just believe, and I will provide it.” Narratives such as this one revealed ongoing conversations

with God, dialogues in which they struggled to accept the word or call of the Lord. They told him of their dreams and preoccupations, and he responded by encouraging them with his promises. Their stories illustrated God’s initiative, will, and faithfulness as well as their openness, surrender and regular fellowship with God.

One superintendent demonstrated his openness and surrender to God, telling of his call to ministry. He began by sharing his plans as a farmer, but someone suggested that he should dedicate his life to serving God in their local congregation. Though he resisted at first, he said, “Give me two weeks to pray.... After a week and a half of prayer, I was getting ready to go to work.... [B]efore leaving I knelt to pray.” He went on to relate that he began praying his traditional prayers for God to bless him when suddenly he found himself crying and praying before the Lord. He concluded, saying, “Yes Lord, as you have said, may your will be done.” As seen in these stories, the dynamics of desiring, relating to, and committing to God emerged as distinguishing characteristics of these leaders’ lives. Table 4.1 illustrates the primary descriptors used by the participants in the preliminary focus group.

**Table 4.3. Preliminary Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of HCF	Preliminary Focus Group n
Prayer	12
Worship	3
Study of God’s Word	5
Spiritual friendships	12
Mentored relationships	11
Relating to God, attentiveness	14
Desiring and committing to God, surrender	9
Fasting	5

The practice of prayer, attentiveness to God, and ongoing surrender described practices that I anticipated seeing in the lives of the Costa Rican leaders. However, the dialogue with the superintendents also provided unexpected descriptors. As Table 4.2 indicates, their stories included numerous references to significant spiritual relationships. Pastors have often commented to me of their isolation and loneliness in ministry; therefore, I did not anticipate a conversation so rich in relationships. These men mentioned mentors who have influenced their lives and ministry, as well as fellow pastors and seminary professors who have stood with them in difficult times. The prevalence of relational descriptors (e.g., “relationship,” “friend,” “mentor,” “model,” “marked my life”) stood out as a distinguishing trait among this group.

A few of the comments shared in the stories of the superintendents evidenced both the need and the value of these relationships. One leader stated, “We are normal men, and we must surround ourselves with the right relationships.” They recognized the relational dimension of their personhood and faith. Later, another leader revealed one of the foundations on which this group has built friendships: “God’s call, which we have in common, sustains and unites us.” The shared call also brought these leaders together to study at the Methodist Seminary, and they described the time there as “four marvelous years.” The group went on to discuss how many of their spiritual friendships and mentoring relationships have emerged in ministry together. They emphasized the importance of having other ministers as friends because of the shared understandings. One of the superintendents provided a concrete example: “One moment of carelessness can cause the collapse of a life of ministry. I give thanks to God because I speak with these gentlemen [looking at the other superintendents], and I feel supported.” Another

superintendent commented, “One of the first pieces of advice I give to young ministers is that they seek out a mentor.” The conversation with this group of mature leaders affirmed my presupposition that enduring leaders need vital spiritual friendships and mentors.

Though the superintendents enjoyed significant friendships and mentoring relationships, they also revealed challenges they still face in cultivating vital spiritual friendships: They experienced brokenness and isolation. One leader related, “Sometimes pastors do not trust anyone. Pastoral ministry can be very lonely. If one becomes isolated, he or she will be lost.” Another superintendent shared, “Because of the demands of ministry, study, and other commitments, . . . we may grow weak, but we discover God’s presence again.” Another leader stated, “I recently had to cry and ask God for forgiveness because I was so busy doing the work of God . . . that I had not cared for my relationship and my intimacy with God.” The interview with this group of leaders demonstrated their humanness, brokenness, and failures; nonetheless, their stories also revealed how they returned to the place of paying attention and surrendering to God.

During the interview, they remembered men from early in the ministry who helped them overcome major temptations and obstacles. One of the leaders shared a story of how the Lord led him to confess to another minister his addiction to pornography. God used his confession to free him of this sinful addiction. The minister who received the confession has kept it a secret to this day. The other leaders displayed a degree of amazement. The conversation moved to other themes, but near the close of our time together, the group returned to celebrate the trust kept by this minister.

The preliminary focus group with the superintendents provided key insights from the lives of successful leaders who have stayed true to God and their call. Their lives and

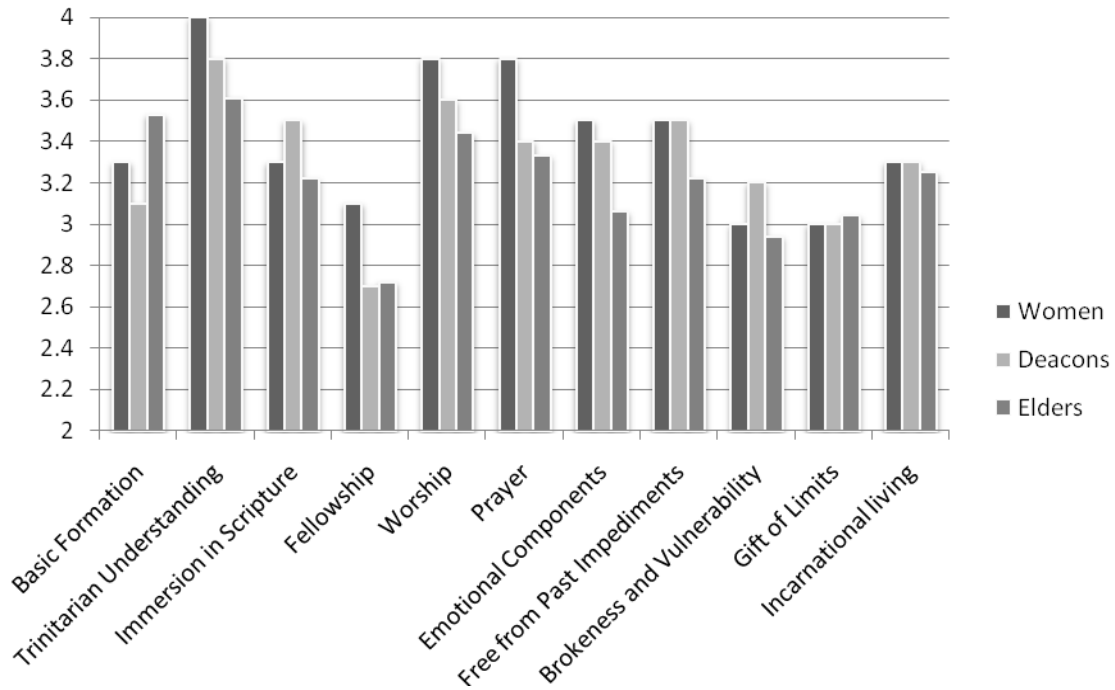
stories created an understanding of HCF coming directly from the lives of Costa Rican leaders. Their perspectives served to filter data in the remainder of the research. They affirmed some of the tentative hypotheses (the vital necessity of spiritual friendships, the importance of a mentor, the challenges of maintaining such relationships in ministry), while challenging some of the potential researcher bias (the absence of vital spiritual friendships, the lack of models). The narratives of the superintendents also provided a view of the dynamic, intimate relationships that exist between enduring leaders and God.

### **Research Question #2**

Research Question 2 examined the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes that occurred in the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants through their participation in the intervention. The mid-intervention and post-intervention focus group interviews served as the primary instruments to collect this data. I also administered the questionnaire on the practices of HCF at the end of the intervention to measure possible quantitative change occurring through the ministry intervention. The results of the post-intervention questionnaire were compared to the pre-intervention questionnaire seeking to observe any quantitative variation. Finally, I implemented an instrument included in the ILI materials for the first retreat. In their conferences, the participants receive a form to write a testimony about the impact of the retreat on their lives. With permission of the participants, I kept the original written testimonies from the ILI conference and included an adapted form for written testimonies at the close of the ministry intervention in January. This form provided a means of collecting first hand narratives from each participant. These stories offered additional insights on the influence of the ministry intervention in their lives and experience of HCF.



The data gained from the pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires provided limited insights. Following collection of the data, a spreadsheet provided the means for careful scoring and comparison of the answers. The post-intervention produced a mean score of 3.2 with a standard deviation of 0.8. The resulting scores generally did not demonstrate consistent patterns of positive or negative quantitative change among the participants. However, observable trends existed within the subgroups. The deacons, who tended to be younger, exhibited negative variation in scores in the post-intervention questionnaire while the elders displayed a consistently positive shift. These scores suggest that the more mature leaders willingly recognized their need for ongoing transformation while the younger leaders resisted change in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF. The women participating in the study demonstrated mixed results. The most significant score variation of +0.4 in the area, “Break the power of the past,” among the elders did converge with the qualitative data. Several leaders shared testimonies of healing of past brokenness, and this matches the improved score. Figure 4.2 and Table 4.4 show the results and the degree of change on the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.



**Figure 4.2. Post-intervention questionnaire results.**

**Table 4.4 Comparison of Questionnaire Results**

	Women			Deacons			Elders		
	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre	Post	Diff
Basic formation	3.3	3.3	<b>0</b>	3.3	3.1	<b>- 0.2</b>	3.6	3.5	<b>- 0.1</b>
Trinitarian understanding	3.8	4	<b>+ 0.2</b>	3.8	3.8	<b>0</b>	3.5	3.6	<b>+ 0.1</b>
Immersion in Scripture	3.4	3.3	<b>- 0.1</b>	3.6	3.5	<b>- 0.1</b>	3.3	3.2	<b>- 0.1</b>
Fellowship	2.8	3.1	<b>+ 0.3</b>	3	2.7	<b>- 0.3</b>	2.6	2.7	<b>+ 0.1</b>
Worship	3.7	3.8	<b>+ 0.1</b>	3.7	3.6	<b>- 0.1</b>	3.4	3.4	<b>0</b>
Prayer	3.8	3.8	<b>0</b>	3.5	3.4	<b>- 0.1</b>	3.4	3.3	<b>- 0.1</b>
Go beneath the surface	3.5	3.5	<b>0</b>	3.4	3.4	<b>0</b>	3.1	3.1	<b>0</b>
Break power of the past	3.4	3.5	<b>+ 0.1</b>	3.7	3.5	<b>- 0.2</b>	2.8	3.2	<b>+ 0.4</b>
Brokenness and vulnerability	3.2	3	<b>- 0.2</b>	3.5	3.2	<b>- 0.3</b>	2.7	2.9	<b>+ 0.2</b>
Receive the gift of limits	3.3	3	<b>- 0.3</b>	3.3	3	<b>- 0.3</b>	2.8	3.0	<b>+ 0.2</b>
Incarnational living	3.5	3.3	<b>- 0.2</b>	3.5	3.3	<b>- 0.2</b>	3.1	3.3	<b>+ 0.2</b>

The mid- and post-intervention focus group interviews rendered rich data concerning the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in HCF among the participants. The interviews and testimonies demonstrated real transformation in the lives of the pastors and leaders. The descriptors (e.g., recognize, understand, rethink, clarify, perspective, opened, learned) of cognitive changes were extensive. One pastor wrote about his experience:

This conference has been one of the best conferences. After 38 years of ministry, I have recognized that my work has not been complete for lack of knowledge. Starting now, I will begin a discipleship with good foundations. I sense a great renewal in my life.

One of the women also commented on the *understanding* she gained through the retreat. She wrote, “This time has been very useful to rethink many things in my life and ministry. It has also helped me to understand the need to clarify my vision and my goals.”

In addition to the comments shared concerning new understanding and knowledge for ministry, other leaders emphasized the holistic nature of the retreat. Several leaders mentioned how the retreat gave them a *new or fuller perspective* of their lives and ministry. One said, “The retreat opened up a panorama for everything.” Another leader said, “These [seminars] were different because they included holistic perspectives of life, ministry as a Christian leader, and the church.” Other cognitive changes emerged following the first retreat concerning the priority of the family. One of the pastors related how changes have come through involving himself more with his family: “One gets caught up in meetings and serving others and easily leaves behind the family. I learned that the house is an extension of my wife’s personality. Now, I am helping with the little details around the house.” The repeated comments on benefiting from the holistic nature

of the retreats, gaining a fuller perspective, and learning about family priorities revealed the significant cognitive changes occurring through the retreats.

The stories shared by the participants also included words (e.g., motivate, refresh, challenge, revive, intimate communion) that indicated elements of affective change in the lives of the participants. One pastor wrote about the changes occurring in his life:

This conference has motivated me; it has refreshed my ministry, has confirmed my vision and has guided me to work under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Also it has challenged me to work on improving my relationship with God and my family.

Another pastor shared how his attitude shifted during the retreat:

I have to admit that I was not very motivated to come to this conference, but today I give thanks to God, because it has been a great blessing for my life. I am revived again. My intimacy with God has been a little cool, but God has dealt with me and I have returned to an intimate communion with Him. Now, I am even waking during the nights to be with Him.

These stories display how the dynamics of the retreat combined to motivate and inspire the participating leaders.

The narratives of the pastors and leaders demonstrated ways in which the ministry intervention produced behavioral change. Several participants mentioned becoming *better stewards of their time*. One said, "I decided to eliminate a TV program that was consuming too much of my time." One of the pastors shared, "Following the retreat, I established the discipline of spending from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. each day in the study of God's Word and prayer." The leaders mentioned other behavioral changes as well. One of the women said, "I discovered a new way to bless my daughter. I started writing letters to her that she could read when I was away." One of the pastors related, "I have started dating my wife and we are enjoying a more intimate relationship." Another leader shared that he has *started two discipleship groups* and plans to start two more in

February. He shared that he is teaching these groups according to what he received in the ILI conference. These comments demonstrate a few concrete examples of the changes that have occurred through the ministry intervention. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 present the frequency of descriptors of change throughout the mid- and post-intervention focus groups.

**Table 4.5. Measure of Change on Mid-Intervention Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of Change	Mid-Intervention Focus Group n
Cognitive change (recognize, understand, rethink, clarify, opened a panorama, learn, holistic, perspective)	10
Affective change (motivate, refresh, challenge, revive, intimate communion)	14
Behavioral change (establish, start, eliminate, write letters, date my wife, help, stewardship of time)	12

**Table 4.6. Measure of Change on Post-Intervention Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of Change	Post-Intervention Focus Group n
Cognitive change	8
Affective change	8
Behavioral change	7

Finally, the early evaluations of the pre-intervention questionnaire suggested a relationship between years in ministry or age of the participant and the low scores in fellowship. Therefore, in the post-intervention focus group, I asked the participants, “Please tell me stories from your childhood family about how you were taught to deal with difficulty, pain, and suffering. Were you allowed to express your emotions, such as anger or sadness, and hurts?” The conversations that followed brought me an almost

overwhelming surprise. Fifteen of the sixteen participants shared stories of dysfunction and abuse. One pastor said, “My parents taught us to defend our brothers and sisters with our fists.... If I lost a fight, I had to face my father afterwards. I was raised in violence.” Another leader shared, “My father almost killed my mother, so she left home with us.... I was raised with various step-fathers, and the majority were abusive.” One of the women related, “I saw and experienced things that I should not have faced as a child.” Another of the women told of growing up in an emotionally repressive environment. Her parents did not allow her to express her anger and scolded her saying, “Christians do not behave that way.”

### **Research Question #3**

Research Question 3 considered the elements of the intervention that most influenced the characteristics of holistic Christian formation among the participants. I originally designed the mid- and post-intervention focus group interviews as my only means of collecting data on this stage of the research. However, in the process of the intervention, two additional methods of collecting this data proved more valuable. The first additional approach came through the written testimonies included in the ILI materials that was adapted and utilized a second time at the end of the ministry intervention. The second more informal means of gathering data was by my personal journal. Comments shared after focus group interviews, during meals, and at the close of the retreats provided rich insights concerning the more influential elements of the retreats.

In order to organize and code the data in the written testimonies, I highlighted narratives and comments relating to the elements of the ministry intervention specifically

mentioned in the testimonies and in my journal notes. Then I organized this data into lists to determine the most repeated themes from the intervention. I observed three major groups of descriptors. First, several leaders commented on leadership principles surrounding the development of vision, plans, and goals. Secondly, the participants often commented on the content and teaching dynamics of the seminars. Finally, they most frequently described the emphasis on their relationships with God, family, and one-another as highly influential components of the intervention. Table 4.9 shows the principal descriptors of the most influential components of the ministry intervention included in the written testimonies.

**Table 4.9. The Most Influential Components of Ministry Intervention**

Descriptors of Influential Components	Written Testimonies n
Planning, vision, and goals	9
Relationships in general	
Intimacy/relationship with God—10	
Family priority or relationships—9	24
Relationships with other believers—7	
Content and dynamic of conferences (conferences, lectures, content, simplicity, clarity, practical nature, holistic)	16

Fourteen participants provided mid- and post-intervention testimonies. In these testimonies, they emphasized the influence of the intervention on their relationship with God, their families, and one another. In these written testimonies alone, twenty-four of the twenty-eight included references to relationships. The next most common theme referred to planning, vision, or goals, and it only appeared thirteen times. Several times this theme responded to a question on the form about future goals. In addition to the repetition of the relational theme in the written testimonies, the focus groups also

included regular references to the relational dimensions of the intervention. One of the women shared, “The encouragement I received from my companions during the retreats was vital.”

The focus group interviews played an unexpected role in the ministry intervention. I designed them as a way to collect data throughout the intervention, yet they emerged as a safe environment in which the participants shared together the changes experienced and challenges faced through the retreats. At the conclusion of each focus group meeting, the pastors and leaders consistently shared their gratitude for the time that I had taken to share with them. I recognized that the appreciation was sincere and not perfunctory.

The participants mentioned the value and influence of the small group discussions. The ILI conference utilized numerous small group discussions and reflection times during the different teaching sessions. The pastors and leaders commented frequently that the practical application and discussion occurring in these workshops played a key role in the impact of the retreat on their lives. During the servant leadership retreat, a one-hour small group discussion followed the primary teaching session each day. The small groups allowed Asbury Seminary students and leaders of the MCCR to share together. Several individuals related how times of prayer and encouragement emerged during their small group. These groups created space for significant connections between students, pastors, and leaders. One leader said, “The small group time was the best part of the week.”

Finally, leaders regularly mentioned the influence of the content of the retreats because of its simplicity, practicality, and holistic nature. These themes appeared



seventeen times in the written testimonies. Following the first retreat, one of the leaders stated, “This retreat has been very practical and direct. It has been very complete.”

Another leader shared at the end of the ministry intervention, “I must say that each retreat has had a personal impact on me.... [They helped me] do more holistic ministry,... be honest with myself and others,... and I have learned to be more like Jesus.” The teaching of the eight core values of leadership during ILI laid the foundation. The following retreats developed the emotional and relational dimensions of HCF. The combined effect of the retreats produced significant transformation in the leaders of the MCCR as evidenced in their testimonies.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The following major findings are discussed in Chapter 5:

1. I did not see any observable change in the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire scores.
2. A significant number of the pastors and leaders participating in this study come out of abusive and dysfunctional homes.
3. A real need exists among the leaders of the MCCR for vital spiritual friendships and mentoring.
4. The demands and busyness of ministry can hinder development and maintenance of healthy, intimate relationships with God, family, and other believers.
5. Many of the stories indicated that even in the absence of a single human mentor, God orchestrated an assortment of individuals who provided counsel and encouragement in the lives of the participants at the precise moment needed.

6. Desiring God, giving attention to his presence, and surrendering to him emerged as dynamic, foundational elements for enduring leadership.

7. When provided the appropriate context and space for connecting with fellow leaders, the participants shared openly about real struggles and experienced personal transformation. The focus groups, small groups, and retreat setting all played vital roles in this process.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study grew out of a burden for the men and women who have experienced God's call in their lives, received theological training, and commenced ministry in the Methodist Church of Costa Rica yet have faced great challenges fulfilling their call. During fifteen years of leadership training with the MCCR, my personal observations indicated that many who prepared for and initiated a life of service to God did not endure in that endeavor. They often left ministry prematurely because of financial, relational, or moral issues that inhibited ongoing service in the life of the church. Others who remained in ministry failed to live according to the convictions and passions that first led them to full-time Christian service. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes among key leaders of the MCCR who participated in three five-day retreats on holistic Christian formation over a six-month period. The design of the ministry intervention sought to promote renewal and transformation of the understandings, emotions, and practices related to HCF in the lives of the participants.

The International Leadership Institute provided the materials, direction, and teaching assistance for the first five-day retreat. The teaching team effectively explored the following topics with the participants:

- intimacy with God,
- passion for the harvest,
- visionary leadership,
- culturally relevant evangelism,

- multiplication of leaders,
- priority of the family,
- stewardship, and
- integrity (see Appendix F).

These eight core values of Christian leadership played a vital role in the overall ministry intervention. The holistic nature of the content combined with the practical emphasis of the teaching challenged the participants in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of their personal Christian formation and ministry to others. Because this first retreat provided new perspectives, fresh motivation, and moments of divine confrontation, the participants demonstrated hunger for intimacy with God, a longing for inner healing, greater openness to one another, and a desire for real change in various dimensions of HCF. Real transformation commenced with the first retreat and continued throughout the ministry intervention.

### **Major Findings**

The preliminary focus group and the six-month ministry intervention provided rich insights concerning the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF among the participants. The study allowed for the consideration of the relationship between HCF and enduring ministry. Through the process of the study and the discoveries it surfaced, I clarified and expanded upon the role of this relationship. The following pages discuss major findings, their implications within the body of research, and recommendations for their application in the context of ministry.

### **The Absence of Observable Change in the Questionnaire Results**

The research did not reveal consistent change of scores on the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. However, it provided insights that led to a shift in questions for the final focus group interview that enriched the outcomes of the study and ministry intervention. In addition, trends present among the subgroups provided insights concerning the dynamics of change and enduring ministry. The resistance of the younger leaders to personal change in cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF represented a particular challenge for the endeavors to promote transformation in the various aspects of HCF. The resistance to change raises a concern for enduring leadership because the young leaders may fail to adopt changes needed to sustain their ministries and life as followers of Christ. The apparent willingness to recognize the need for transformation and take necessary steps to amend behavior among the elders displayed greater maturity and may represent a characteristic that has allowed them to endure in ministry. This quality will assist them in finishing well in life and ministry.

### **Leaders Emerging from a Broken Model of Living in Relationship**

The research revealed that 94 percent of the participants completing the full six months of the ministry intervention (fifteen out of sixteen leaders) came out of abusive and/or dysfunctional homes. This discovery provides an important insight into the challenge that the participants faced in their experience of Christian fellowship. The family of origin provides the first model of community and relationships, whether the example be good or bad. Scazzero writes about the influence his family of origin had on his Christian life and ministry:

Very, very few people emerge out of their families of origin emotionally whole or mature. In the early years of my ministry, I believed the power of

Christ could break any curse, so I barely gave any thought to how the home I'd left long ago might still be shaping me.... But crisis taught me I had to go back and understand what those old things were in order for them to begin passing away. (*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* 12)

Individuals who spend the first years of their lives in a dysfunctional model of community and relationships face additional challenges as adults to live in community and experience relational wholeness. In addition to the personal need for wholeness, Scazzero recognizes the vital role of the pastor in shaping the church and writes, "I looked at New Life Fellowship honestly. The Church clearly reflected my family of origin in significant ways" (*Emotionally Healthy Church* 31). This realization leads him to pursue a model of Christian discipleship and church life that intentionally considers the emotional dynamics of maturity in Christ. In light of the research, the leaders of the MCCR needed opportunities to confront their pasts and experience transformation. Only then could they lead their congregations in processes of personal transformation and community building.

The brokenness and dysfunction experienced in the families of the majority of the leaders participating in this study explained one of the unexpected findings. Costa Ricans are seen as a highly social people, but the findings of this research suggested that the relationships they often experienced did not achieve intimacy or transparency. One pastor shared, "I failed in life because I did not know how to handle difficulties." Another leader said, "Recently, I realized that it was difficult for me to express love to my children because of the way I had been rejected as a child." Later, this same leader stated, "The low self-esteem that accompanied me early in ministry made it difficult to approach doctors or professionals." In order for these leaders to experience emotional and relational wholeness, they needed to confront their own brokenness and replace

dysfunctional models of community and relationship with biblical models and experiences.

The intentional and ongoing healing of past brokenness and the transformation of inadequate models of life in Christ play an essential role in the life, family, and church ministry of the enduring leader. Cantalamessa's discussion on the source of personal wholeness that emerges out of an individual's encounter and relationship with Christ describes this life-altering change (145). Many of the Costa Rican leaders testify to such encounters, yet they reveal the need for ongoing change as well. One pastor stated, "For me, the healing power of The Encounters has been outstanding." Though he had significant experiences of God's healing love, he still needed deeper levels of transformation, which he had not yet experienced. This finding suggests that the pastors and leaders attain wholeness through a process of growth and transformation, not an event. The present ministry intervention built upon experiences and foundations lay in the past, forming part of a continuing process in the lives of the leaders and the Church.

In the midst of the stories of brokenness and pain, the leaders indicated that a new generation of leaders and families is emerging. One pastor shared his experience:

Today, we respond differently to our children because of the training and education we have received. New ways of parenting exist and emotions are expressed more freely.... Now, I am a new person, a new creature. I have a new perspective. As I analyze my parents in light of God's Word, I recognize areas that I must handle differently with my children.

As these leaders have experienced healing in their lives, they established new patterns in their homes that can positively influence the upcoming generation.

Though these testimonies provide hope for the future, a real concern still exists for the present leadership of the church. On the questionnaire, the ordained elders

participating in the study demonstrated lower scores in the areas of “freedom from past impediments,” “brokenness and vulnerability,” and “receiving the gift of limits.” The low scores in these areas converged with complications in developing and maintaining healthy relationships. In a post-intervention testimony, one of the ordained elders shared of the tremendous impact the intervention had in his life. He shared concerning the emotional healing he experienced and the potential for real friendship he saw with his colleagues. However, he concluded by writing, “I do not anticipate too much emotionally. The truth is that I need a change of attitude because it is difficult for me to trust anyone.” According to the questionnaire, the ordained leaders experienced the greatest change of scores in the freedom they received from past impediments. Nonetheless, this testimony stood as a reminder that the ministry intervention represented only one step in a greater process.

### **Enduring Leaders Needing Healthy, Spiritual Relationships**

Chapter 2 laid the foundations for a biblical perspective on vital spiritual relationships. Furthermore, Acts 2 provided key insights by establishing the connection between relationship with God and with fellow believers. The first disciples devoted themselves to a dynamic relationship with God and with one another. Bonhoeffer’s thoughts added the affirmation that all Christian community depends upon the person and work of Jesus Christ (21). Furthermore, Chapter 2 asserted that the person who is in Christ already pertains to a community. Within this theological framework, the study participants considered the reality of relational isolation in ministry.

The theme of loneliness and isolation emerged in the focus groups, and it coincides with one of the major presuppositions that led to my research. I believe that



loneliness and isolation act as contributing factors in the lives of those who fail to endure in leadership. Several leaders shared their loneliness in the course of the ministry intervention. One of the women related, “The path of ministry is very lonely.” Another pastor responded, saying, “People isolate themselves from the help and counsel of others.... [T]hat is what happened to me during the first three or four years of my ministry. I thought I was some super saint.” Both of these examples demonstrate the challenge faced by leaders of the MCCR to live in a vital, dynamic relationship with God and other believers.

During the pre-intervention discussion with experienced leaders in ministry, the importance of relationships was mentioned frequently. This theme could suggest that the leaders experience rich and multiple spiritual relationships. However, the language of friendships stood in contrast to the results of the questionnaire. After closer analysis of the focus group materials, a possible explanation emerged. In the two pre-intervention groups, only one woman mentioned this theme prior to my request that they share about relationships that have influenced their growth in Christ. Furthermore, upon closer analysis, the participants mentioned relationships or friendships only three of the eight times in the context of stories about actual relationships. This discovery led me to believe that the descriptors (i.e., friendship, relationship) caused the participants to focus on theoretical concepts when responding to my question rather than on real relationships. If this interpretation of the data is accurate, then the apparent discrepancy between the low fellowship scores on the questionnaire and the relatively frequent mention of relationships in the pre-intervention focus group makes sense.

The research findings offer a convincing argument that a real need exists among the leaders of the MCCR for vital spiritual friendships and mentoring. Fortunately, the conversations with these pastors and leaders have revealed existing paths of relationship in two concrete ways:

1. The preliminary focus group with the superintendents uncovered the rich relationships that exist in their lives. These men stand as models for the upcoming leaders.

2. The participants in the study provided theoretical solutions to their isolation and need for vital spiritual relationships. They lacked the practice of living what they knew in theory to be true.

In the pre-intervention focus group, one woman stated, “Because we have gone through similar things.... My relationship with fellow ministers strengthens me tremendously.” Another pastor shared, “When I am around pastors who have more experience, I listen.... I have learned that I need to build relationships.” In the preliminary focus group, one superintendent shared, “I have found mentors and counselors within the church.” Another leader spoke of a fellow pastor: “[He] is my friend and my counselor.... When my son was sick, he joined me in praying and fasting.” Each of these narratives refers to a spiritual relationship that has provided encouragement, direction, friendship, and support.

### **Leaders Experiencing Hindrances to Vital Relationships**

The biblical perspective of believers establishes that all who are in Christ belong to the Christian community. Positive models of vital spiritual relationships do exist among the leaders of the MCCR; nonetheless, many leaders experience isolation and loneliness. Discussing the condition of pastoral leaders, Jim Herrington, R. Robert

Creech, and Trisha Taylor write, “Far too many are fatigued and spiritually empty. The day-to-day stress of managing an institutional church—small or large—robs them of their personal spiritual vitality” (3). According to the testimony of several participants, the demands and busyness of ministry hindered development and maintenance of healthy intimate relationships with God, family, and other believers. One superintendent stated, “I know that many of us have this passion, we are following God, but we lose ourselves. We lose ourselves in busyness. We fall and we do not even recognize it.” Another pastor shed light on how this seclusion occurs: “Ministry is beautiful, and at the same time it is painful. The commitments and responsibilities isolate us.” Though the particular responsibilities of ministry often set pastors and Christian leaders apart, they can find community and understanding with fellow ministers. They must intentionally create space and take advantage of opportunities to be with other leaders in order to access this resource.

The invitation to the retreats that formed the ministry intervention provided the pastors and leaders an opportunity to create space intentionally for fellowship and revitalization. Approximately half of those invited to the retreats accepted the invitation. Those who participated shared a wealth of opportunities to experience personal and corporate renewal as they connected, related, and grew as a community. However, those who declined the invitation missed the renovation of their ministry and walk with Christ. This occurrence repeats itself with other events, and even though legitimate reasons exist for not attending a given retreat, leaders should evaluate the patterns that shape their lives and ministry. Across the years, I have observed a tendency among certain leaders to take

advantage of every opportunity to connect with the greater body of pastors, while others consistently choose not to participate.

The absence of trust presented another primary hindrance. As I have reflected upon the superintendents' reaction to the narrative about keeping a trust, I have recognized that even among those who experienced meaningful relationships, many of them still struggled to trust another minister or leader fully. One pastor rightly stated, "Not everyone is trustworthy. Bishop Palomo has been one of the trustworthy persons for me.... He helped me through a year of crisis early in my marriage." Though not every person merits the trust of another leader, enduring leaders found those trustworthy individuals who walk with them in good and bad times. At other times, God provided a constant friend or mentor who stood by the superintendents and a couple of the participants in the study. In other moments, God provided a trustworthy person in the moment of need. One superintendent shared a personal experience: "Juan was not a man who inspired trust because of the way he looked, but one day God put in my heart to confess a personal struggle with sin to Juan. I obeyed God, and God used him to set me free." All leaders need to develop relationships of trust. They may discover such deep friendship with a lifelong mentor. In some circumstances, a person may come to them through divine initiative. Regardless of the source of this connection, Christian leaders must choose to trust the individuals that God provides them.

Another hindrance to spiritual friendships involves the image of the leader. One participant shared, "We worry about keeping our image." The concern with image can block transparency and openness. Individuals who place high value on their image choose to keep their struggles with temptation or sin hidden. They fear losing status,

influence, or leadership. This concern parallels the leadership paradigm of *caudillismo*. Both the abiding in Christ seminar in the November retreat and the servant leadership seminar taught during the retreat in January positively influenced the perspectives of the pastors and leaders in this area. The seminar teachers exemplified an attitude of humility themselves. One of the pastors commented, “In the seminary with Dr. Mike Wells,... I learned to be more honest with others and with myself according to who I really am.” The teaching sessions considered the honesty and humility of the leader who follows the example of Jesus.

### **God Orchestrating Mentorship**

Several of the stories indicated that even in the absence of a single human mentor, God orchestrated multiple encounters with a variety of individuals who provided counsel and encouragement in the lives of the participants at the precise moment needed. Ruth Haley Barton describes spiritual formation as “mystery: something outside the range of normal human activity and understanding that can be grasped only through divine revelation and brought about by divine activity” (12). These examples should not promote passivity. The Word of God encourages the disciple of Christ to take specific steps, utilize given practices, and walk in obedience to the revealed Word of God. Our endeavors nurture openness and create spaces to experience God’s move. All believers and disciples participate in the formative processes of their lives; nonetheless, the mystery of holistic Christian formation persists.

Only a few of the participants of this study acknowledged the presence of a stable mentor in their lives. However, several participants shared stories that revealed how God’s hand guided their lives, providing counsel, direction, confrontation, and

encouragement through a variety of sources. A superintendent told a story of a moment when God led him to the person who would provide the counsel he needed:

I was a recent convert when I was facing a difficult situation. There was a man who really loved to read the Bible. God told me I was to share my situation with him, but he was very difficult to understand.... He came to visit me, so I shared with him. He opened his Bible and said, "Read this verse." It was exactly what I was waiting to hear.

In another group, one woman recounted how she came to Christ. She was seeking for a man to love, when she heard these words, "I am Jesus. Love me." Another leader shared, "At age seventeen, I came to know Christ. No one counseled me. No one taught me.... Through the Bible, the Word of God and the pure necessity to survive, God brought about a change in my life." He finished by saying, "No pastor can say, 'Jerry was formed with me.' It was the pure grace of God." The process that God orchestrated in his life included several different leaders and ultimately led him into ministry.

### **Attentiveness and Surrender to God**

Desiring God, attentiveness to his presence, and surrender to him emerged as dynamic foundational elements for enduring leadership. Ruth Haley Barton writes, "The depth of desire has a great deal to do with the outcome of our life" (27). The superintendents demonstrated desire for and surrender to God that shaped them and sustained the processes of HCF in their lives. One superintendent shared, "I believe that all of us around this table know what has sustained us in ministry. We know it has been a life of consecration to God." Narratives describing similar desire and surrender emerged among the participants in the study. One woman shared the change in her life: "I seek time to have intimacy with God." Another shared, "I have learned to seek God in his Word." One of the pastors said, "I was hungry and thirsty for God.... I turned down a

scholarship to study medicine, so I could go to seminary.” These testimonies reveal a God-centered orientation in the lives of the pastors and leaders in the MCCR. Cultivating and maintaining this focus on God facilitates a life of enduring leadership.

The deepest desires and longings of the human heart call us into relationship with God and with one another. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor consider how desire acts like the glue adhering Christian followers to Christ:

Personal transformation ... is an inside-out process of growing obedience to Christ. It is helped along by the presence of a safe community of coaches and peers who offer grace and speak truth, but most of all it calls us to a reflective life centered in the person of Jesus Christ. (13)

I believe these words reflect the heart of HCF. Christ alone stands at the center of personal transformation, but one’s relationship with and to the body of Christ plays a vital role assisting the leader in this journey.

Cantalamessa provides rich insights into the transformation of the human heart by clearly identifying the role of the Holy Spirit in giving birth to and nurturing the desire for and surrender to God (263). From the foundations of the Church in Acts, the infilling of the Holy Spirit has marked the life of the body of Christ. This experience creates within the life of the believer the longing and commitment essential to Christian living. This work of the Holy Spirit characterized the life and ministry of the superintendents and stands as the essential element of enduring leadership.

### **Space for Holistic, Transformational Experiences**

In Chapter 2, I stated that a primary goal of the retreat involved the discovery of the community that already existed. Small group discussions, focus group interviews, group projects, meal times, and coffee breaks all served to create the space for recognizing the community in which the participants found themselves already

immersed. The holistic teaching and relating in the appropriate setting, accompanied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, accomplished more than expected in the relatively short duration of the ministry intervention. In this setting, cognitive, affective, and behavioral change occurred rapidly and effectively. People changed.

Various components of the retreat contributed to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. The holistic and practical nature of the ministry intervention allowed the participants to connect at points of greatest need or interest and to make concrete applications for life and ministry. One pastor said, “These [seminars] were different because they included holistic perspectives of life, ministry as a Christian leader, and the church.” Another pastor shared, “One gets caught up in meetings and serving others and easily leaves behind the family. I learned that the house is an extension of my wife’s personality. Now, I am helping with the little details around the house.”

The fact that all the participants served as pastors and active leaders in the church allowed their discussions in the small groups to emerge from and connect to current life experiences. The participants developed specific action steps in the first retreat that they further developed as they practiced them throughout the intervention. A specific example of this process occurred during the first retreat. The pastors and leaders participated in a teaching session in which they learned how to receive, nurture, and implement vision (cognitive change). They also received the challenge from Scripture that renewed and energized their passion to receive and live according to God’s vision (affective change). Finally, they took time to write, discuss, and refine personal vision statements, which prepared them for implementing change in their lives and ministry (preparation for behavioral change). The teaching team talked personally with different participants and



helped them sharpen their vision statements. One of the pastors shared several drafts of his vision statement with me as he worked on it throughout the week. He left the retreat with a clear vision for a holistic ministry to families from which a ministry plan developed.

**The importance of small groups for the participants.** In the small group setting, participants shared with one another independent of the leadership team's intervention. Though questions and particular themes from the teaching session guided their conversations, the participants entered into an open dialogue according to the burdens that God placed upon their hearts. Often I observed that the small group discussions included significant times of prayer and encouragement at the group's initiative. One woman received inner healing and experienced personal transformation through her participation in the small group. The group was discussing a question provided at the end of a teaching session. She shared, "I decided to make myself vulnerable." When she finished sharing, a participant stepped forward to pray for her. Another member of the small group said, "Her vulnerability set the tone for the rest of our small group gatherings." This example demonstrates the cognitive influence that came out of the teaching, followed by affective changes occurring through processes of inner healing, and the behavioral changes as this woman and her small group altered their actions, becoming more vulnerable.

**Focus groups and space for community.** The focus groups unexpectedly created space for community. Focus groups provided a distinct forum for dialogue. In this setting, I participated as a facilitator and recorder of the conversations. Though I designed the focus group to collect data, the meetings materialized as another opportunity for open

sharing and experiencing community among the participants. My presence as the interviewer shifted the focus of the participants because they narrated their stories to me. They shared their experiences, challenges, and struggles openly. They appreciated receiving the space and time to convey their stories and share in the group's encouragement.

Several participants came forward to express their appreciation at the close of each focus group. One of the pastors stands out in my mind because of the way he took my hand, looked me in the eyes, and said, "Thank you for letting us share." When he thanked me, I knew the focus group had served as far more than a research instrument. I could see that this pastor felt valued and accepted through the opportunity to be heard by me and his colleagues in the focus group. An affective change had occurred in him. In a post-intervention focus group with the women, I observed a gradual affective change. The energy in the group grew as the women shared, and I could see through the expressions on the participants' faces the encouragement and motivation they received from one another.

When provided the appropriate context and space for connecting with fellow leaders, the participants shared openly about real struggles and challenges. The focus groups, small groups, and retreat setting facilitated the transformational processes occurring in the lives of the participants. One woman shared of a cognitive change, stating, "I have learned to see things differently.... I trust in God and wait to see what he will do." An example of an affective change came through another woman who shared of her struggles because of the changing circumstances that limited her opportunities for ministry. She shared with two different women during the retreats, and both of them told

her, “Receive peace and wait in the Lord.” She went on to say, “I give thanks to God for these words of encouragement.”

**The broader context for creating community space.** In addition to offering the space and opportunities for small groups, focus groups, and informal connections, the retreats also allowed the participants to break away from the routine, systems, and structures that often inhibit significant reflection. The one young woman who had to leave the first retreat twice to go to classes at the university told me, “I hated having to leave the retreat.” She revealed how leaving to go to classes interfered with her experience in the first retreat. A pastor alluded to the value of the retreats when he said, “We continue to learn every time we come together. We learn from one-another.” This shared learning process observed in each of the retreats offers a model for the ongoing endeavors to develop and nurture HCF among the leaders of the MCCR.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study indicate that the pastors and leaders of the MCCR face significant obstacles in their pursuit of HCF and enduring leadership. Nonetheless, they already have resources available to respond to them. The challenges faced by the pastors discussed in the major findings include those listed below:

- The majority of the pastors and leaders participating in this study come out of dysfunctional and often abusive home environments.
- The leaders of the MCCR experience a shortage of vital spiritual friendships and mentoring.
- Over commitment, busyness, and the responsibilities of ministry hinder the nurture of healthy intimate relationships with God, family, and other believers.

The findings also revealed positive resources available to the leaders of the MCCR and the dynamics of God's working in their midst. These key findings are summarized in the following list:

- Independent of a human mentor, several stories revealed that God orchestrated different individuals to provide counsel and encouragement for the participants when needed.
- The superintendents, who represent enduring leaders, demonstrated a distinctive desire for God, attentiveness to his presence, and surrender to him.
- Given the appropriate context and space, the participants shared openly about real struggles and experienced personal transformation.

These findings provide significant directions for HCF and enduring leadership for leaders in the MCCR and in a broader context.

Leaders of the MCCR struggled to encounter the encouragement and mentoring needed in their own journey of HCF. The findings of this study may be of interest where parallel problems exist. Based on studies and ministry in the United States, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor recognize the crisis facing pastors:

Pastors are called to lead, but they face the same challenges that every other believer faces. Although expected to assist others in their *personal transformation* [original emphasis], the pastor often has no place to turn for the encouragement and mentoring required for his or her own spiritual formation. (5)

The connection between the words of Herrington, Creech, and Taylor and the findings of this study demonstrate that the challenges faced by pastors in their own spiritual formation cross cultural boundaries. Therefore, the implications and recommendations from this study merit consideration in the broader American setting. In addition, studies

realized in this broader milieu should be evaluated within the Costa Rican and Latin American context.

Though this study has shown that pastors and leaders experience insufficient vital spiritual relationships, it also demonstrated that the presence and development of a shared biblical understanding of community (cognitive change) facilitates the growth of vital spiritual relationships among the leaders of the MCCR. Once the pastors share the conviction (affective change) that community already exists in Christ, then they can create spaces and maximize opportunities (behavioral change) for connecting with one another on the existing foundation. As the leaders intentionally open themselves up to these connections, they must then build the dynamic relationships that will serve to sustain them in times of difficulty and challenge. During the ministry intervention, the participants maximized both the space and opportunity provided by the retreats, and real transformation began to take place. Now, the leaders of the MCCR need to determine how to sustain and nurture the processes through which the transformation and relationships have initiated.

Because of the brokenness and poor models that exist in the lives of many leaders, an adequate approach to HCF must include intentional ministries of healing and restoration. It should also include teaching and counseling to assist in building new models for family and community life. Chapter 2 discussed how this process already had begun through the Encounter movement. Nonetheless, the current research revealed the persisting need for deeper levels of healing and personal transformation. The Encounter has provided a significant healing event in the lives of numerous leaders and members of the MCCR; however, this healing experience has not fully translated into the emergence

of new practices of relating to colleagues in ministry, family, and friends. In order to take the next step from affective to behavioral change, the Church needs to develop sustainable processes of HCF that teach and nurture new models and practices of relationship and community, promoting deeper levels of personal transformation.

In addition to the pursuit of cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in the relational dimension of HCF, the leaders of the MCCR need intentionally to embrace an expanded vision of HCF. On 18 February 2010, David G. Benner spoke on being deeply spiritual while becoming fully human. He suggests three disciplines for “living with spirit and soul”: (1) paying attention, (2) embracing reality, and (3) practicing surrender. The journeys of Christian formation among the superintendents especially exemplified attentiveness to God and the practice of surrender. Though I did not include these disciplines in my initial review of spiritual disciplines, the preliminary focus group with the superintendents who represent seasoned leaders has convinced me that these disciplines need to undergird the formative practices of those who endure in leadership.

The study also revealed that leaders in the MCCR face challenges (busyness, lack of trust, and image keeping) in developing and maintaining vital spiritual relationships common to leaders in other contexts. The participants affirmed that the demands of ministry isolate them. In order to promote HCF, the leaders of the MCCR will need to discover a healthy rhythm of life that pursues holistic transformation of perspectives, feelings, and practices.

The obstacle presented by the absence of trust needs to be considered through the lens of Christian *koinonia*. Seamands provides important insights into the nature of this *koinonia*, which involves a dynamic relationship with others as well as with the Trinity

(*Ministry 39*). In the same way that the believers and disciples of the early Church devoted themselves to fellowship with God and one another as seen in Acts 2, the contemporary Christian is called into the same kind of community. The devotion demonstrated in Acts 2 and understood in *koinonia* implies a level of trust and intimacy in relationship that must be the standard for the body of Christ in all ages. The work of God in Christ provides a common call, unity of purpose, and life in the same Spirit that stands as the key to fellowship of this nature. The Apostle Paul wrote clearly concerning this unity in the Trinity (Eph. 4:4-6). Some of the leaders of the MCCR have captured this truth recognizing that their common calling unites them. Their experience demonstrates how the biblical model of *koinonia* provides a source for the cognitive and affective change, but the deeper affective and behavioral change needed to be guided by those leaders who have experienced and can offer such trust and fellowship to others.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research and ministry intervention achieved a surprising level of penetration and influence in the lives of the pastors and leaders of the MCCR; nonetheless, the study presented definite limitations. Because the teacher intervention only extended for six months and the collection of data was limited to this period, the study could not measure long-term impact on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of HCF. This drawback was particularly significant in the affective and behavioral aspects of the study.

Concerning the instruments of the study, the questionnaire served as an effective tool in establishing a baseline of the dimensions of HCF in the lives of the participants prior to the intervention; however, it did not provide an observable measure of change between pre- and post-questionnaire scores. In the context of a brief window of data

collection, the four-point Likert scale failed to quantify change. In a future study, the researcher should seek an approach that would allow for the use of a six-point Likert scale to increase the questionnaire's sensitivity and consider extending the period of data collection.

The final retreat with Steve Martyn and the Asbury students significantly enhanced the ministry intervention. However, the teaching and experiences of this retreat likely contaminated the results of the study. I believe that the self-scoring of the participants on the questionnaire as well as the dialogue in the focus groups were probably altered. In future studies, the researcher could include this final retreat as part of the intervention because of the positive impact of the servant leadership themes. In so doing, the final data collection needs to occur following the retreat.

Finally, inadequate sound and video equipment as well as background noise in the rooms used for the focus group interviews affected the quality of audio and video recordings of these sessions. The technical difficulties limited the recording of the preliminary and pre-intervention focus groups to audio. In all the sessions, the inadequacy of the equipment provided low grade recordings, which increased the difficulty of the initial transcription and coding of the collected data. For future research, I would recommend securing higher quality digital recording equipment as well as a setting more conducive to recording the sessions.

### **Unexpected Observations**

An unexpected discovery emerged in the scores of the questionnaires. According to the section measuring time dedicated to practices of basic formation, the ordained elders dedicate the most time to devotional practices. However, they consistently



rendered the lowest scores on all other components of the inventory. These scores suggest less integration of the devotional practices into their daily lives and a lower degree of emotional maturity. The interpretation of the data could draw two possible conclusions. It might suggest that the elders practiced more conservative self-scoring, or it could mean that the amount of time dedicated to devotional practices does not guarantee spiritual or emotional maturity.

The questionnaire also suggested that many of the leaders of the MCCR dealt with an unexpected degree of brokenness from their past. The post-intervention focus group confirmed this initial conclusion to be true. The percentage of participants, 94 percent, coming from abusive and/or dysfunctional homes was especially surprising.

A particularly valuable serendipitous discovery emerged during the final retreat. The presence of the students from Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) provided a unique opportunity for a cross-cultural small group engagement. The presence of the Asbury students in the small groups created an opportunity for the modeling of trust and vulnerability. Testimonies shared by the ATS students revealed dynamic conversations, heartfelt prayers, and significant bonding occurring across cultural boundaries within the small groups. I believe that these elements played a special role in the personal transformation experienced by many of the participants in the ministry intervention, and it provides a model for future ministry in the pursuit of HCF.

### **Recommendations**

The MCCR and the seminary in Costa Rica must develop a plan that includes ongoing teaching, counseling, and retreats that focus on healing past brokenness and developing new models for relationships. The plan must involve more than an event; it

needs to be a continuing practice. Only a process will bring the desired results. Recently, a few pastors have graduated from the Methodist University with degrees in counseling. These leaders could provide valuable insight and direction in the development of an intentional movement that attends to the brokenness and dysfunction that shape the lives and ministries of numerous pastors. The overall leadership of the MCCR will profit greatly from training and modeling for their marriages, parenting, and friendships. This endeavor will greatly benefit these leaders and their congregations in personal transformation and community building.

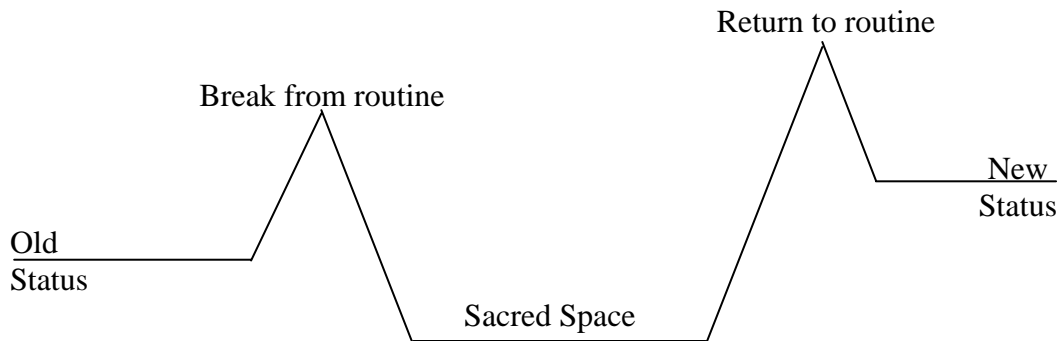
The curriculum for teaching on HCF in the seminary of the MCCR needs to be adapted to include intentionally the disciplines of paying attention to God, embracing reality, and ongoing surrender to God. These disciplines lay a foundation for the other classical spiritual disciplines. They will also play a dynamic part in bringing the leader back to a Christ-centered life and ministry.

The MCCR needs to develop a deliberate approach to creating spaces and opportunities for the formation and nurture of vital spiritual relationships. The positive impact of the retreats during the ministry intervention provides one avenue for offering insightful teaching and of nurturing relationships. The seminary should purposely plan semi-annual or annual events that provide the opportunity for the pastors and leaders to gather in a retreat. These events will provide the setting for renewal and restoration in the various dimensions of HCF.

Zahniser's work on cross-cultural discipling provides a conceptual framework to create a pilgrimage-sabbath model of HCF to meet this need through a combination of strategically planned events and dynamic processes. According to Zahniser, "Pilgrimage

... can be understood as a rite of passage through space—a journey to a sacred center where bonding to meaning can take place, where people can be instructed and empowered for work and witness” (154). The work of the seminary should provide retreats, which, like pilgrimages, will serve as unique opportunities for personal and corporate transformation.

The leadership of the MCCR should prepare a retreat concerning sacred rhythms, daily office, and biblical Sabbath because of the role that these elements play in providing regular renewal and transformation in a leader’s life. The elements of faith, renewal, and recentering for the believer and disciple could help the leaders of the MCCR achieve a healthier balance in their pursuit of HCF in the midst of their ministerial commitments and responsibilities. During a retreat of this nature, the teaching team should create the space and opportunities for experimenting with the practices of daily office and Sabbath. Furthermore, significant times of personal reflection and small group discussion should form a central part of the teaching design to allow the leaders to pursue ideas and innovations for application in their context. An adapted version of Zahniser’s conceptualization of the application of the rite of passage structure contemplates application to different models of retreat, Sabbath and daily office.



**Figure 5.1. Adapted rite of passage structure for transformational retreats.**

The MCCR needs to clarify and develop the mission and vision for the ministry of the superintendents. The narratives they shared in the preliminary focus group manifested the dynamics of a great team as described by Lencioni (7). They have broken away from the negative dynamics and redeemed the good elements of the old paradigms of *machismo* and *caudillismo*, and they provide a model of biblical leadership and healthy relationships as leaders. The openness, vulnerability, and connectedness that they demonstrated established a pattern of great hope for future leadership. As others view their model, they must deliberately remove the obstacles that hinder living in holistic relationships that nurture enduring leadership. Their experiences offer an indispensable example of vital spiritual relationships that could assist the pastors and leaders of the MCCR in overcoming hindrances (e.g., isolation, image seeking, busyness, and lack of trust) to these relationships in their own lives. In order to maximize the experiences of these leaders, the MCCR needs to provide the training and encouragement for the future ministry of the superintendents.

Finally, the leaders of the MCCR need to remember God's part as they intentionally pursue a plan of HCF for enduring leadership. They should never lose sight of the mysterious and miraculous role that the ministry of the Holy Spirit plays in these processes. Just as the personal encounters with God played a vital role in the lives of the superintendents, the leaders of the MCCR must continue to depend upon the work of the Holy Spirit in all their endeavors. As God remains the focus of their lives and as they consistently pay attention to and surrender to him, he will continue to lead them through the processes of HCF and sustain them in leadership.

## APPENDIX A

### LETTER OF CONSENT

August 1, 2009

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary, and I am conducting research on the practices and relationships that nurture and sustain holistic Christian formation among Christian leaders. I would like to conduct two surveys and three group interviews of fifteen leaders of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica, and in consultation with Bishop Palomo you have been selected as one invited to assist in the study.

Since the practices and relationships of Christian formation can be a sensitive topic among Christian leaders, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your leadership or ministry in the life of the Church, so I will not ask for your name on the surveys. The data will be collected using a code, and all of the surveys will be organized to give a blended view rather identify any one person. The data collected in the group interviews will not be divulged outside of the sessions, and it will be used exclusively for the purposes of this study.

I believe that the practices and relationships that undergird holistic Christian formation play a crucial role in the longevity and effectiveness of leaders in ministry. I believe the findings of this research will assist me in providing better approaches for training and sustaining effective ministry leaders. My hope is that current and future leaders of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica will be helped because you have taken the time to participate in this study. Once the research is completed in approximately four months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in the study. Feel free to contact me at any time if you need any more information. My number is \_\_\_\_\_ and my email is gconnection@hotmail.com. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Steve Gober

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

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

Please print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### *Holistic Christian Formation for Enduring Leadership*

##### **Pre-Intervention Focus Group**

###### **Question # 1:**

Share how the practices of Christian formation play a regular part of your journey with Christ and formation in him.

*Por favor, compartan cómo las prácticas o disciplinas de formación Cristiana constituyen una parte regular de su peregrinaje con Cristo.*

###### **Question # 2:**

Share with me about the personal relationships that have encouraged growth in Christ for you and others involved in the relationship. Has transparency, vulnerability, and intentional support characterized some of these relationships?

*Por favor, compartan conmigo acerca de las relaciones personales que han fomentado crecimiento en Cristo para usted personalmente y las otras personas involucradas.*

*¿Algunas de estas relaciones han sido caracterizadas por la transparencia, vulnerabilidad y apoyo mutuo unos a los otros?*

##### **Mid-Intervention Focus Group**

###### **Question # 3:**

Please relate how your participation in the ILI conference has helped you with your intimacy with God and the integrity of your life.



*Por favor relaten como su participación en la conferencia de ILI le ha ayudado en su intimidad con Dios y en la integridad de su vida.*

**Question # 4:**

Please share with me the challenges you currently face to live in intimacy with God and to maintain a life of integrity.

*Por favor, compartan conmigo algunos de los desafíos o retos que aun enfrentan para vivir en intimidad con Dios y para mantener la integridad en su vida.*

**Post-intervention Focus Group**

**Question # 5**

Briefly, tell me stories about how you were taught to deal with difficulty, pain, and suffering. Were you allowed to express your emotions, such as anger or sadness, and hurts?

*Relatan como fueron enseñados a manejar dificultades, dolor y sufrimiento. ¿Le permitieron expresar sus emociones, tales como el enojo o la tristeza, y sus dolores?*

**Question # 6:**

Please share with me stories concerning how your understanding, feelings, and practices of HCF have changed through your participation in the retreats. As needed, I will probe deeper in each of the different areas.

*Comparten algunas historias breves de como su entendimiento, sentimientos, y prácticas de formación cristiana integral han cambiado a través de su participación en los seminarios. En cuanto sea necesario, indagaré más en las diferentes áreas contempladas y específicamente en las amistades espirituales.*

**Question # 7**

In the context of your life and ministry, what else do you need to change in response to what you discovered through the retreats?

*En el contexto de su vida y ministerio, ¿en cuales áreas de su vida aun necesita cambiar como respuesta a lo descubierto en los retiros?*

**APPENDIX C****THE PRACTICES OF HCF QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please answer these questions as honestly as possibly.

**PART A: General Formation and Discipleship**

1. On the average, how much time did you dedicate each day to hearing, reading, and studying the Word of God last week? More than one and a half hours \_\_\_\_; Between one hour and one and a half hours \_\_\_\_; Between thirty minutes and one hour \_\_\_\_; Less than 30 minutes \_\_\_\_.
2. Last month, how frequently did you spend time with a close Christian friend for open sharing, mutual exhortation, and prayer? At least once a week \_\_\_\_; Every other week \_\_\_\_; One time \_\_\_\_; Not at all \_\_\_\_.
3. On the average, how many times a week did you participate in corporate worship last month? Three times a week or more \_\_\_\_; Two times a week \_\_\_\_; Once a week \_\_\_\_; Rarely \_\_\_\_.
4. On the average, how often did you spend time in personal worship last month? Three times a week or more \_\_\_\_; Two times a week \_\_\_\_; Once a week \_\_\_\_; Rarely \_\_\_\_.
5. Last month, how much time did you typically dedicate to prayer each day? More than one and a half hours \_\_\_\_; Between one hour and one and a half hours \_\_\_\_; Between thirty minutes and one hour \_\_\_\_; Less than 30 minutes \_\_\_\_.

**Please use the following scoring method for the remainder of the questions:**

1 Strongly Disagree

2 Disagree

3 Agree

4 Strongly Agree

- |                                                                                                      |         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 6. I understand the implications of the Trinity for my life.                                         | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. I spend quality, regular time in the Word of God.                                                 | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. I often share a meal or coffee with Christian friends or families from<br>my church.              | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. I love to worship God by myself as well as with others.                                           | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. I regularly spend time praying.                                                                  | 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. The image of God as seen in the Trinity helps to shape my practices of<br>Christian formation.   | 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. The truths I learn from the Word of God guide my daily decisions.                                | 1 2 3 4 |
| 13. I am an active, vital participant in a community with other believers.                           | 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. The celebration of the Lord's Supper forms a meaningful part of my<br>Christian experience.      | 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. When I face a challenging situation, I am motivated to pray.                                     | 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. I find my understanding of the Trinity to provide meaningful insights<br>for my daily practices. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 17. I consistently integrate my faith in the marketplace and the world.                              | 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. I have trusted friends with whom I confess my temptations and failures<br>as a Christian.        | 1 2 3 4 |
| 19. I have discovered places and ways that I can regularly worship God.                              | 1 2 3 4 |

20. Throughout the day, I often pray for other people or for the problems of my church, community, and country. 1 2 3 4
21. My understanding of the nature of God has deeply influenced my approach to Christian formation. 1 2 3 4
22. Weekly, I expose myself to sermons and teaching of godly leaders. 1 2 3 4
23. I have a close friend who knows my greatest struggles and challenges as a believer and leader. 1 2 3 4
24. I often experience the renewal of God's presence and grace in my life through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. 1 2 3 4
25. When people share needs with me, I respond by praying for them. 1 2 3 4
26. It is easy for me to identify my feelings. 1 2 3 4
27. I am willing to explore previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself, allowing Christ to transform me more fully. 1 2 3 4
28. I enjoy being alone in quiet reflection with God and myself. 1 2 3 4
29. I can share freely about my emotions, sexuality, joy, and pain. 1 2 3 4
30. I am able to experience and deal with anger in a way that leads to growth in others and myself. 1 2 3 4
31. I am honest with myself (and a few significant others) about the feelings, beliefs, doubts, pains, and hurts beneath the surface of my life. 1 2 3 4
32. I resolve conflict in a clear, direct, and respectful way, not what I might have learned growing up in my family, such as painful putdowns, avoidance, escalating tensions, or going to a third party rather than to the person directly. 1 2 3 4

33. I am intentional at working through the impact of significant *earthquake* events that shaped my present, such as the death of a family member, an unexpected pregnancy, divorce, addiction, or major financial disaster. 1 2 3 4
34. I am able to thank God for all my past life experiences, seeing how he has used them to shape me uniquely into who I am. 1 2 3 4
35. I can see how certain *generational sins* have been passed down to me through my family history, including character flaws, lies, secrets, ways of coping with pain, and unhealthy tendencies in relating to others. 1 2 3 4
36. I do not need approval from others to feel good about myself. 1 2 3 4
37. I take responsibility and ownership for my past life rather than placing blame on others. 1 2 3 4
38. I often admit when I am wrong, readily asking forgiveness from others. 1 2 3 4
39. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes. 1 2 3 4
40. Others would easily describe me as approachable, gentle, open, and transparent. 1 2 3 4
41. Those close to me would say that I am not easily offended or hurt. 1 2 3 4
42. I am consistently open to hearing and applying constructive criticism and feedback that others might have for me. 1 2 3 4
43. I am rarely judgmental or critical of others. 1 2 3 4

44. Others would say that I am slow to speak, quick to listen, and good at seeing things from their perspective. 1 2 3 4
45. I have never been accused of *trying to do it all* or of biting off more than I could chew. 1 2 3 4
46. I am regularly able to say, “No,” to requests and opportunities than risk overextending myself. 1 2 3 4
47. I recognize the different situations where my unique, God-given personality can be either a help or hindrance in responding appropriately. 1 2 3 4
48. It is easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else’s burden and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden. 1 2 3 4
49. I have a good sense of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities, intentionally pulling back to rest and renew myself. 1 2 3 4
50. Those close to me would say that I am good at balancing family, rest, work, and play in a biblical way. 1 2 3 4
51. I am regularly able to enter into other people’s world and feelings, connecting deeply with them and taking time to imagine what it feels like to live in their shoes. 1 2 3 4
52. People close to me would describe me as a responsive listener. 1 2 3 4
53. I have a healthy sense of who I am, where I’ve come from, and what are my values, likes, passions, dislikes, and so on. 1 2 3 4
54. I am able to accept myself just the way I am. 1 2 3 4

55. I am able to form deep relationships with people from different backgrounds, cultures, races, educational, and economic classes. 1 2 3 4
56. People close to me would say that I suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice. 1 2 3 4
57. I am good about inviting people to adjust and correct my previous assumptions about them. 1 2 3 4
58. When I confront someone who has hurt or wronged me, I speak more in the first person (“I” and “me”) about how I am feeling rather than speak in blaming tones (“you” or “they”) about what was done. 1 2 3 4
59. I rarely judge others quickly but instead am a peacemaker and reconciler. 1 2 3 4
60. People would describe me as someone who makes *loving well* my number-one aim. 1 2 3 4



**APPENDIX D**

**ABBREVIATED LONELINESS SCALE: VERSION 2**

O = Often

S = Sometimes

R = Rarely

N = Never

- |                                                                       |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. I feel like the people most important to me understand me.         | O S R N |
| 2. I feel lonely.                                                     | O S R N |
| 3. I feel like I am wanted by the people/groups I value belonging to. | O S R N |
| 4. I feel emotionally distant from people in general.                 | O S R N |
| 5. I have as many close relationships as I want.                      | O S R N |
| 6. I have felt lonely during my life.                                 | O S R N |
| 7. I feel emotionally satisfied in my relationships with people.      | O S R N |

Source: Paloutzian and Ellison 228.

## APPENDIX E

## TABLES

**Mid-Intervention Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of HCF	Pre-Intervention Focus Group n
Prayer	3
Worship	0
Study of God's Word	4
Spiritual friendships	6
Mentored relationships	0
Relating to God	10
Desiring and committing to God (Language of change)	<b>19 (11)</b>
Fasting	0

**Post-Intervention Focus Group Interview**

Descriptors of HCF	Post-intervention Focus Group n
Prayer	3
Worship	0
Study of God's Word	2
Spiritual friendships	6
Mentored relationships	0
Relating to God	5
Desiring and committing to God (Language of change)	<b>10 (7)</b>
Fasting	0

## APPENDIX F

## RETREAT #1: ILI NATIONAL CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Mon		Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri
	8:00	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional	Devotional
9:30 Welcome	8:30	Spiritual Leadership <b>Steve</b>	Overcoming Obstacles <b>Miriam</b>	Stewardship of Time <b>Miriam</b>	Planting New Churches <b>Gerardo</b>
10:00 – 12:30 Question- naire and Focus Groups	10:00	Implementing the Vision <b>Al</b>	Evangelism Workshop <b>Gerardo</b>	Family Priority 2 <b>Miriam</b>	Multiplica- tion Workshop <b>Steve</b>
1:30 The History of ILI <b>Al</b>	11:15	Servant Leadership <b>Miriam</b>	Transform- ational Leadership <b>Al</b>	Goals Workshop <b>Gerardo</b>	Finishing Well <b>Gerardo</b>
2:00 The Vision of ILI <b>Al</b>	12:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Graduation and Lunch
3:00 Expectation Workshop	1:30	Establishing Goals <b>Gerardo</b>	Multiplica- tion 1 – Discipleship <b>Al</b>	Multiplica- tion 3 Mentoring – <b>Gerardo</b>	
4:00 Intimacy with God <b>Steve</b>	3:00	Movilization <b>Al</b>	Multiplica- tion 2 Coaching – <b>Steve</b>	Integrity – <b>Palomo</b>	
5:30 The Birth of Vision <b>Al</b>	4:15	Practice of Evangeliza- tion <b>Gerardo</b>	Recreation	Recreation	
7:30 Passion for the Harvest <b>Gerardo</b>	7:30	The Holy Spirit and Leadership <b>Palomo</b>	Family Priority 1 <b>Miriam</b>	Passion for the Harvest 2 <b>Gerardo</b>	
<b>Ee-Taow 1</b>	8:30			<b>Ee-Taow 2</b>	

**APPENDIX G**

**RETREAT #2: ENDURING LEADERSHIP TEACHING SCHEDULE**

**Monday 2 Nov. 2009**

Session 1: Introduction to Abiding in Christ—Dr. Mike Wells

Session 2: *Ministry in the Image of God*—Rev. Stephen Gober

**Tuesday 3 Nov. 2009**

Session 3: The Source of Life—Dr. Mike Wells

Session 4: *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Part I*—Rev. Stephen Gober

**Wednesday 4 Nov. 2009**

Session 5: A Christ-Centered Marriage—Dr. Mike Wells

Session 6: *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Part II*—Rev. Stephen Gober

**Thursday 5 Nov. 2009**

Session 7: History-Taking as a Tool for Counseling—Dr. Mike Wells

Session 8: *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Part III*—Rev. Stephen Gober

Session 9: *Authentic Christian Community and Friends of the Heart*—Rev. Stephen  
Gober

## APPENDIX H

### RETREAT #3: SERVANT LEADERSHIP TEACHING SCHEDULE

#### Daily Teaching Schedule

##### **Monday, January 25**

Theme: Union Precedes Kenosis

Morning worship with Bishop Palomo: (Focus upon our primary relationship with God, which must come before our service for God)

Lecture: Mary and Martha (Luke 10.38-42)

Small Groups: Where are you in the story?

Wrap Up: Putting First Things First on a Daily Basis

##### **Tuesday, January 26**

Theme: The Same Mind as Christ

Morning Worship with Bishop Palomo: (Focus upon our call to serve humanity)

Lecture: Descending with Christ (Philippians 2.1-11)

Small Groups: What would it mean for you to have the same mind as Christ?

Wrap Up: The Discipline of Service (Richard Foster)

##### **Wednesday, January 27**

Theme: Guarding against Shadow Side

Morning Worship with Bishop Palomo: (Focus upon our call to live holy lives)

Lecture: The Simon Syndrome (Acts 8.9-24)

Small Groups: Where do you most identify with Simon?

Wrap Up: The Temptations within Pastoral Leadership (Henri Nouwen)

##### **Thursday, January 28**

Theme: Humility as Our Way of Life

Morning Worship with Bishop Palomo: (Focus upon the humility of little children and possibly use Mark 9.33-50)

Lecture: Tend the Flock with Humility (1 Peter 5.1-11)

Small Groups: How are you being called to clothe yourself with humility?

Wrap Up: Either we preach ourselves or we preach God (Raniero Cantalamessa)

##### **Friday, January 29**

Theme: Abiding in Faith, Hope, Love; Serving in Self-Forgetfulness

Morning Worship with Bishop Palomo: (Focus upon obedience to Christ)

Lecture: Abiding/Obeying (John 15.1-17)

Small Groups: How are you keeping the balance between inspiration (abiding), and incarnation (serving)?

Wrap Up: Mercenary, Servant, or Child? (Catherine of Siena)

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