

ABSTRACT

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSIMILATION STRATEGIES OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN UNION: CLOSING THE BACK DOOR OF THE CHURCH

by

Earl Ralph Hux

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of evangelism, assimilation, and discipleship strategies of ten churches of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Organized focus groups from selected churches at various points of historical development explored their discipleship models and methods utilized in spiritual formation of new converts documented and reported as members gained by profession of faith. Many churches assume all new converts become functional and contributing members of local congregations and further assume that their approach to evangelism is effective and has positive results. These ten focus groups revealed effective and ineffective assimilation and discipleship strategies among a sampling of congregations of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Insights and observations gained from this effort are very important and necessary for the denomination's studies and for other congregations and denominations that may be experiencing similar productive growth challenges.

This evaluation is a qualitative study. The focus group interviews took place on location, and as researcher I stimulated and motivated discussion, interaction, and group dynamics among leaders and lay leaders of the participating churches. Information

pertaining to the congregations' perceptions of effectiveness and ineffectiveness resulted from the discussion among the members of the focus groups.

The findings of this study disclosed methods of evangelism, assimilation, and discipleship among churches with members gained by profession of faith from a selected sample of congregations of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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A Dissertation

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

In 2009 The Churches of Christ in Christian Union (CCCU) celebrated its one hundredth anniversary. Since those beginning years of organization and ministry, the denomination has only grown to 11,167 members gained by profession of faith with 524 gained within the reporting year (Churches Yearbook 2009). In his revised history of the organization Charles Runion also reveals that the denomination has remained very restricted geographically (191).

Despite its size, the CCCU has contributed significant influence among other denominations and groups within the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. For example, several influential leaders such as James McKibban, O. L. Ferguson, E. A. Keaton, G. C. Johnson, Melvin Maxwell, Donovan Humble, Robert Kline, Daniel Tipton, Doug Carter, and the establishment of Ohio Christian University have greatly contributed to the denomination's success (Runion 191-94). The driving force behind the establishment of the organization centered on the theological distinctive of entire sanctification. Individuals coming to saving faith and subsequently being entirely sanctified resulted with effective and passionate evangelism (64). Throughout the years, a few churches have demonstrated notable growth (75-86); currently 224 churches reside in four reporting districts (Churches Yearbook 2009). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke states, "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47, NRSV). God intends for his Church to experience growth coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

While some congregations of the denomination consistently report members gained by profession of faith, statistical information reveals that many more churches produce very few new members if any (Churches Yearbook 2009). After one hundred years of ministry as the denomination transitioned from a movement to an established church, the organized churches have continuously produced fewer members gained by profession of faith.

Bryan P. Stone also reflects on how time and establishment affect the passion and purpose of evangelism in the broader context (1514). Erwin R. Stutzman contends more specifically that as a congregation ages it establishes and erects barriers against new people. Many times these barriers within established churches are not obvious. Churches remain unconscious concerning their lack of reception of new people. He further recognizes that established congregations develop comfort zones that contribute to greater difficulty in their ability to reach out. Churches must truthfully represent an atmosphere of genuine welcome (13-21). The church must take responsibility for the reception and integration of new people into the fellowship (33-36).

The transitional shift from the evangelistic passion of the initial movement to the established denomination of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union has produced issues that are preventing churches from engaging in effective evangelism and natural assimilation of members gained by profession of faith. Churches in the CCCU experiencing some success in evangelistic effort can provide insight and clarity to the issue for those churches that continue to struggle.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the perceptions of effective or ineffective methods of evangelism and assimilation strategies, during the current council year, used by the pastors and local church leaders of ten churches within three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. The results led to recommendations for effective assimilation based on the addition and discipleship of those making a profession of faith.

Research Questions

Several questions emerge regarding methods for effective assimilation and discipleship among participating congregations. These questions reflect the local church as a sample of the denomination's concern for producing members gained by profession of faith.

Research Question #1

What methods and strategies did the participating members of the churches identify that resulted in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

Research Question #2

What methods and strategies did the participating members of the churches identify that did not result in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

Research Question #3

How do the effective methods and strategies identified by the participants in the study correlate to those found in the literature, and what discoveries, similarities, and

differences compare between the two regarding the effective assimilation of new converts into The Churches of Christ in Christian Union?

Definition of Terms

The following terms or phrases bring clarity to the study.

Members gained by profession of faith include individuals who have acknowledged a personal faith in Jesus Christ and have become members of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. These individuals also accept the theological positions of the church and understand the importance of effective evangelism in relationship to church growth and development.

Effective strategies related to this study refer to intentional efforts that resulted in assimilation that incorporates the normal pattern of members gained by profession of faith in The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Not every convert becomes a member of the local church. The CCCU records the number of conversions and the number of members received annually, but the number of converts exceeds the number of individuals taken in as members. Some members, as identified by definition in this study, become disciplined, assimilated, and active members of the local church. The category that identifies members gained by profession of faith is the only question assigned by the denomination on the annual church report. This category seeks to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the local congregation's efforts in evangelism, discipleship, and assimilation. This study is not only concerned about new convert discipleship but is also concerned about the number of new converts who become contributing members of the local church's ministries and evangelistic efforts.

Use of the term *evangelism* referred to the board process that churches used to lead individuals into a personal relationship with Christ. The incorporation of this term bears important implications for assimilation, discipleship, and the identification of a member gained by profession of faith within the CCCU context. No discussion regarding effective assimilation and discipleship can develop apart from considering the purpose and intent of evangelistic practices.

Context

The failure of church membership and implementation of effective evangelistic strategies plagues and challenges other evangelical denominations and groups across the United States. Insights gained from other evangelical authors provide greater clarity regarding solutions to ineffective methods of bringing individuals to faith in Christ. Furthermore, growth patterns and lack of growth patterns emerged.

Concerning evangelistic strategies and growth trends of other churches within the Wesleyan/holiness context, these groups also disclosed similar patterns as the general evangelical denominations and groups. Similarities exist between the historical and theological context, the Wesleyan/holiness churches and CCCU churches. Comparable distinctive qualities specific among denominations within the Wesleyan/holiness groups and to The Churches of Christ in Christian Union disclose important results.

Specifically, this study evaluated responses from clergy and lay leaders of churches among three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Methods of effective assimilation and discipleship that produced members gained by profession of faith and ineffective methods became apparent. Insights gained should result in greater awareness of the specific role and association of effective methods in the CCCU church

and produce clarity regarding growth strategies for individuals who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Methodology

This project was a qualitative design of selected, internal, on-site focus groups from ten churches that reported members gained by profession of faith to the denomination during the current church calendar year. As pastors and lay leaders discussed, compared, and contrasted their efforts or methods, the focus group participants observed and disclosed their effective or ineffective evangelism, discipleship, and assimilation methods and growth patterns. Some groups further evaluated the maturity of believers that the local church reported as new members.

Participants

The focus group participants were selected from ten churches from among three different districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union and consisted of the pastor and five to eight lay leaders. The selected churches reported annually in the past, indicating they had gained members by profession of faith. Insights gained from each participant's response revealed the congregation's evaluation of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness in assimilation principles. These responses demonstrated either growth or lack of growth and whether profession of faith ultimately resulted in an increase in members. The annual statistic of members gained by profession of faith is the only gage the denomination requires of its churches that links discipleship with assimilation.

Instrumentation

Participating church pastors and selected lay leaders observed, interacted, discussed, and evaluated their strategies for developing new converts into active disciples

of the church. The pastor and lay leaders participated in the same focus group. I facilitated the groups. The participants selected were from churches among the South Central District, the West Central District, and one church from the Northeast District.

Data Collection

The collected data came from observations and insights gained from each digitally recorded focus group. Participants openly shared, discussed, and evaluated the effectiveness of their congregations in the development of disciples and the effect that development had in producing membership gains for each location before the close of the current council year-end.

Data Analysis

I compared and contrasted the differences and similarities among the locations and evaluated the key elements that resulted in a convert's faith development and assimilation into becoming a member. The results disclosed the central tendencies and relationships regarding the effectiveness of assimilation strategies that contributed to growth and new converts. This comparison ultimately revealed whether converts became active members.

Generalizability

This study is important for The Churches of Christ in Christian Union since annual statistics suggest that a great majority of churches do not have strategies for effective assimilation or plans for growth and development. Many years pass without any church gaining members from conversion. My research only includes a sample of selected churches. Therefore, limitations of results and findings exist pertaining to the unique methods and strategies of the participating congregations. A review of the

literature revealed little research or self-evaluation conducted among The Churches of Christ in Christian Union; therefore, the findings of this effort are extremely valuable. Other denominations, comparable in size and facing similar historical and theological issues, might find this study helpful and engaging, especially if they relate evangelism and growth with conversion and individuals finding Christ as Savior.

Theological Foundation

The following observations formulate a theological framework and biblical insights regarding the impact the church should exemplify pertaining to evangelism and assimilation. The Apostles understood that the Church was to multiply, grow, and engage culture and society through the power and transformation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also expected the Church's success when he stated to his disciples that they would do greater things than they witnessed during his earthly ministry (Matt. 21:21; John 1:50).

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus leaves behind no greater mandate for mission and discipleship than the Great Commission. In this passage, Jesus challenges his disciples to go and make other disciples. Considering the original language of the text and verb tense association, *make disciples* is the main activity of the command. The process of making disciples occurs as a part of daily life. As the disciples go about their daily business, they must share the gospel and witness clearly to their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The disciples must be baptizing new converts into the faith and teaching them to follow the example of Christ.

Jesus demonstrates the best model of discipleship and assimilation as being caught rather than taught. While Jesus extensively taught the crowds, and more specifically his disciples, everywhere he ministered, the dynamics of his effectiveness

resonated in his ability to develop relationships with people. Robert E. Coleman observes that Jesus stayed with people in order to develop their faith. Coleman gives two relational examples of Jesus' ministry to Zacchaeus in Luke 19:7 and to the woman at the well in John 4:39-42. Jesus demonstrated the need for immediate personal care of new converts and modeled this behavior before his disciples and future leaders (47-48). One of the key elements of Jesus' relational approach demonstrated and showed to believers how to follow and serve God. He accomplished this goal by modeling prayer, through his use of Scripture, his soul winning, and through his practical and continual teaching methods (71-75). Jesus recognized that effective discipleship required the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus leaves behind instructions that believers must accomplish the witness of the gospel through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, actively and constantly available to all believers, empowers them, enabling and preparing each to share the gospel. This empowerment has a continual purpose. Believers accomplish the witness locally, regionally, and ultimately worldwide through both individual and corporate empowerment.

The ministry of the Apostle Paul also provides a good theological evangelistic principle evident in his passion for the establishment of new converts and new churches. A brief study of the ministry and relational behavioral patterns of Paul recorded by Luke in Acts reveals through his missionary journeys his desire for converts' complete assimilation into the faith. Paul either revisited every location he evangelized, wrote a letter of encouragement and further instruction, or in some cases did both. Paul's method

clearly indicates that development and assimilation into the Christian faith requires the establishment of trusted relationships and practical instruction.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians contain his best example of clear instruction between immature and carnal behavior and his expectations toward Christian maturity and development. Paul discloses the contrast between immature and mature Christian behavior through a thorough discussion of the role, function, and purpose of spiritual gifts. Failure to mature in Christ results in weak, underdeveloped, carnal Christians. The testimony of Christ among the Corinthians appears divided, ungracious, and unloving. Their behavior greatly undermines the transformational truth and power of the gospel message they portray to an unbelieving world.

Finally, in Paul's letter to Timothy, he stresses that Timothy lead by example. Paul challenged Timothy to be an example through teaching, the way he lived, by his faith and through his purity. Paul challenged Timothy to teach and encourage all people to mature in the faith (1 Tim. 4:11-13). Paul states in 1 Timothy 4:11, "Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them." Here Paul suggests that a model necessary for personal growth and maturity Timothy demonstrate through his example.

Since no established or formal places for Christian worship existed in the first two centuries, the Church retained its relational nature. It blended, interacted, and engaged culture in daily and normal business and social activity. Stutzman observes that the early Church did not perceive themselves as *going* to church but *being* the church in the midst of the world. He contends that the gospel's best strategy penetrates society and culture as taught, lived, and commanded by Jesus and through his example (44).

Overview

Chapter 2 establishes and associates the foundational literature review pertaining to evangelism, assimilation, and church growth. Chapter 3 details the methodology. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the project. Chapter 5 discloses and analyzes the findings and results and discusses the study as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Issues related to evangelism will always remain an important element for real and measurable growth in the church. Effective discipleship should produce an increase in the number of converts reported and added as assimilated church members. Most congregational membership roles, however, reflect very few members gained because of their profession of faith. Much of church growth happens from the transference of members from one church to another. The dynamics and tendencies for growth diminish as churches and denominations mature and become more established.

Determining the effective and positive results of evangelism relates closely to the development of faith in the believer and to the believer's association and participation in the local church. George Barna's research discloses that membership across the United States is in decline (116-22). However, church membership and the believer's choice to align with the theological and ecclesiological practices of the church as the body of Christ reliably reveal the effectiveness of evangelism. In 1991, Dr. David L. Lattimer completed a study that observed the evangelistic methods of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. This study disclosed and evaluated how individuals came to faith in Jesus Christ in the CCCU. His study has three components. It compared the assumptions of certain CCCU leaders concerning how persons became Christians in CCCU and the perceptions of selected CCCU members concerning how they became Christians. It further examined the amount of time before a convert accepted Christ and became a Christian in CCCU. Finally, it investigated the influence of family background and relationships on

individuals who became Christian in the CCCU (7). While Lattimer's study provided great insight concerning how people come to faith in the CCCU, it did not go on to evaluate the number of converts who matured in their faith and became active and productive members of the local church and the denomination.

Defining Effective Christian Evangelism—A Biblical Theology

Understanding evangelism brings key insights concerning the effectiveness of the local church in association with the communication of the good news of the gospel. Jacques Matthey observes that too often, the definition of evangelism is associated primarily with the crisis or point of conversion and not the ultimate process of the believer becoming an active participating member of the body of Christ and his church. Matthey defines evangelism as not only the positive response of the invitation to turn from false absolutes, change, and be converted but also to follow Christ and to join the community of his church. Believers must commit to live the remainder of their lives under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in accordance to the ethics and principles of God's kingdom (355).

Effective evangelism acclimates to cultural sensitivity. The study of anthropology within a missiological context generates extreme value for understanding effective evangelism (Whiteman 400). The Incarnation represents God's humiliation both in human culture and in an existing Jewish culture. Jesus accepted the challenges related to the culture's imperfections and limitations. Jesus' Incarnation, therefore, demonstrates a model for effective evangelism. God's people must be willing to enter into the culture of the people they intend to serve by speaking their language, adjusting to their lifestyle, and understanding their worldview (260-66).

Jesus' Expectations for Effective Ministry and Assimilation

At least two times in the Gospels, Jesus disclosed and modeled his expectations for the disciples' effectiveness in continuing his ministry. Jesus assured them that they would do even greater things than the example he provided through his spoken word regarding a fig tree's withering. Jesus demonstrated the primary implication of bold faith through prayer. Another interesting association related to his challenge to do and expect greater things lies in the inability of the fig tree to bear fruit. Jesus revealed that healthy plants should bear fruit. If not, they do not fulfill their purpose and should no longer live (Matt. 18-22). R. T. France asserts that Jesus is using the example of the fig tree symbolically representing the barrenness of the temple ritual and failure of Judaism as the witness for God. Mark 11:11-25 further demonstrates this distinction more pronounced. France concludes that Jesus disappointingly reacts concerning trees that do not bear fruit even if not completely in season and compares the tree to an example of religion without godliness leading to inevitable destruction (303).

In John 15 Jesus encourages his disciples to remain connected to the vine so that they might produce much fruit. True disciples produce much fruit, and fruit in turn brings glory to God (John 15:5-8). Considering the fuller translation of the original text, Jesus clearly demonstrates that bearing fruit and the concept of discipleship directly relate. Without the evidence of fruit, one does not deserve the name of disciple. Not only does the evidence of bearing fruit bring glory to God, but it also verifies relationship with nonbelievers and dependency on developing conversation and proves reality for discipleship (Tasker 176-77).

The final words of Jesus spoken prior to his ascension in the Great Commission provide clear and simple instructions concerning his goals and expectations for his disciples and future believers. Because of the successful completion of Jesus' earthly ministry, the message of salvation became the mission and responsibility of all believers. The mission also became universal. The scope of Israel's ministry broadened through the success of their Messiah (Ladd 226). The universal, all-inclusive, authoritative nature of this gospel indicates that Jesus expects his ministry to continue. The mission is effective and successful, anticipating, requiring, and producing disciples from all nations. Jesus' instructions clearly stated that his disciples must make more disciples, baptize, and teach them so they may possess the same personal commitment and allegiance themselves. Mature disciples' primary role becomes that of teaching new converts to follow Jesus' commands. Discipleship is not complete unless it results in this level of obedience and commitment. Their ability and assurance of success relies on Jesus' constant presence and authoritative promise (France 414-16).

The New Testament Mandate for Effective Assimilation

The success and effectiveness of the early Church resulted from understanding the purpose and function of the Holy Spirit and the continuation of ministry in the name of Jesus (Bence 18). The power and person for witness was not the Church's own. The Spirit of Christ was something every disciple received, and the Spirit transformed each into witnesses representing an understanding essential for the disciple of Christ, and the natural transformation, growth, and developmental goal of every believer.

Effective church assimilation in Acts. Acts 1:8 states, "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere, in

Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus revealed that the primary purpose of discipleship is witness. The disciples were to do more than discern the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as indicated in their previous dialogue between Jesus and the present disciples. They were to become witnesses (Marshall 60-61). The text further suggests that because of the role and relationship of the Holy Spirit, their witness had not only the power *to do* but also the power *to be*. Bence associates the nature of the kingdom *to be* to the relationship of Jesus’ introductory review regarding the kingdom in the previous verses (31). Spirit-filled disciples are witnesses, participants, and members of this new kingdom order—the community of faith.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the disciples’ witness resulted in the Lord adding those being saved to their group each day (Acts 2:47). The initial observation contained in Acts 2:47 suggests the maturity and inclusion of believers into this faith community. Believers then fulfilled the plan and purpose of the Lord in direct relationship to the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the disclosure of the kingdom of God, and the testimony of all who belong. The text begins by indicating that the activity and work of the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the gospel, results in converts. Bence recognizes the intensity and level of commitment among the fellowship. He states, “True fellowship is so much more than having coffee and cookies together; it is life together, even at personal sacrifice” (47). Fellowship further implies that the new believers are assimilating into a community of like faith. Each convert experienced the forgiveness of sins and acknowledged Jesus as Lord.

In every circumstance, the new community of faith experienced continued growth. Converts grew numerically and spiritually amid opposition and persecution. Despite conflict and confrontation, all developing events fit within the confines of God's plans and intentions similar to the events that led to Jesus' death. The success of the church stemmed from God's ability. The apostles believed that God was the Creator and Lord of history; belief gave them the assurance that he held their fate in his hand. The disciples requested God demonstrate his power through them as authentication for their belief and message (Haenchen 226-27). Because of their request for boldness, the church effectively recommitted to the continued faithful proclamation of the gospel. Because of their unselfish and communicable concern and nature of their request, the place where they assembled shook and the Holy Spirit filled them (Luke 4:31). This level of commitment represents a body of believers that understood the true sense of belonging. They exemplify real growth and effective assimilation.

Finally in Acts 11:26, Luke records that the city of Antioch referenced the developing community of faith as Christian. Even during the formational development of the Church, certain criteria for effective ministry begin to emerge. Dr. Benny Tate observes from this passage five general traits of communities of faith that please God. First, the church at Antioch possessed the supernatural power of God. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and the power of the Lord was upon them (Acts 11:21). Additionally, they were serious about prayer and fasting. Further, they utilized every believer's spiritual gifts. The church steadfastly disciplined new members. Barnabas and Paul remained at Antioch for a year establishing believers, primarily Gentiles, in the faith. Finally, the church represented a giving spirit. They gave financially to the famine-

stricken congregation in Jerusalem and to the vision in sending Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey. The Antioch church effectively understood and utilized personal spiritual gifts, developed every convert in the faith, and assimilated every believer in mission.

Effective church assimilation and the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul compared the natural cooperative function of the human body to the functionality of the Church. Paul's teaching clearly stressed his expectation for all believers to mature in their faith and contribute to Christ's body. While certain individuals are responsible to equip the community of faith, all contribute toward the effective communication of the gospel. Each new follower of Christ incarnated the message of the risen Savior. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul explains the process and function of the body of Christ and the association along with his expectation for growth:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Paul identified those who equip the body for ministry along with their function and purpose toward growth and maturity. Evidently, Paul expects this body of Christ to reflect and impact the culture effectively. The grace of God, which allows every believer to become a Christ follower, has purpose, direction, and function. Paul uses this passage

to demonstrate the expected and normal function of the Church. The purposeful ministry of the Church includes the complete maturity and discipleship of believers and the continuation of that process until the return of Christ. He strives to assimilate and associate every believer into the body of Christ completely. This passage also shows that Paul understands and identifies the body of Christ as the Church. Francis Foulkes recognizes that Paul defines equipping the members for service as the leader's responsibility.

Every believer has a ministry and fits into the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:7 clearly implies that every Christian has a work of ministry and ministry represents the ultimate goal for every believer. Believers exercise faith for more than just an acceptance and collection of dogmas but for relational and functional ministry. The relational and functional aspect of ministry become possible as every believer matures and develops into the fullness of Christ. The believer's formation and depth of maturity reflect natural growth expectations leaving no excuse for optional development (Foulkes 128-30).

Throughout Paul's writings he demonstrates the function, purpose, and expectation of maturity of all believers. His extensive discussion regarding spiritual gifts not only indicates that he expects the believer to grow and mature into an effective influence for Christ but that their maturity is not complete until all become functional in the body of faith. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 Paul most directly defines the assimilation, necessity, and effectiveness of the body of Christ:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make

it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange any body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

Paul clearly demonstrates belonging as a necessary part of functionality. Leon Morris observes the diversity of the body. While each part performs its intended duty, it all functions as one body (170-71). F. F. Bruce further implies that the functionality of the body results from the identification of the believer into the shared risen life of Christ. He states, "Faith-union with Christ brought his people into membership of the Spirit-baptized community, procuring for them the benefits of the once-for-all outpouring of the Spirit at the dawn of the new age, while baptism in water was retained as the outward and visible sign of their incorporation into Christ" (120-21). Believers comprehend their functionality in conjunction with their sense of belonging and assimilation into the body of Christ.

Identification of and Challenges to Effective Assimilation within Evangelicals

Personal conversion to Jesus Christ remains a constant challenge for the evangelist. A convert's faith development and becoming productive and functional members of the local church perhaps even poses the greater challenge. Many

congregations fall short in completely developing believers in their faith. Because discipleship remains incomplete, many new converts never become assimilated and active members of a local church.

Historical observations. Within the broader scope of evangelicalism, failure to assimilate new converts into productive members had theological implications. Salvation and justification by faith became a formula. The reception of God's grace failed to challenge the follower of Christ into developing a complete lifestyle of mature Christian behavior. A salvation formula becomes very personal and self-centered, seldom leading to a life of witness and service for Christ. Growth remained undeveloped and stunted. A primary challenge for the church is keeping the gospel incarnational and oriented toward the concepts foundational for the kingdom of God.

According to Donald C. Flatt, even the Apostle Paul expressed much concern in this regard for the Christian community. Historically the Church perceived the Great Commission in terms of obligation or mandate. Additionally, the saints of the early church committed themselves to more than the proclamation of the Word of God by living out the Word in daily life. The first evangelists did not understand the Incarnation as a one-time event. Rather, it was an ever-present ongoing reality, observed in the overall care of the church rather than mere verbal witness (491-97).

The church remaining on mission, message, and evangelistic fervency has always been challenged by failure to find the balance between established doctrine and practice. This failure has often caused the church to become too structured. The structure in turn stifled evangelistic effort, and the indifference produced no real conversion or individuals grounded in Christian faith. Robert Pope makes some important observations in his

analysis, which also contains historical perspective and implications of the current effect of the emerging church. Pope assesses the early Church's calling as both sociological and theological. Its theology consisted of mission and message identified as the *kerygma* and fellowship *diakonia*. It possessed sensitivity to the culture yet in many situations engaged culture and became counter cultural. As the Church became more established, it lost evangelistic concern and its passion for relevance (25-45).

Pope observes currently the emerging church's desire to return to the principles of the early Church before establishment. The emerging church developed and attempted to address the need for the Church of any age continually to reinvent itself, leave the comfort of its traditions, searching for people and the unchurched. Pope concludes that while the emerging church contends that converted people make a church, not officers, creeds, or sacraments, any church without these principles lacks a necessary foundational belief system, yet the emerging church contends that the established structure caused the organized church to focus inwardly (25-45). Richard Yates Hibbert goes on and states, "The Church is not only an instrument of God's purpose, but an end in itself, and even the central goal of what God in Christ is doing in the world" (324). A noticeable struggle develops between purpose and establishment, and authenticity.

Throughout church history, the church thrives and experiences the most success through its witness. The best and most effective demonstration of the church exists through the relationship of its worship and mission. These two dynamics display the virtue and attractiveness of the church. An essential inseparable link exists between mission and evangelism. The call of the gospel requires the Church's implementation of the victory of God in the world through suffering love. The cross of Christ becomes more

than something to follow but represents an achievement worked out and put into practice (Chan 22). Mission is more than the proclamation of the gospel. It is the *missio Dei* or the mission of God. This *missio Dei* represents the very heart of God's character. God is a missionary God (Lee 66; Stone 2506-08). David J. Bosch offers clarification regarding church and mission. "There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love" (389-390). The relationship of mission and message offers clarity regarding the purpose and function of the church.

Success of the mission versus establishment rests in the conversion of individuals and the establishment of new churches (Hibbert 331). According to Anthony Barratt, when the church fails to live up to the demands of its mission, it effectively fails to be Church. Mission and evangelism are a part of ongoing development and revelation. Further, effectiveness in mission and evangelism also invites creativity and imagination in terms of presentation of context and means (766-67). Church without mission or evangelism exists merely as a social club. Mission begins with God and represents his way of saving and loving the world. Mission, therefore, reflects not a human decision but God's choice (Lee 66). Barratt agrees with Martin Lee. The church exists to evangelize and the church exists subsequent to mission (767). These observations share historical agreement. The shift from mission toward establishment affects evangelism.

Evangelism and mission have a direct relationship to the concept of the kingdom of God as revealed in Scripture. With more clarification through the ministry and teaching of Jesus, evangelism and mission, both of which lead to conversion to the

Christian faith emphasize a call of participation in the plan of God and the establishment and fulfillment of his kingdom. William J. Nottingham contends for the following.

Beyond the anxious dualism of good and evil, evangelism must point to the Reign of God as embracing the whole world and its destiny. God's rule of righteousness and everlasting love not only resists injustice and death but expresses reality for human life confronted by the rebellion of idolatry and violence. (311)

Currently, believers experience the kingdom of God spiritually reflected primarily in the ministry and outreach of the church understood within the context of the dynamics of the spiritual. If evangelism only reflects church membership, it loses its character for addressing the world with the good news of the gospel (312).

The role of the church as an institution and reflection of the kingdom of God has significant implications. The message of the gospel and the responsibility of proclamation reside in and through the faithfulness of the church. The Church as the body of Christ represents a living organism and, therefore, exemplifies the primary reason for its reproduction and growth. A communicable aspect to God's salvation and the gathering of believers into the Church remains essential. Calling men and women to conversion, to follow Jesus, and to share in his community represents and must always remain at the center of mission. Separating the mission of the Church from the establishment of new churches becomes impossible. The Apostle Paul's teachings reflect this representation and function of the Church. As the Trinity functions in complete relationship and community, the Church must also strive for harmony. The goal of church planting embraces the creation of communities that display the kingdom (Hibbert 316-31).

Stone, in agreement with Hibbert and Nottingham identifies that the kingdom of God represents a new world order. Therefore, Stone contends that evangelism's goal in

relation to the kingdom of God seeks no answers for the world's problems but invites the world to participate in this new order. For Stone, evangelism represents more than personal conversion and involves the association and orientation of a transformational worldview. Evangelism must remain the call to become the people of God. An individual believer's response to this call determines the effectiveness of evangelism. Evangelism represents a call to a new social order including love for enemies, forgiveness of sins, a value for the poor, and rejection of violence. Stone concludes that salvation is impossible apart from the Church because of its form and social existence. Real evangelism, therefore, represents a world of what could be, what should be, and what one day will be (971-1847).

A primary theological observation concerning the relationship between evangelism and the kingdom of God develops. The spiritual dynamic related to evangelism bears significant implications. Nottingham summarizes this concept and makes the following seven conclusions:

1. Evangelism reflects not what we do but what God does. The work of the Word and Spirit through the grace of Jesus Christ liberates the lives of men and women. God creates both opportunity for witnessing and mutual listening.
2. Evangelism changes and evolves constantly, never static or defined dogmatically.
3. Evangelism addresses all persons with a remembrance of Jesus Christ but without a plan to proselytize or convert.
4. Since the most effective evangelism includes teaching and preaching, the family unit—mother, father and grandparents who try faithfully to belong to the church—are the best evangelists.
5. Evangelization consists of more than evangelism. The concept of personal conviction leading to repentance and faith best defines evangelism. Evangelization, however, has a broader meaning which relates more directly to the responsibility for creating an evangelical community of the whole society.
6. Evangelization, changing the world, and evangelism, changing individuals, comes together as the meaning and purpose of mission. Both

are a part of God's *missio Dei* the reflection and sign of God's reign among us.

7. Evangelism contains very relational and communicable aspects. With the ever-developing isolation and independence of life in affluent societies, evangelism is not just person-to-person but community with the person. The power of the gospel in the future directly relates to incarnational loving service to the community. This concept represents the dynamic of living life and sharing life together.

Nottingham's summations suggest important dynamics pertaining to the concepts necessary for effective evangelism with implications for positive results. (312-14)

To an extent, Craig L. Nesson supports the role of developing relationships and community. However, in association with worship, overcoming the fear connected with evangelization and releasing imagination become important factors for evangelism. Converts become members because of relationships. However, the expressions of God's grace through worship and the sacraments, which Nesson concludes have been sustained by the Church since New Testament times, should never be underestimated (38-46).

Patricia Obst and Naomi Tham specifically consider the psychological impact of relationships and the associations between connectivity and well-being within the church community. Their research disclose the psychological implications of church membership and the direct relationship between membership and well-being. The identified elements defined by Obst and Tham as a *psychological sense of community* include a sense of community, social support, religiosity, and identification. They recognize that a sense of community involves feelings of emotional safety that promote belonging and identification with the group or association. Members expect to exert influence and effect change in reciprocation of their relationship. Individuals seek integration and the ability of the group to meet their personal needs. Members also expect to have a shared emotional connection. A primary association of membership supports participants with

their struggles and toward success in community living (343-44). Obst and Tham make the following summation.

Membership is reflected in the members' feelings of acceptance and belonging within the church; influence can be seen in the expectations that are set upon church members and in the church's evangelism; integration and fulfillment of needs is reflected in the church members' provision and receiving of spiritual and emotional support, and shared emotional connection that is felt between members as a result of their shared history and experience within the church. (344)

Obst and Tham therefore demonstrate the associated dynamics of relationship pertaining to evangelism and the function of the Church.

The second component of Obst and Tham's research discussed the role of social support. Social support provides key emotional elements for well-functioning communities where participants are cared for, loved, esteemed, and valued. This support incorporates a large network of communication and mutual obligation (344-45).

The role of religiosity represents an important dynamic of Obst and Tham's approach to church membership and a *psychological sense of community*. This relationship and association of religion as it pertains to church membership discourages participation in risky or deviant behavior and results in lifestyle patterns that promote better health. It also promotes and encourages prayer, meditation, and contemplation that contribute to overall well-being (345).

Finally, Obst and Tham recognize and identify the important role of identification. When an individual identifies with a church, a self-conception of belonging results in emotional value in the relationship and produces a *psychological sense of community* (345). They defend, "If an individual did not identify strongly as a church member, it could be that they do not feel they belong in the community or that

they have any influence in the community, or have any connection with other church members” (346). The more influence the individual has, the more the individual experiences psychological well-being. These observations provide good insight regarding the importance and association of membership specifically as it pertains to an individual’s psychological sense of community.

These discoveries caused Obst and Tham to make the following relationship between promotion of church community and well-being for community members. They conclude that a sense of belonging represents more importance than the other dimensions considered in their study. An individual’s psychological sense of community and religiosity in relationship to church membership strengthens his or her well-being. Religiosity increased the longer an individual belonged to a church and contributed to a more developed sense of well-being and a psychological sense of community. Social support also added to a *psychological sense of community* and psychological well-being. Other observations related and important to his or her well-being included the connection he or she has with other church members and his or her personal perception of control within the church. Ultimately, Obst and Tham’s findings imply that religiosity, a *psychological sense of community*, social support and identification are important predictors of well-being in the church context, especially considering the dynamics associated with church membership (350-59). Their study implies that membership supports and assists an individual’s personal faith. Relationships with the church play an important role in the development and discipleship of believers. Brian D. Majerus and Steven J. Sandage also make an important observation pertaining to Christian development. They understand that maturity reflects a developmental and teleological

theme in Christian spirituality described throughout Scripture. The pursuit of maturity implies a part of the divine call disclosed in Hebrews 6:1 and the challenge for attaining maturity exhorted in James 1:4 (41).

Much research exists pertaining to the dynamic of believing over belonging. David Kettle supports this concept. Kettle suggests that the dynamic of believing without belonging has caused the key factor for the decline of the church in Western culture in secularized and postmodern contexts (509). He further recognized the importance of both believing and belonging, which he represented in his discussion of the mystery of Christ. He defines the mystery of Christ as the starting points of ministry and mission that include believing, belonging, obligation, and choice as each relate to participation in the kingdom of God (509). Kettle stressed that belonging represents an important aspect of faith since the Christian calling involves a relationship with Christ. Belonging and believing contain inseparable qualities and both incorporate choice and obligation (514-15).

Thomas J. Morgan recognizes the same challenges pertaining to the role, development, and dynamics of relationships within the Roman Catholic Church context. He identifies the development of relationships as one of the greatest needs of the church. He observes that society tends to live in isolation and primarily contributes to this current problem facing the church. His research discloses that the relational break down problem, an issue not just limited to the church also persists among membership clubs, unions, and parent-teacher associations. He further reveals less networking and community among the Baby Boomer generation. Relational issues result in less compassion and caring and produce a greater challenge in filling church pews each week. People fail to develop real

friendships where they can share and express thoughts and feelings (48-51). The significance for the development of relationships cannot be overstated.

Morgan suggests that church represents a good place to overcome isolationism and, in turn, reach people with more purpose and intensity. The parish offers points of connection through prayer, worship, and other internal networks. Small Christian communities enhance relational living by becoming more relational within culture. Community and relational living become the center for sharing personal stories with one another. They build interpersonal ties and offer places where people can express what they feel, challenge individual growth, release burdens, attain perspective, and receive satisfaction. People connect with the Divine in their daily routines, return, and serve the community because of these developed relationships (48-51). Morgan so convinced regarding the impact of developed relationships that he states, “The Parish could very well be the key to reviving a culture that is alienated and disengaged” (51).

When considering the importance of developed relationships, the work of the Holy Spirit also bears significant influence on evangelistic theory and practice. Without the Holy Spirit, evangelistic effort remains futile. Brian A. DeVries recognizes, “All evangelistic witness is more than merely human-to-human conversation about ideas. It is, rather, the divine-human encounter of a rebellious sinner with the claims of the Word of Christ” (52). DeVries defines the effort of evangelism as a triological encounter because it involves a dialogue between a human evangelist, the unbeliever, and the Holy Spirit. A cooperative divine-human communication depends and takes shape through the Holy Spirit’s monergistic work in regeneration. This evangelistic encounter represents a divinely authorized appeal for the restoration of communication between a holy,

righteous Creator and the guilty, rebellious unbeliever. The engagement of evangelistic spirituality represents a prerequisite for all evangelistic communication as it results from a prior relationship of biblical spirituality between triune God and gospel communicator (52-67).

Among the Wesleyan-Holiness organizations, Glen O'Brien makes observations regarding churches in Australia. Historically these groups grew more from members switching from other denominations than from new convert growth. Such switching becomes a typical tendency when organizations transition from a movement to an established sect or church. When this dynamic takes place, the movement loses the effectiveness of evangelism and relinquishes initial standards and membership requirements. The organization's ability to engage the culture diminishes. Specifically, the Holiness movement loses the distinction regarding the doctrine of entire sanctification, which noticeably affects evangelism. Thus, the growth and survival of the Wesleyan-Holiness churches in Australia depended more on transfer than conversion (320-44). This phenomenon, not just true of the Australian churches or of Wesleyan-Holiness organizations, reflects typical evangelicalism worldwide (Rosson 48).

Practical observations and associations. While most evangelists agree that evangelism does not end with conversion, a real conversion experience exemplifies a necessary step of Christian faith. In the New Testament, the word conversion means turning around, reversing direction, and going the opposite way. Regarding Christian experience, Richard V. Peace supports the conversion's necessity. The future foundation of a new convert's witness directly relates to his or her conversion experience. Real conversion leads to discipleship development. Therefore, evangelism resulting in a

genuine conversion remains linked to spiritual formation. In the Great Commission, Jesus exhorts his followers to make disciples not converts. The Church embodies the message of salvation (8-9).

A foundational precedent emerges between the associations of evangelism, especially as it relates to discipleship and assimilation of believers into the body of Christ, conversion, and the Church. James L. Bailey agrees with this association for the necessity of evangelism resulting in the priority of discipleship. Evangelism represents the movement of God in direct relationship with the Church. Joining the Church means joining the movement of God. Part of the relationship between evangelism and discipleship culminates in joining God's movement (189-90).

The association of evangelism and discipleship relationships helps define the effectiveness of the church's efforts. The goal of Christian evangelism involves the creation of a person whose life bears witness to the authenticity of faith. This experience relies on the work of the Holy Spirit (Bloesch 20). Young Gi-Hong boldly states that most nonbelievers do not complete the conversion process or develop in their faith. He substantiates the truth of underdevelopment among potential converts because nonbelievers demonstrate more interest in fulfilling personal needs. The church must show interest toward the needs of non-believers and strive to meet those needs. The church fails to secure new believers because it lacks preparation to evangelize. While Christianity represents more effectiveness than other religions regarding evangelism, it must attempt to evangelize only those open to the gospel. Finally, overcoming the negative stigma among nonbelievers is always a challenge (221-47). Even though Gi-Hong's observations relate to the Korean context, his insights identify a universal truth

pertaining to effective evangelism. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird additionally observe that the church has diffused its effectiveness by operating in isolation. Rather than remaining gripped by isolation, all believers must become involved in ministry (178). The combination of failing to secure new converts in their faith and an isolated gospel of the evangelist indicate two significant hindrances to effective evangelism.

According to Charles D. and Kenneth E. Crow of the Church of the Nazarene, another factor hindering the effectiveness of evangelistic efforts result from a misinterpretation and understanding of Donald McGavran's church growth movement. Crow and Crow identifies that the primary goal and approach of Nazarenes regarding evangelism involve refocusing on mission and understanding church growth. They believe that this association was McGavran's initial concept for his church growth studies and provide a Nazarene response concerning the effects and the results the movement had on the American church. They contend that these effects and results represent the misinterpretation and misuse of the principles of the church growth movement, adversely distorting evangelistic efforts in the American context. Unfortunately, these results produced the negative reactions to the church growth movement (1-11).

First, the church growth movement developed into a marketing approach. The movement became more concerned with numbers than with the transformation of converts. Deductively, Crow and Crow refute the idea that all good churches have the ability to grow if they simply do what *good* churches do to produce growth. Unfortunately, too many individuals entered the church growth movement for personal gain. Their driving goal only packaged a concept, marketed, and sold a product. Those

selling the product reaped financial gain but had little effect on the number of disciplined converts. Finally, Crow and Crow recognize the academic exchange that took place among departments, colleges, and universities in response to the marketing distortion of McGavran's initial goal and purpose for analyzing and tracking growth patterns. They conclude that McGavran studied church growth to discern how well the church was accomplishing its divine mission. Though the marketing approach resulted in increased numbers, it failed to produce committed disciples with a nurtured faith. They further conclude that *bigger* does not always mean *better* recognizing that the church growth movement came on the scene when the *bigger is better* philosophy developed and grew in influence. An over glamorization of the big church movement over the quality development of real disciples resulted. The marketing approach neglected struggling, stagnant churches in declining communities experiencing changing culture and demographics. Churches failing to keep up with, discovering and discerning the latest craze or development became their driving motivation and challenge (1-11). Crow and Crow contend that to solve the problem, churches must return to the original missional purpose behind McGavran's study and rediscover his concern for how people come to faith in Jesus Christ (11).

Crow and Crow confirm that the Church of the Nazarene exists as a missional church and find that recognizing the challenges and strengths, a church discovers greater effectiveness regardless of various sizes. The church experiences greater success with multicultural mission strategies that minister to minority populations. Academic exchange and discussion, church leadership, and the recognition of concerns and observations from the grassroots further contribute to success. The church grows more

effectively when the analysis incorporates demographic studies. Research still incorporating McGavran's movement benefits the church and remains a good model to follow. The result for all approaches to church growth methods must focus on bringing individuals to saving faith and into fellowship with a community of believers. This kind of evangelism represents nothing other than a recommitment to the divine mission (1-11).

John G. F. Wilks observes additional issues and obstacles that challenge effective assimilation and discipleship and obstruct a true recognition and evaluation of new converts. He questions whether numerical church growth results from new conversion or from people shopping for a church or from established churches stealing sheep. Churches identified within evangelicalism, though warm and welcoming, do not ensure a nurturing congregation and environment. He contends that evangelicalism became too personal and that potential converts search for a place where they can experience spiritual growth rather than a personal conversion experience. The success and effectiveness of evangelicalism, pertaining to new converts, result from personal discipling efforts and small groups that cater to the needs of new converts. These efforts ensure maturity, and after the maturing process, new converts become disciples (75-84).

Failure to develop and nurture converts in their faith contributes to the primary cause of ineffective discipleship and assimilation. Alan Jamieson's work discloses significant statistics about why people leave a church. Jamieson's research reveals that 1 percent of those that leave the church do so because they lose faith. Another 18 percent leave because of a dispute they have with the local church. The most interesting and sobering result of the research stated that 81 percent of converts leave a local evangelical church because they feel unable to develop spiritually (64-105).

Human connection and the development of real relationships become vital for effective evangelism and communication of the gospel. Gi-Hong's *Diamond Evangelistic System* emphasizes the importance of evangelism and its inseparable relationship to church growth. Leading to the formation of this theory, discussed in more detail in the next section, models, and trends, Gi-Hong makes important preliminary observations pertaining to the effectiveness of evangelism. His research among Korean churches reveals that the church appears weak in the development of nurturing relationships. Human relationships with nonbelievers determine whether a potential convert remains in church. His research further discloses the importance of nonbelievers settling into church-related relationships. Without this connection, most return to their previous lifestyles. The results of Gi-Hong's study discloses that among Protestant churches in Korea, smaller churches represent the least effective ones in the assimilation of converts. Regardless of size, most do not develop a customized evangelistic approach or proper preparation for evangelism. Gi-Hong identifies *forceful image*, a typical Protestant model, as one that grips churches rather than a more individualistic approach (221-47). A final observation, perhaps the most sobering for future evangelistic efforts, reveals that Protestant churches continue to lose interest in the younger generation (221-47). The Korean context discloses an important global dynamic that challenges and impacts the evangelistic effectiveness of the church worldwide.

Rick Richardson agrees with Gi-Hong's evaluation of the old evangelism paradigm. Richardson contends that the previous method of evangelism failed to embrace a relational dynamic but instead took a sales approach. Evangelism became nothing more than closing the deal on a sales pitch. This approach does not connect with people in the

twenty-first century. He concludes that effective evangelism invites potential converts to take part in God's big story. The invitation represents a journey, rather than a rational apologetic taken from a rehearsed script (167).

Barratt makes important observations representing the Roman Catholic Church's reflections concerning evangelistic effort. He identifies another hindrance to effective evangelism as the *ghetto mind-set*. This concept suggests that the church fell into maintenance rather than an evangelistic mentality and failed to engage the culture (769). The object of evangelization includes conversion to Jesus Christ through the church and the work of the Holy Spirit. Barratt's evaluation states that this concept only happens if the church avoids the *McDonaldisation* of evangelism. The church must not resemble McDonalds, which seeks efficiency, calculation, predictability, sameness, and control. He concludes that effective evangelism contains relational aspects and encompasses dynamics and principles of searching, reflection, and the gift of salvation (778).

Stone discusses some of the most contemporary thoughts pertaining to the Church's effectiveness with evangelism. Stone's work analyzes much of the research in the field of evangelism. He states, "The Church must abandon its 'stained glass culture' so that it can better reach unchurched secular people in a pluralistic world" (82). Churches become more invitational striving to be friendlier than *Disneyland* (86). Stone includes an important dynamic regarding evangelism:

The *missio Dei* is neither the individual, private, or interior salvation of the individuals nor the Christianization of entire cultures and social orders. It is rather the creation of a people who in every culture are both "pulpit and paradigm" of a new humanity (Yoder 1997:41). Insofar as evangelism is the heart of this mission (cf. Robert 1997), this very people constitutes both the public invitation and that to which the invitation points. That is why all Christian evangelism is fundamentally rooted in ecclesiology. It

can even be said that the church does not really need an evangelistic strategy. The church is the evangelistic strategy. (108)

Effective evangelism encompasses the quality, character and performance of the convert.

Conversion is not a matter of decision but of participation in a new worship journey toward the new kingdom of God (1476).

For Stone the effectiveness of the church in evangelism produces significant implications. The challenge of the evangelist involves the reproduction of another evangelist with the same qualities and passions for the incarnation of the gospel message. Effective and efficient evangelists create this atmosphere for reproduction. For Stone, the concepts of *Christian* and *witness* are equal. Evangelism involves more than practice and reflects motivated love. If not motivated in love, then it becomes mere busyness resulting in converts lacking depth and development (342). Reducing evangelism to a form, practice, method, or acquired skill represents one of the greatest hindrances to evangelistic ministry and effectiveness. Stone identifies this challenge as the primary hindrance:

This principle partly explains why evangelism is so easily distorted as a practice. Once an external good (such as the quantitative growth, power, and influence of the church or the number of conversions one is able to produce) has come to be substituted for the internal good of the practice, and precisely to the extent that the church becomes skilled in achieving those external goods, the church ceases to have any good reason to practice evangelism well or virtuously. (361)

Here Stone clearly articulates the how evangelism becomes distorted if love fails and not incorporated into the entire effort.

The effectiveness of evangelism and the communication of the incarnational gospel Stone identifies in the following characteristics as (1) faithful witnessing, (2) virtuous practice as opposed to making converts, (3) mastery of remembering information

rather than the saturation of the gospel story, (4) faith sharing as opposed to hope sharing, (5) story telling rather than owning one's story, (6) not just holy individuals but holy people, (7) evangelism and the kingdom of God as a direct relationship calling all to participation, (8) individuals prepared for the end rather than individuals transformed by the end, (9) costly and revolutionary mission involving more than starting a church, and (10) establishment (Constantinian) rather than embodied witness (incarnational) (208-652). He concludes that properly understood evangelism includes these characteristics and incorporates, necessarily, more than a practice. Instead, it exists as an incarnational transformation and participation in the greater purpose of God among all those evangelized (208-652).

Like the Apostolic church, contemporary evangelism reaches secular people where they are. It attempts to convince secular people of the truth of the gospel by establishing either the gospel's factuality or its utility. The content of the message transmitted engages new cultural forms that effectively communicate this truth. (Stone 1887-947).

Defining Effective Christian Evangelism—Assimilation Models and Trends

Barna identifies six dynamics of highly effective churches. Effective churches usually include (1) worship, (2) evangelism, (3) Christian education, (4) a community of believers, (5) stewardship, and (6) service to the needy. Barna contends that the early Church modeled and incorporated these six dynamics (107-11).

Barna's research also identifies that highly effective churches rely on good habits and practices. They strive toward a transforming impact on people's lives, and they avoid generating bad habits. Effective churches avoid habits that lack strategic, productive,

biblical behavior (163). Effective habits, which develop converts, focus on individual and corporate spiritual growth rather than numeric growth. Spiritual growth is difficult to measure and many times cannot be measurable. Highly effective churches also maintain and develop effective leaders. Individual qualities determine leaders rather than quantitative factors (512).

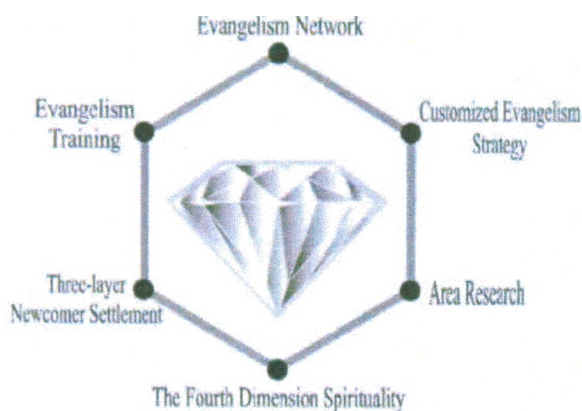
Most highly effective churches find attracting crowds less difficult than getting people to return to church and grow. Effective churches realize they can only absorb and grow as many people as they can support in healthy relationships. Relationship development represents a critical component for effective churches. Usually only 15 percent of church membership becomes involved in ministry. Beyond that 15 percent, the church creates spectators rather than participants. Highly effective churches realize if growth happens too rapidly, new members risk being underdeveloped. Only 10 to 15 percent of Protestant churches fulfill these criteria (Barna 512).

For Barna, habits of highly effective churches include these significant dynamics: (1) reliance on strategic leadership, (2) organization skills that facilitate highly effective ministries, (3) emphasis in developing significant relationships within the congregation, (4) congregants investing in genuine worship, (5) congregations engaging in strategic evangelism, (6) congregations getting people involved in systemic theological growth, (7) congregations utilizing holistic stewardship, (8) congregations serving the needy people of their community, and (9) members equipping families to minister to themselves (126-68). Barna determines that churches with these qualities tend to grow more deeply rather than broadly. While both deep and broad growth reflect the ideal, quality growth always represents better growth than quantity. True concern and compassion demonstrates more

than the friendliness of a church. Highly effective churches demand accountability. Their commitment to and success of accountability gauged among members prevails over numeric growth because these churches recognize that most ministry occurs off campus through relationships. The church committed to the development of a relational philosophy makes establishing relationships an intentional priority. They recognize that relationships foster growth and adhere to a relational marketing strategy. Most visitors visit because of preexisting personal relationships. Every member of highly effective churches challenges their members to become responsible for the inclusion of people outside the church and to develop personal relationships. The greatest contributions toward retention efforts result from developed personal relationships. People seek out emotional connections. A church that fosters true community demonstrates high effectiveness and reflects its special qualities. Barna's conclusive research effort reveals that a key evangelistic element for effective churches includes their ability to connect people with God (126-68).

Gi-Hong, president of the Institute for Church Growth and pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea, developed from his research among Korean Christians the Diamond Evangelistic System. His evangelistic approach consists of six stages: (1) the fourth dimension spirituality, (2) area research, (3) customized evangelism strategy, (4) evangelism network, (5) evangelism training, and (6) three-layer newcomer settlement (234). Like a diamond, Gi-Hong's approach consists of six sides, so the cut diamond shape provides a visual analogy, which represents his conviction that the effort of winning souls prevails as more precious than the possession of diamonds (234; see Figure 2.1).

1. The Fourth Dimension Spirituality
2. Area Research
3. Customized Evangelism Strategy
4. Evangelism Network
5. Evangelism Training
6. Three-layer Newcomer Settlement



Source: Gi-Hong 234.

Figure 2.1. Diamond evangelistic system (six stages).

Gi-Hong's first principle is entitled the fourth dimensional spirituality of witnessing. Evangelism and witnessing comprise a unique aspect of a fourth spiritual dimension. Gi-Hong recognizes the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit. His reference to the fourth dimensional spirituality of witnessing identifies the dynamic essential for effective evangelism in a three dimensional world. Statistics taken from research in 2005 revealed that 74 percent of witnessing church members in Korea have no experience. The research discloses two primary reasons identified are busy lifestyles and a lack of confidence in witnessing, thus hindering effectiveness. This attitude among Christians must change. How Christians think about evangelism must encompass the first element of the fourth dimension of spirituality. Other dynamics contained in Gi-Hong's spiritual observations include the importance and role that faith plays in witnessing and that God uses Christians to reach nonbelievers through positive expressions of love and forgiveness (234-36). Perhaps the strength of Gi-Hong's approach and research lie in his

sensitivity concerning the spiritual dynamic necessary for effective witnessing and communication of the gospel to nonbelievers.

Gi-Hong's second principle identifies the need to understand and characterize nonbelievers according to area research. Gi-Hong's diamond stresses the importance for Christians to understand and characterize nonbelievers according to area research. In essence, this phase challenges Christians to know and understand how nonbelievers think. This element acknowledges the marketing approach dynamics necessary for effective witnessing and evangelism, and it remains keenly sensitive to the needs and diverse lifestyles of nonbelievers toward the Christian faith. He classifies potential converts into four categories: optimistic nonbeliever, neutral nonbeliever, negative nonbeliever and evasive nonbeliever (236-38).

Gi-Hong identifies four categories of nonbelievers resulting in his third level of the *Diamond Evangelistic System*, incorporating the concept of mastering customized witnessing strategies. Taking into consideration a marketing approach to witnessing, pragmatic strategies tailor to the effective communication of the gospel to nonbelievers. His research discloses that what works for one category of nonbelievers does not necessarily work for the other categories (238).

Considering the Korean Church, Gi-Hong identifies ten different styles or witnessing approaches and reveal which strategies work best among the four types of nonbelievers. He compares this part of his system in compliance with the Apostle Paul's approach found in 1 Corinthians 9:20. Christians, therefore, must discern the type of nonbeliever and the method that best results in their conversion from communication of the gospel (238). Stone also cautions that the church be careful not to turn evangelism

into church marketing, since market strategies usually leads to reducing the message of the gospel (2205).

The fourth principle of the *Diamond Evangelistic System* proposes that every church must create and utilize an evangelism network. Evangelism must take priority in determining effective methodology and evaluating individual giftedness for effective witness. This witness functions within a collaborating effort between the church and a special evangelism force and small groups. Churches should have several opportunities for nonbelievers to develop and cultivate relationships. Gi-Hong's observations of the Korean context agreed with Elmer Towns' research. In a study conducted in the United States, Towns recognizes that 86 percent of people who attend church started because friends and family invited them (241-42). Relationships represent the essential element necessary for reaching nonbelievers.

Gi-Hong's fifth element of the *Diamond Evangelistic System* stresses the necessity of effective evangelism training. Prayer is the first essential element in the Christian's evangelism training process. Christians must seek and pray for opportunities to witness and become prepared to answer nonbelievers' questions. Christians must possess a love for evangelism (243-44). Not only are these ingredients necessary and effective for evangelistic effort, but they are also contagious and infectious among nonbelievers.

Gi-Hong's sixth and final step of the *Diamond Evangelistic System* recognizes the importance of assimilation, which he identifies as the three-layer newcomer settlement strategy. He recognizes that this step represents the most difficult phase to implement and that the Korean church demonstrates adequacies pertaining to visitor

retention. His settlement plan consists of three intentional aspects or *layers*. The first layer stresses that the newcomer receive three instances of contact from either visitations, text messages, or telephone calls. Each newcomer must have the assurance of salvation within the first three months of initial contact. Finally, each new believer must make three more friends in the church within this period (244-45).

Gi-Hong's research supports the three points of his three-layer concept and reveals that newcomers' decisions receive confirmation within the first year. New believers receive affirmation through an intentional nurturing process and spiritual experience. The church's primary role generates this environment. It fulfills new believers' spiritual needs best in a weekly atmosphere designed specifically for them. Newcomers receive encouragement to experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit during this process and, as previously stated, to discover at least three new friends within six months. These steps, all a part of the third layer, indicate the new convert's commitment and activity (244-45). Gi-Hong's steps convey important insights since salvation in the Christian context consists of more than an experience but includes liberation and healing associated with the rule of God. Real repentance incorporates faithfulness and obedience rather than pragmatic behavior (Stone 2135). Gi-Hong's research remains important to this study since the Korean context reflects possible similarities to the CCCU context.

George G. Hunter's research regarding effective evangelism, related specifically to the Celtic model, exemplifies another evangelism approach that also contains significant insight. Hunter develops a strong case pertaining to the important role of relationships as they relate to the health of the church and individual discipleship, growth, and maturity in the Christian faith. He observes, "The mainline Western Churches,

Roman Catholic and Protestant, lack both the precedent and the paradigm for engaging the West's emerging mission fields" (27). Hunter determines that certain aspects of the Celtic evangelistic approach contribute toward the success of Christian influence in Ireland and much of Western Europe. In the Celtic approach, evangelism takes place as a team effort. Teams in turn relate, identify, and develop engaging friendships, conversations, ministry, and witness among the groups they evangelize. Raising up churches represents the ultimate goal of these evangelists who train to live with depth, compassion, and power in mission. They focus on imaginative prayer in solitude, with a soul friend, in a small group, in corporate life and in ministry. The Celtic approach represents a ministry of hospitality, which welcomes and includes seekers, visitors, refugees, and other guests and moves each toward the process of conversion. The Celtic approach accomplishes this ministry through established community and developed fellowship, incorporating conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship. The approach's final effort results in an invitation for a commitment by the potential convert (397-453). Hunter evaluates this approach in comparison to the current context: "Indeed, many new believers report that the experience of the fellowship enabled them to believe and to commit" (459). The relational goal therefore represents the foundational strength of the Celtic approach.

Hunter recognizes the similarities of the Celtic approach to postmodern evangelism. He contends that most people today experience faith through relationship, by encountering the gospel through a community of faith. They then become a Christian over a process of time. Hunter notes that John Finney's observations closely align with the Celtic model (462). This model leads to Hunter's classic observation: "For most

people, belonging comes before believing” (471). Hunter, therefore, concludes that helping people belong so they can believe represents a major shift in an effective approach to evangelism.

Hunter’s disclosure of Saint Patrick’s model contains an effective approach for current evangelistic efforts. Hunter notices that the primary elements of Saint Patrick’s model includes *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. He explains that *ethos* represents the evangelist’s ability to connect the message of the gospel to the audience’s deepest concern. This communication demonstrates that God cares about the feelings of the potential believer. It displays and includes a presentation of God’s providence. Christianity provides for outlets and expressions of constructive emotions. This aspect represents one of the strengths of the Christian message and messenger (617-874).

Imaginative communication of the Christian message represents a second important dynamic that Hunter describes as *logos*. The Celtic approach understands the importance of *logos* incorporating diverse means of communication. Among those the Celts ministered to, Celtic evangelists understood the culture and historical context. They practiced indigenous principles and communicated in the language of the people (617-874).

Finally, the Celtic approach includes *pathos*. Celtic evangelists attempted to discover the point of goodness within their audience rather than initially engaging potential converts as sinners. They discovered this approach was more effective and more relational (617-824).

If the church is going to experience growth from effective evangelism, Hunter observes that the church must realize the people they expect to reach as secular. The

Christian religion has not substantially influenced them and they have no Christian memory and no church to which to return. Postmodern people are increasingly suspicious of groups and institutions that claim authority. They are more intuitive. They trust their feelings, and they explore spirituality and the supernatural. The church assumes it cannot reach postmodern people, and that postmodern people appear too uncivilized to become real Christians. The church must overcome that assumption and realize the complete opposite truth: “The typical church ignores two populations, year after year: the people who aren’t ‘refined’ enough to feel comfortable with us, and the people who are too ‘out of control’ for us to feel comfortable with them!” (891). Most postmodern people express receptiveness toward the church, but the church must understand the current culture in order to reach and serve it. Hunter concludes that the best way to evangelize happens through the establishment of existing congregations clustering and starting new churches (874-1108).

Christine D. Pohl includes the association of the New Testament’s concept of hospitality into her consideration and discussion of issues associated with evangelism and assimilation. The spirit of hospitality represented the foundational qualities and theology necessary for leadership in the early Church. Pohl’s concept of biblical hospitality also contends that the spirit of hospitality reflects vibrant Christianity, proof of Christian faith, the centrality of the gospel, and an important theological component of the New Testament (4-14).

Christian hospitality did not seek to minister among those who already belonged but reached out to the stranger. In most cases, hospitality included those who seemingly brought little to the encounter. This hospitable spirit becomes noticeable in the

invitational inclusive nature of Jesus. Jesus' example included the general and specific invitation to participate in God's kingdom. The ministry to strangers by the new developing church reflected and compared to Jesus' own model and method for ministry. The New Testament reflects a close association of hospitality to the very nature of God's grace and gracious character (Pohl 16-29).

Hospitality encompasses the necessary practices of the community of faith. Hospitable relationships developed through shared meals, travel, the spread of the gospel, and the dynamic of house worship. The spirit of welcome, compassion, and equal treatment represented an essential part of Christian identity. Personal hospitality broke down some of the social barriers so powerful in the culture (Pohl 31-46).

Pohl generally associates the practical theological concept as it relates to the practice of hospitality as an example and point of entry for the stranger and needy into the fellowship of believers. Therefore, the practice of hospitality represents and encompasses the initial and necessary process toward discipleship and assimilation (46). The concept of hospitality fosters and includes direct and purposeful involvement beyond financial giving and physical assistance. This level of ministry demonstrates value, elevating the self-esteem and self-worth of the stranger (70). The church tends to minister, however, to people with whom they already have some connection (92).

Finally, Pohl identifies the characteristics of hospitable places. They include a comfortable and live-in setting where people can flourish. The place needs to reflect an atmosphere of celebration yet includes an environment for brokenness and deep disappointments. It must be alive with particular commitments and practices. It must allow room for the growth of friendships (152-53). Pohl make the following observation:

“The manner in which we welcome people, the interest we show in them, and the time we take for them communicates to them that they are valued” (179). Pohl demonstrates clearly the association between hospitality and effective evangelism and assimilation principles.

Lyle E. Schaller reports that one-third to one-half of Protestant church members do not experience a sense of belonging where they attend and are members. The church received them as members but they never felt accepted into the fellowship circle. He contributes this discovery to his primary thesis by defending that evangelism and assimilation are not the same but represent two separate actions. Schaller contends that all churches possess at least two of the three barriers that contribute to this lack of belonging. Methods of techniques and traditions within existing churches act as barriers to a sense of belonging and assimilation. The unintentional exclusionary dimension of human nature contributes to barriers, also. Finally, existing operational systems within a church can erect barriers (16-17).

Unity represents an important dynamic of every church. A church builds and bases a sense of unity around a cause or theme that usually fosters, creates, or develops more unity. However, some of the factors that unify churches can also be or become what prevents belonging or connectedness (Schaller 22-37). Unity between members and guests must strive toward inclusion and not exclude.

Schaller suggests that churches provide new attendees with several options for how they can attend. Consideration of options regarding attendance results in a congregation’s intentional reflection and evaluation of those options. People assimilate into a congregation through specifically developed and intentional ministries (38-48).

Schaller further discusses twelve hindrances that prevent new people from assimilating and becoming members of the local church:

1. Don't invite them to become members or to get involved. Membership is not a priority for the church.
2. Frequent pastoral transitions (every 2-4 years)
3. The impact of financial subsidies
4. Criteria for evaluating potential (a) Under programmed—not meeting needs; (b) Understaffed; (c) Limited choices
5. The impact of architectural evangelism—just because you built it doesn't mean they will come!
6. The impact of self-image—remain and function as a single-cell church
7. The impact of intercongregational cooperation prevents growth especially in evangelism.
8. The impact of the cutback syndrome—Cutbacks result in less entry points and groups or connections. Must be need sensitive.
9. The transfer of responsibility—Ignore the church's responsibility to evangelize—Avoid the "We're here every Sunday" syndrome.
10. Subversion of the agenda—Ministry vs. Institutional Maintenance.
11. The impact of the literalists—Don't settle if the first response is NO.
12. Rifle/Shotgun—Identify needs and make ministry specific to meet those needs. Decide which needs to meet – cannot meet them all. Focused churches grow! (51-66)

Schaller states, "Too often congregations, by their actions, attitudes, and traditions, tend to cause people to stay away completely or to cause the church-shoppers to continue looking elsewhere for a new church home" (69). Through a circular diagram, Schaller demonstrates that most churches develop a dynamic between a membership circle and a fellowship circle. All members fit within the confines of the membership circle. Others members progress on into the fellowship circle. These members develop a more direct sense of belonging and feel fully accepted. Most of the leadership for the local church comes from within the fellowship circle (69). The primary discovery of Schaller's membership circle reveals it easier to become a member of the church than to feel accepted. Acceptance and a developed sense of belonging, however, emerge as key elements toward the retention and assimilation of new people. Secondly, Schaller's

research reveals more opportunities for wives and women to gain a sense of acceptance and belonging than are available to husbands and men (73).

Schaller's research reflects that entry points for new people and potential members are extremely important. The primary entry points to membership include friendship, kinship, the pastor, and walk-ins. Two-thirds or nine out of ten friendship or kinship ties produce the greater percentage for growth and increased membership. Pastoral ties result in 15-20 percent of growth. Walk-ins result in 5-10 percent of growth usually resulting from denominational loyalty or due to the location of the church (74-75).

Entry points create the primary means or methods for the assimilation of new people. Schaller identifies these entry levels by two basic groups. The type A groups usually make a connection through some existing ministry before becoming members. The type B groups become members first and unite afterwards with a group or ministry. Whether an individual enters as a type A or B, new people remain with a congregation because they accepted a role or task within the church. Individuals who enter and assume a role usually accept an office or official position within the church. Those who enter and assume a task accept a responsibility for a specific task or job as a worker (76). Schaller states, "Research concludes that adult new members who do not become part of a group, accept a leadership role, or become involved in a task during their first year tend to become inactive" (77). Most commitments to a congregation result from heritage and shared roots or association with contemporary goals reflected in the ministry, mission, and meaningful worship of the church. Some members may fit into both categories, but if members do not fit into either, most do not feel a strong sense of commitment. The

congregation gaining members resulting from their assimilation to the church's contemporary goals experience better potential for growth. These churches also experience a better record of assimilation (78-79).

A final observation by Schaller reveals that most congregations fail to discover why individuals leave their church. Those churches that sought a response from parting individuals discover that most leave because they felt the inner circle, contained within Schaller's model, was impenetrable. Exclusionary factors exist and prevent most new attendees from entering into the inner circle. Even if the ministry group and some of the connecting issues previously mentioned exist, some fail to assimilate. Unfortunately, for many churches the responsibility for a new person entering into the inner circle and the discovery of a sense of belonging remains with the new attendee (82-83).

Schaller makes two concluding observations for any church serious about growth and assimilation. The church that seems to understand its ministry style and attempts to minister to a specific group tends to experience better growth than churches that attempt to be all things to all people (89). Growing churches have many points of entry with multiple groups and interchangeable groups allowing participants to be involved in more than one group (94-95).

Coleman recognizes that the evangelistic efforts of any church need evaluation. A close association exists between effectiveness and purpose. Coleman contends that the ministry of Jesus best models and articulates this lifestyle and evangelistic effectiveness. He identifies eight guiding principles of the Master's approach to evangelism (19-20).

The first element of Jesus' approach included selection. Jesus selected men and women whom he believed possessed the qualities that the multitudes would follow. Even

though Jesus ministered to and among the multitudes, he did not attempt to win them all. Instead, he selected a few teachable individuals and kept the group small for effectiveness (Coleman 27). A primary goal of Jesus' relational development encompassed transformation. He understood that people needed to be prepared to inherit his kingdom. This transformation, however, included more than a conversion experience for numbers' sake. It involved a transformation that produces continuing results and lasting effects. It encompassed a lifestyle of association, allowing people to follow and observe his personality and living example. Coleman notices that Jesus stayed with people so that they might develop in their faith (35-47).

Jesus sought out individuals willing to consecrate themselves completely to him and his ministry. Through total consecration, obedient followers invariably take on the character of their leader. Jesus expected his new converts to follow and obey. Coleman emphasizes this level of commitment as essential for evangelism efforts and the assimilation of new converts. Closely associated to the consecration of the individual includes the impartation of the very nature of Christ. This impartation reflects the self-giving, self-sacrificing, and self-emptying character of Jesus. The new convert experiences the impartation of the character of Christ through the power and key role of the Holy Spirit (51-66).

Coleman identifies another key element of Jesus' evangelism and assimilation—demonstration. Jesus not only instructed his disciples but he also modeled and demonstrated for them the behavior and lifestyle for a growing and developing disciple. Jesus demonstrated the necessity of prayer, the use of Scripture, and the way to win souls by naturally teaching through real and practical experiences and opportunities. Once

Jesus shared these dynamic qualities, he delegated responsibilities to his disciples. The process of delegation encompassed the ultimate goal of Jesus' ministry among his followers. Their ministry began among people like themselves with similar needs and life-threatening situations (71-80).

Coleman also notices that Jesus did not leave his followers unsupervised. Jesus continued to demonstrate, supervise, and instruct their efforts. He provided opportunities for sharing in the effective accomplishments of ministry and application. Evaluation represented a foundational principle within the Master's complete evangelism process. The whole purpose of Jesus' instruction culminated in his desire to see these principles reproduced in his followers. Reproduction represented the final element in Jesus' approach. He expected his disciples to reproduce these principles aggressively in other people. Coleman identifies and refers back to the main verb of Matthew 28:19, "make disciples," to substantiate the evangelism and assimilation technique of the Master soul winner (89-98). As a result, Jesus' disciples concerned themselves with making converts and ministering to the masses while developing specific people to reproduce more and more disciples (103-04). The disciples, therefore, completely modeled the patterns and principles left behind by the Lord.

Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson develop a very practical approach for moving first-time guests into full participating members of the church. Searcy and Henson define the process of assimilation and spiritual formation as the integration of first-time guests. Assimilation represents a vital component of spiritual formation (90-94).

Searcy and Henson contend that churches perceive guests as gifts. Every Sunday, people visit a church. God sends every church the number of guests that a congregation can effectively recognize. Therefore, taking care of guests and acknowledging them represent a very important responsibility for the church. God expects the church to turn new faces into developing members. This concept becomes the foundation of their discussions pertaining to assimilation (126-90).

Searcy and Henson demonstrate the importance of assimilation when they state, “Assimilation leads to life transformation by giving people the means and opportunities to become maturing followers of Christ” (190-93). Without the sincere effort of the church to assimilate guests and first-time attendees, many people may never experience the transforming grace of Jesus. Every church contains an assimilation ratio. A church can calculate this ratio by considering the number of attendees in comparison with the number of guests determined from among the number of guests that actually stay. Searcy and Henson conclude that a church with a 3/100 ratio represents a church in maintenance mode. Churches 5/100 experience steady growth. Rapidly growing churches possess a 7-10/100 ratio (219-27).

Similar to Pohl, Searcy and Henson recognize the important dynamic of hospitality. They compare the church’s efforts of intentional hospitality to how a family demonstrates a welcoming spirit to expecting guests. Guests need to feel comfortable and valued no matter their point of spiritual development. They contend that the lack of preparation of members represents the primary cause leading to failure regarding hospitality and assimilation issues. Searcy and Henson define assimilation as well-planned biblical hospitality through service (291-328).

Searcy and Henson identify that assimilation contains a three-step process before first-time visitors become participants of a membership class. Each step builds more aggressively on the previous step. In the first step, a church attempts to turn every first-time guest into a second-time guest. The church then more intentionally strives to turn the second-time guest into a regular attendee. The third step attempts to turn regular attendees into fully developing members. Natural gaps exist between each step. The churches take responsibility to bridge gaps between each step, allowing new people to move progressively to the next level (332-34). Similar to Hunter and Schaller, Searcy and Henson recognize the important role for new attendees to develop relationships. They perceive the development of relationships as the glue that encourages and causes second-time guests to stick. Once relationships begin to form, churches offer new people responsibilities and opportunities for service. Searcy and Henson observe that this effort allows new people to develop a sense of ownership. They defend that ownership contains the essential element that precedes membership (334-49).

Churches cannot attain developed relationships without positive first impressions. First impressions become very important for every church. Searcy and Henson contend that a positive first impression formulates within the first seven minutes of a new visitor. Within these seven minutes, visitors determine whether they will return before they ever hear the first worship song or sermon. The development of a pre-service mission making contact with everyone who sets foot on church property becomes an essential first priority (365-85). Searcy and Henson suggest that four initial areas of contact the church can influence and control include how visitors “are greeted, directed, treated and seated” (385-92). Congregations need to choose truly friendly greeters who smile and make eye

contact with all guests. Churches choosing greeters possess the greatest potential for success. Greeters direct guests either to signs giving further instruction or by volunteering to escort visitors to desired locations. A church serious about receiving guests preferably provides good directions, signage, and trained volunteers to lead people. Food represents the easiest points of connection, means of breaking down barriers, and acceptable social methods for developing relationships. Congregations happy about receiving guests and making sure they each have a good experience demonstrate their serious desire to connect and develop a relationship. Finally, good volunteers or ushers actually escort visitors to their seats (409-63). This step contains the final important element of a pre-service mission and expresses the proper reception of guests.

The assimilation process breaks down if congregations fail to obtain contact information from their guests. This element of communication from visitors becomes extremely important and valuable. Searcy and Henson's research at the Journey Church in Manhattan revealed that 80 percent of visitors responded well to a communication or connection card. Whatever method, congregations must keep their motives pure and sincere, providing clear instructions and descriptions of what guests need to do. Everyone at the Journey fills out a card so that guests do not feel singled out. No matter how well churches attempt to gather information from guests, ultimately every guest bears responsibility for their participation. Everyone places his or her card in the offering. After churches receive this important information, what they choose to do with that information becomes very important and strategic for continued contact and communication with guests (535-661).

Searcy and Henson's commitment to evaluation and follow-up represent among some of the best elements contained in their assimilation and membership process. The importance of follow-up cannot be underestimated. Searcy and Henson stress that follow-up must be fast, friendly, and functional. The element of fast follow-up contains two phases. Effective follow-up happens post-service by presenting guests with a gift and thanking them for their visit. The second element of follow-up comes by way of e-mail. Searcy and Henson's experience at the Journey suggests that the church e-mail guests by Monday afternoon. This communication expresses thanks, invites guests to return for another visit, and asks each to participate in a first-time-guest survey on the church's Web site. Searcy really stresses that guests participate and take the survey. This feedback represents the best communication and source of evaluation of the guest's first impression of the church. Evaluation of services and ministries contains extremely important information for the church and represents the key to excellence (665-748). Without the key element of evaluation, the assimilation process remains incomplete, and churches function without any feedback concerning their efforts to connect with first-time guests.

Searcy and Henson identify two other important elements of communication to first-time guests. Within ninety-six hours, guests receive a regular mail response. At the Journey, this communication also contains a gift. A \$5 New York subway, gas, or Starbucks card adds an important personal touch to this phase of communication. Finally, Searcy and Henson suggest sending a one-month, follow-up letter. This letter simply reminds guests of their experience, provides a little more information about the church and invites them back. Searcy and Henson discovered that the organization of a volunteer

first-time response team represents one of the best ways to maintain this level of effective communication (708-801). Searcy and Henson's follow-up strategy and element of evaluation present a unique dynamic of their church's efforts to develop relationships and assimilate guest. This aspect of the Journey's approach includes a level of detail not as noticeable in the other authors considered in this review.

Searcy's efforts also disclose that when guests return to The Journey, 80 percent of the battle of gaining new regular attendees drastically increases, thus increasing the visitor's chances and opportunities for beginning a journey with Christ. Searcy and Henson's church discovered that the centralized communication card represented the best, most effective way of encouraging people to indicate their interests and provided overall, general communication from both guests and regular attendees (846-913).

Searcy and Henson stress that the second-time visitor follow-up becomes just as important as first-time guest follow-up. This response again includes a thirty-six hour, e-mail response. This response also contains an expression of thanks, invites the visitor to fill out a second-time visitor survey from the church's Web site, and provides more detail regarding how guests might plug into ministries or link with small groups. Following the e-mail communication the church sends a second-time visitor ninety-six hour, regular mail response along with another small gift (913-31). Searcy and Henson contend that this level of communication develops relationships that ultimately lead to friendships. The development of relationships becomes the primary important elements of a church's pre-service mission.

Searcy and Henson's discussion regarding the importance of relationships compares to Schaller's, Coleman's and Stutzman's observations. Searcy and Henson

agree that the development of relationships comprise the most effective adhesive for keeping guests and the church bound together. The Journey accomplishes this process through small groups, fun events, and service teams (977-92). Searcy and Henson state, “Small groups are the best way to close the back door” (991-92). They acknowledge that their approach however differs from Bill Hybels’ concept for small groups rather than “the open chair.” The Journey develops new groups every semester. Once this cycle begins, new groups continue to develop. This revolving process or evolution of new groups for Searcy and Henson become an important dynamic to assimilation efforts. They believe that unless new people develop friendships within four to six weeks, “they will not stick” (993-1011).

Another important element of the Journey’s approach includes offering new people opportunities for service even before their commitment to Christ develops. Searcy and Henson contend that offering ownership and responsibility foster and develop relationship. Further, this aspect of the assimilation system presents the most effective method of moving regular attendees into membership. Responsibility leads to the natural next step of membership. Ownership precedes membership; responsibility precedes ownership (1047-92). Searcy and Henson’s approach regarding responsibility and ownership closely relates to Hunter’s discussion of the Celtics’ model of new converts belonging before believing. Their approach compares to Schaller’s discussion regarding assimilation of members through entry points.

Searcy and Henson identify three *Rs* related to retention. They include return, relationship, and responsibility. They defend each of these as important and leading to ownership, ultimately resulting in membership (1092-94). They make a significant

observation: “It doesn’t matter how well you preach or how passionate your worship team, if your newcomers do not find relationships and take on responsibility within the church, they will not stay long” (1094). Assimilation becomes the church’s goal that all new people develop relationships, become followers of Christ, participants and members of his Church.

Searcy and Henson provide the clearest, most significant discussion regarding membership beyond Schaller and in more detail than other authors considered for this study. Searcy and Henson identify three effective ways of encouraging new people toward membership. Congregations encourage membership through multiplying service opportunities. They encourage membership through teaching. Finally, they encourage membership through regular sign-ups. All service opportunities need to lead to this goal, and the entire process needs to be simple and understandable. The church must take responsibility for teaching new people the importance and implications associated with membership. The church accomplishes its responsibility best through regular membership classes (1115-66).

Searcy and Henson discuss, demonstrate, and defend the clearest example regarding the importance of church membership beyond any of the other authors consulted. Searcy and Henson’s studies and research indicate that the main reason new attendees fail to become members results from little or no emphasis by the church successfully communicating the meaning of membership. Since the church represents alignment with the body of Christ, it contains a very significant aspect of the assimilation process and discipleship. The Scriptures clearly state that the Church belongs to Christ created of divine origin and purpose (1166-79).

Secondly, Searcy and Henson express that membership offers a significant means of accountability among the participants. Membership becomes a key measurement of the spiritual development of an individual's commitment to Christ. Completion of the membership class compares and represents the commencement ceremony of the assimilation process (1183-246). The church needs to take responsibility for the encouragement and compliance of believer's alignment with the plan and purpose for people of faith. This association represents more than belonging to a local church but reflects complete association with a divine institution authored by God. The Church exists and remains not by human effort but for the glory of Jesus Christ the head.

Pertaining to the reception of new members, Stutzman considers the dynamics of existing church cultures. Many times the longtime established members only perceive their congregation as friendly. Stutzman suggests that outsiders possess better judgment concerning a church's friendliness. The church needs to be a welcoming place where people who do not know Christ get to know him and not exist as a place just for those that already belong. Members already a part of the church take the responsibility for the reception and integration of new people. Usually new people need an advocate, someone already established in the church, for a quick and full reception (24-36). These perceptions of existing church culture, many times difficult for the establish church to recognize, greatly challenge or prevent assimilation of new people.

Stutzman further implies that the church building may not represent the best place to invite first-time guests. He suggests that the first invitation of new people meet in a member's home or at a church-related party. If this kind of interaction does not usually take place first, assimilation takes much longer. This observation closely relates to

Schaller's, Searcy and Henson's, Hunter's and Pohl's discussions concerning the important need for developing relationships with first-time guests and new people. Stutzman recognizes the advantage of working within the existing networks of families and friendships. Church members choose a church 70-90 percent of the time because a friend or relative already attends. These existing relationships lead to a natural means of future spiritual support (45-50). Stutzman relates 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 as an example of the importance of relationships within the church. In the first two centuries, the church met in homes, developing fellowship where they heard and experienced the gospel (96-101).

Stutzman agrees with Searcy and Henson's interpretation regarding the role and importance of church membership. Stutzman relates belonging to a church essential for discipleship and development of a vital spiritual life. New converts need to understand fully the gospel and the role of the church (55). Like Searcy and Henson, Stutzman recognizes that through church membership converts participate in and demonstrate a willingness to align with the body of Christ (155-56). Stutzman boldly concludes that properly understood no separation between conversion and church membership exists. The church encourages new converts not only to develop personal relationships but also a deepening relationship with Christ reflected in practical living (55-61).

Stutzman observes that if churches ignore guests, they slip out the back door. Church members must notice and include guests. New people who become inactive 70 percent of the time do so in the first twelve months. New attendees must also recognize real spiritual life in a church (67-89). Churches need to obtain contact information from every guest. Similar to Searcy and Henson, Stutzman recommends a communication

card. However, Stutzman provides information cards only to guests and includes a monthly church-sponsored dinner for visitors. The dinner provides guests with an opportunity to meet the pastor and staff. Like Searcy and Henson, Stutzman agrees that churches need to follow up with all visitors quickly but suggests home visits preferably by trained laypersons. From his experience, this kind of follow-up results in 60 percent of guests making a return visit (104-05).

Stutzman identifies three significant issues related to assimilation that contribute to successful results. First, churches must recognize the potential in all people and offer visitors genuine expressions of worship not rules and regulations that extend optimal opportunity for guests to feel they fit in the church. Second, genuine welcome exceeds a handshake and must come from the heart. Third, most satisfied church members identify with some subgroup within the church consisting of a Sunday school class, committee, special interest, home group, or combination of these options (108-22).

Stutzman recognizes the significant role of numbers. Counting people communicates the importance of people. Each number represents a person created in the image of God and entails an expectant form of accountability. Most churches audit financial books but seldom audit people. Effective evaluation of people produces a significant approach to the entire mission of the church (133-39).

Other authors make noteworthy observations when defining effective Christian evangelism. Timothy J. Steigenga challenges the Pauline paradigm with the dynamics of conversion in the Latin American context. He defines the Pauline paradigm as the “sudden, dramatic, all-encompassing view of conversion that characterized previous studies” (77). Steigenga suggests that conversion represents a continuum consisting of

levels and movement over time. He defines stages along the continuum that include pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation. Consideration of a continuum concept entertains the possibility that conversion may also encompass more than a Pauline paradigm. In summary, Steigenga contends for a fluid definition of conversion, classifying it as more of a process over time, which interacts with institutional religion, networks, and cultural contexts and does not necessarily proceed in a linear or chronological fashion (77-81). This concept also fits within Hunter's statement that some converts belong before they believe. The Celtic model contains elements of Steigenga's more fluid example (471).

Stone provides further clarity by negatively defining the effectiveness of evangelism. He defends that evangelism extends not an invitation to a set of creeds, doctrines, or propositions heard or believed. Rather, evangelism offers an invitation to the truth disclosed in Christ and extends to other people to join the journey. The people of God demonstrate and give witness on this journey through the Church's worship, fellowship, baptism, Eucharist, discipline, morality, and martyrdom. Those invited may reject or refuse. Effective evangelism does not just invite people of similar backgrounds or values to church and expressed in terms more than simple friendliness. Rather, it represents an open invitation of salvation through Christ to any that respond. Real evangelism expressed reflects more than a sales campaign or military operation but first and foremost involves the work of the Holy Spirit. It is an invitation to "come and see" (John 1:46), and it provides a place of nurturing and spiritual development. Effective evangelism leads to more than conversion; it draws converts into a comprehensive way of life not always rationally explained or understood. Evangelism becomes a way of living

where one participates in the work of the Holy Spirit and makes Christ present. It does not simply lead people to receive a personal Savior, but it invites them to embark on a public journey incorporated into the body of Christ (3025).

Nottingham agrees with Stone's primary conclusion when he states, "Evangelism is not just the invitation to faith, which has been affirmed and debated in mission circles throughout this century, but it implies the response which remains a mystery of the human heart" (318). Stone and Nottingham concur that the primary goal of evangelism seeks a response from any that receive its message.

Research Design

Considering the formation of focus groups as the primary means for gathering research, the design for this study falls into a qualitative design approach. Characteristics pertaining to qualitative research include the following.

Characteristics of Qualitative Design

A qualitative study represents a relatively new and evolving approach to academic research. In many cases, the approach contains a non-singular nature difficult to dialogue (Lichtman 249). John W. Creswell, a major contributor of research design, identifies that qualitative methods contain five basic characteristics:

1. The approach for selecting participants in a qualitative study includes differences from quantitative studies.
2. Selection and identification of participants in qualitative designs develop on-site and among individuals that can best assist with the understanding and comprehension of a central phenomenon.

3. Availability of an on-site location reflects a key element to this process and information obtained usually through interview or observation.

4. Objectivity of the interviewer remains critical to this process, and he or she must avoid any restriction of the participants' views.

5. The interviewer's records assist with the organization of the information reported by the participants and become a very important part of the overall process. The interviewer must be extremely sensitive to the challenges and ethical issues related to collecting information on location face-to-face (213).

Marilyn Lichtman further states that qualitative research expresses concerns with the role of the researcher and issues pertaining to the influence of that role on the questions posed, the data collected, and analysis and interpretations made. It does not necessarily rely on the researcher's design or approach. Lichtman refers to this aspect of the method as reflexivity (249). Reflexivity contains a more subjective nature and thus represents the major difference of this method compared to independent objective research (287). This aspect of the design becomes an important characteristic for this study.

Michael Quinn Patton identifies three kinds of qualitative data. The first means for collecting qualitative data includes interviews. The interview process primarily provided information for this study and for the insights necessary to explore and discover effective assimilation strategies. Interviews usually consist of open-ended questions that probe into individual experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (4-5). Gathering responses to open-ended questions enables the researcher to understand and capture other people's points of view without predetermining those points of view

through prior selection of questionnaire categories. The process relies on direct quotation and reveals the depth of emotion, organization, thoughts, experiences, and basic perceptions of the participants (21).

A second kind of qualitative design involves observations. This process consists of extensive fieldwork usually describing activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. The third kind of qualitative study concerns documentation. The collection of written material and other documents are important for the collection of important information for the study (Patton 4-5). My effort relied heavily on the interview approach with additional insights gained from observations of group dynamics and responses from the individual participants.

Specific Associations of Qualitative Design for This Study

Specific to this study, Lichtman provides further insight to important qualities of qualitative research clarifying approach. Researchers conduct a qualitative approach in natural settings. The approach reflects a non-experimental nature and involves not testing hypotheses. The process contains induction and moves from data to themes or theory. The number of participants consists of usually small groups randomly selected. The researcher relies on interviews, observations, and records for data and does not include a lot of statistics. Specifics pertaining to the procedures for data analysis lack rigid articulation. The role of the researcher remains critical. Evaluation standards reflect a different form from standards for experimental research (250).

Qualitative findings may stand alone or in combination with quantitative data. A quantitative aspect exists when both fixed-choice, closed questions and open questions

combine in the questionnaire format (Patton 5). Creswell defines this approach as *mixed-methods designs*. Since the approach for my project attempts to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of assimilation methods among local churches, my study best reflects an exploratory design or approach. Exploratory designs attempt to explore the views of the participants through listening rather than by a topic of predetermined variables (552-61). Patton states that qualitative research provides a framework within which people can respond. This framework accurately and thoroughly represents their points of view, leading to evaluation. What people say, verbally or written, conveys a major source for qualitative data (21). These descriptions and quotations enable the researcher to describe and interpret what occurred (26-27). These statements best define the entire approach for my study.

Summary

Until the church conducts, explores, and enters into an honest dialogue about the effectiveness of assimilating new converts into productive members, little thought discerning the quality and end result of the discipleship process materializes. The development of new converts into productive and active members of the local church represent, not only essential elements for the growth of that church but for the influence of the gospel on culture and society in general. A plan, process, or procedure must exist, which results in effective discipleship and implementation of the disciple back into the ministries and mission of the church. While church membership cannot comprise the final test whether a convert is fully disciplined, it does gage and reflect a level of commitment by the new convert toward the efforts, mission, and goal of the local church.

The most important dynamic at work in the development of new converts resides with the church's ability to cultivate meaningful relationships. The development of vital relationships results in new converts and transferees from other congregations who become contributors to the ministry and mission of that local church. Too many churches participate in re-assimilating individuals with previous church-related backgrounds rather than developing new converts into faith, ministry, and mission. In consultation with comparative literature, this issue became a consistent observation.

Even if churches incorporate methods of evangelism and discipleship, few congregations consider evaluating methods for effectiveness. Churches find the method of incorporation difficult to gain in membership by profession of faith if no plans, processes, or procedures exist. A greater problem exists if plans, processes, and procedures exist but no method, reflection, or evaluation exists to determine the effectiveness of the entire effort. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this study and provides a framework for exploring, evaluating, and discerning the effectiveness of the methods, which seek to develop new converts, and the dynamics related to members gained by profession of faith.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and determine the effective assimilation of new converts from the point of conversion to active membership and participation among ten local churches of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. It developed from noticeable variations between reports of conversion and the number of members gained by profession of faith. A numerical difference exists between the conversions and members gained by profession of faith by the congregations. Thus, the study developed from these variations and from concerns for the assimilation of new converts into disciplined and active members within local CCCU churches. This study provides the insight necessary for more purposeful and effective evangelism and discipleship methods among local churches.

Research Questions

At the outset of the study, I generated three research questions that identified strategies that led to members gained by profession of faith. Participants explored, observed, and evaluated which strategies appeared effective. The study further disclosed how well the local participating church disciplines and assimilates new converts into productive and effective members.

Research Question #1

What methods and strategies did the participating members of the churches identify that resulted in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

In order to assess the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the assimilation and growth strategies of the participating churches that resulted in gains in membership, I needed to discern whether the church offered specific discipleship and spiritual formation development pertaining to the assimilation of new converts and potential members. I gained information regarding these topics by asking the focus groups if they had knowledge of their church's plans, processes and procedures used in the establishment and development of new converts. I recorded the group's responses and interactions. Participants responded based on their personal knowledge or because they were recipients of the congregation's strategies for the development and reception of new members.

Research Question #2

What methods and strategies did the participating members of the churches identify that did not result in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

The groups discussed the aspects of their church's plans, processes and procedures that were not effective specifically as their efforts related to new converts becoming functional participants in the church. By objectively considering possible ineffectiveness, the groups honestly explored and discovered inadequacies and important elements that were missing in the development of new converts or transferees assimilation into the ministries of the church. I used extensive field notes of the groups' conversations and observations concerning their discussion and revelations pertaining to issues contributing to ineffectiveness. While monitoring the groups, I interjected other

general questions to stimulate deeper thought and provide additional opportunity for consideration of possibilities and points of ineffectiveness (see Appendix C).

Research Question #3

How do the effective methods and strategies identified by the participants in the study correlate to those found in the literature, and what discoveries, similarities, and differences compare between the two regarding the effective assimilation of new converts into The Churches of Christ in Christian Union?

The groups further offered comparative evaluation and considered whether their approaches to growth strategies reflected actual effectiveness or if real strategies existed at all toward the assimilation of new converts, resulting in an increase in church membership. My observations and participation with the group, along with the group's collective observations, helped determine areas of effectiveness and ineffectiveness. The groups formulated conclusions from these observations and stimulated additional discussions about how to increase effectiveness, resulting in more successfully disciplined members. I contacted the pastors a few weeks after I conducted the focus groups to determine if additional observations surfaced, enlightening and revealing other issues of effectiveness. I drew other inferences made by the pastors specifically pertaining to effectiveness of the churches' plans, processes, and procedures.

Population and Participants

The participants consisted of an organized focus group of six to ten members among ten churches. I asked the local pastors to select the focus groups based on his or her awareness of the participants' personal understanding, knowledge, and experience of the congregations' general procedures for preparing and receiving members. I also asked

each local church pastors to participate with the organized groups. The participants were either lay leaders of active ministries or elected leaders from the local church governing board. If the church had a staff pastor, that individual participated in the groups. I believed that a general awareness and comprehension of basic evangelism, discipleship, and growth methods, either by training or through experience, represented qualities necessary for participation in the focus groups. Some participants received actual instruction from their congregation's programs, that prepare new converts and transferees for membership.

The population consisted of churches I selected to participate in the study. I chose ten churches from three different categories. These categories consisted of three churches less than ten years old, three churches less than fifty years old, and four churches greater than fifty years old. The churches selected came from among three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union within the United States. I selected four churches from the South Central District, five churches from the West Central District, and one church from the Northeast District. The selected churches annually reported the reception of members gained by profession of faith, which allowed me to infer the use of some standard or method for determining individual growth and development necessary for membership.

Design of the Study

This project involved a qualitative approach that sought to discover, discern, and explore the effective and ineffective strategies for evangelism and assimilation of new converts utilized by the selected churches. The study focused on churches that experienced growth by profession of faith by the end of the current council year. These

congregations disclosed their sincere commitment in bringing individuals to faith in Jesus Christ. The results produced recommendations for effective church assimilation and development for The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Each church I evaluated demonstrated discipleship, church growth, and assimilation procedures, which ultimately resulted in and produced members gained by profession of faith. The intent of the research from among the pastors, leaders, and lay leaders of the participating congregations was not only to engage and identify procedure but also to determine effectiveness leading to active, productive, healthy members. Discussions, interaction, and group dynamics recorded from the organized focus groups provided the necessary data for the study.

The participants from each of the ten focus groups discussed openly valid insights based on their personal knowledge of the church's methods for developing and receiving new members. Individual, personal knowledge and experience of the participants provided reliable, insightful, and important information for the study. Focus groups' individual participants served as the primary source for this study. I encouraged every member of each focus group to participate. I used written record and audio recordings to keep detailed minutes. I gained good information from each group's open conversations essential to the discovery process of the study.

The research involved a little over three months of organization to facilitate the ten focus groups. Each session spanned about a two-hour time frame. I served as the facilitator for each session and conducted the ten focus groups at an on-site location of the participating church facility.

Sometime after each session, I conducted a follow-up call with each participating pastor. This call generated conversation that determined the pastor's evaluation and value of participation in the study. During the call, I also asked if additional observations regarding effectiveness surfaced, and if the church made appropriate adjustments. I further probed whether these adjustments resulted in better methods for discipling new converts with additional increases in church membership. I made notation from each conversation. These notations represented an important step for assessing and drawing conclusions from the study.

Instrumentation

The participants' discussion, dialogue, and interaction provided a very important component for my study and approach. The elements of group dynamics produced insight in defining effective and ineffective strategies and methods used by each participating church.

I used statistical information available from the annual church reports of the CCCU to determine any pattern of inconsistencies between the number of new converts gained during the 2009-2010 council year and the reported members gained by profession of faith. This information served as the foundation for the study.

Prior to conducting any of the ten focus groups, I designed general questions, pertaining to the primary subject matter, to stimulate discussion (see Appendix C). The focus groups did not have an opportunity to review these generalized questions before the session.

Expert Review

In order to determine whether a church is effective in the discipleship and development of new converts, it must first minister to and experience new converts. For the purpose of this study, congregations that consistently received new members provided the best possible insight.

I called the pastors of the churches identified on my list of potential participants. I received permission from them to conduct the study and solicited their assistance with formulating the focus groups. I encouraged them to select members who demonstrated active involvement or were in lay leadership positions and who had a general understanding about how new converts become members. I asked the pastor and at least one staff pastor, if applicable, to participate in the focus group. I personally facilitated each of the focus groups, gathering the groups' observations on location.

Dr. Steve Ybarrola, my faculty mentor, suggested that I conduct this study qualitatively, organizing focus groups from among the selected churches. Before conducting any of the focus groups, I asked Dr. Ybarrola to review the general questions instrument used to facilitate the groups. After his review and suggestions, I made adjustments and clarifications to the questions and reduced any redundancy or duplication of similar or related questions.

I invited two members from my reflection team, Dr. David Lattimer and Dr. Tim Eades as additional consultants for the study. Dr. Lattimer suggested the follow-up interview with pastors after the focus group meeting. Input from these members kept the study focused and clarified. Dr. Lattimer's insights incorporated his findings from his initial study pertaining to conversions in the CCCU and proved valuable to this effort.

Mr. Michael Castle and Mrs. Kim Elswick also served as lay representatives for the reflection team.

Reliability and Validity

Through the organization of focus groups, group dynamics resulted with interaction that extracted valuable and reliable insight of the many facets pertaining to the effectiveness of the church. The personal experience of members, therefore, disclosed assessments of effectiveness specifically as discussion pertained to procedures, methods, and practices for the discipleship and assimilation of new members.

Since the researcher represents the instrument in a qualitative study (Patton 14), I took every precaution to record by extensive written notation and digital audio recording every focus group session. Audio recordings served as a valuable cross-reference for my written observations. The interviews successfully evaluated perceptions and observations of the participants' general knowledge and disclosed the effectiveness of new convert assimilation and membership.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, pure description and quotations represent the raw data and method of inquiry (Patton 9). The purpose attempts not to judge whether issues important to the study represent good or bad, positive or negative influences but simply describe what occurred (26-27). Considering this study in particular, I used the participants' interactions and observations to determine the effectiveness of the congregations' assimilation of new converts and whether new converts became active members of the local church.

Patton further states that qualitative research includes three other dynamics. The first he defines as *Being-in*. This process involves the immersion of the researcher in the world of the persons studied. The second includes *Being-for*. This approach defines the researcher as one taking a stand on behalf of the persons studied. The final qualitative approach involves *Being-with*. This example best represents and defines my study because it incorporates the concept of the researcher being present with those of the study. In the *Being-with* approach, the researcher brings the personal knowledge and experience into the relationship. He or she listens to the thoughts, feelings, and objections of the group while interacting and offering his or her meaning, perceptions. At times, the researcher may even disagree with the thoughts, feelings and observations of the group (8).

I prepared discussion questions prior to conducting the organized. I consulted with my mentor, Dr. Steve Ybarrola, for direction and clarity and to ensure that the questions remained open-ended in format. On his recommendation, I reviewed and edited the questions and made final preparation before presentation. I personally contacted each pastor to explain the purpose of my study and scheduled appropriate meeting times. Interviews with the focus groups lasted for two hours each.

After meeting with each focus group, I categorized the information within each group and made comparisons among the various groups. The study's results contributed to individual location evaluations as well as comparative evaluations. I conducted a follow-up interview call with the each pastor to obtain any additional insights, observations, evaluations, and concluding thoughts that may lead to future actions, corrections, or changes.

The interview process took about three months to complete. Chapters 4 and 5 of this study reveal the results of the focus group interviews. Taken from collective observations, explorations, and evaluations of focus group members, issues of effective and ineffective methods surfaced, and I made conclusions regarding the assimilation of new members.

Data Analysis

The important aspect of my study reflects the analysis of the information I received. Both my role as researcher remained important to the process along with the insightful reflection and honest evaluation of the focus group participants. The evaluation, knowledge, concern, and compassion of the participants regarding the group's discernment and comprehension of effective ministry proved impressive and produced measurable insights.

I evaluated all of the focus groups' observations and discussions. I recorded all issues that related to the groups' exploration and discovery of applicable implications. The dynamics and interactions of each group revealed these implications as pertained to effective methods for assimilation of new converts. The ultimate result disclosed whether the focus groups' members determined if the plans, processes, and procedures of their churches added members. I further compared these results with the observations made by the other focus groups to determine patterns and similarities that contributed toward the findings of the overall study. I specifically analyzed whether the number of years a congregation existed affected the results. This process produced a necessary objective influence to the general qualitative approach of the study, also resulting with greater reliability and validity.

Finally, the content of the study compared other effective methods and observations discovered in the literature review among authors of similar studies. I attempted to comply with Creswell's analysis of content pertaining to qualitative research (265). As Creswell suggests, I attempted to balance discussion about the research and the actual content of the study (285).

Ethical Procedures

The participants and the churches used for the study remained anonymous. I believed anonymity was necessary so that individuals or churches could remain confidential in the study. The audio recordings of each of the ten focus groups were stored on a compact disk filed with the notes taken for each session. All files of any kind were securely stored and remain in my personal possession. My work at the Global Ministry Center of the CCCU necessitates keeping the location of the focus groups confidential.

Each church received a full report of the study's specific and overall findings regarding analysis and related trends of assimilation resulting in members gained by profession of faith. These results become important for the local church and membership concerns of the denomination as a whole. The findings reported to the general superintendent, district superintendents, the General Board, and the General Church Extension Board represent important insight into the effectiveness of the denomination's assimilation, or lack of assimilation, of new converts and the reception of members.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

The assimilation of new converts into the fellowship and ministries of the body of Christ represent a significant purpose for the Church's existence (Coleman 19). As a local congregation develops new converts in the faith, the convert's maturity and involvement offer insights into whether the methods and strategies of the congregation effectively result in local church membership. The study developed from variations and concerns for the assimilation of new converts into disciplined and active members within local CCCU churches. This study evaluated the effective and ineffective assimilation methods used by churches that come out of discussions with ten focus groups. The focus groups represented ten churches within The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.

Some differences existed between the number of new converts and members gained by profession of faith as reported in the annual data. A noticeable pattern emerged and indicated possible inconsistencies in the assimilation and discipleship processes utilized by CCCU congregations pertaining to the reception of members. From the information shared among the organized focus groups, this study discovered some of the causes that contributed to these differences. It further revealed the overall effectiveness of the methods and strategies used by the participating local churches in assimilating new members into congregational life. The primary result of this study revealed areas of weakness regarding the assimilation and discipleship process as it related to new converts becoming active members in the local church.

Participants

Ten congregations among three different districts within The Churches of Christ in Christian Union agreed to participate in the study. Among these participating churches, three represented congregations less than ten years in existence, three less than fifty years in existence, and four greater than fifty years of existence. Table 4.1 reveals the number of converts and members gained by profession of faith for the past five years broken down into the three categories. Churches A-C represented congregations less than ten years of existence with churches D-F less than fifty years of existence. Churches G-J represented congregations greater than fifty years of existence. I identified the congregations by letter in order that the names of the participating churches remain anonymous. Churches that participated represented congregations that experienced and reported new converts and received new members annually from the denominational statistics in the CCCU *Yearbook*.

Table 4.1. Conversions and Members Gained

Church	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	NC	MG	NC	MG	NC	MG	NC	MG	NC	MG
A	0	0	0	0	15	15	24	0	0	0
B	0	0	4	4	0	8	7	3	12	3
C	0	0	6	2	0	2	8	3	5	0
D	22	16	13	9	33	10	22	15	25	17
E	0	5	0	6	0	3	0	2	0	9
F	0	32	0	19	0	16	0	13	0	9
G	6	18	36	3	15	12	10	11	10	21
H	60	10	23	2	14	22	6	6	8	6
I	15	0	5	5	28	13	44	9	28	8
J	0	19	0	21	0	19	0	9	0	28

* NC = New Conversions; * MG = Members Gained

Source: Churches Yearbook.

Research Question #1

What methods and strategies did participating members of the churches identify that resulted in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

Churches that assimilate and disciple new converts into a deeper experience with Christ and develop converts who become active in the ministries of the local church develop a plan, a process, or a procedure intentionally designed for assisting the church and individuals in attaining that goal. I asked the participants of each of the focus groups based on their knowledge or experience to identify the strategies their church used that resulted in new convert assimilation, discipleship, and, ultimately, church membership. The focus group responses disclosed the following observations.

Each of the focus groups recognized they must be intentionally and directly involved with the development of new converts. Participants defined the development of relationships as essential for effective assimilation and discipleship. However, participants believed that the primary responsibility for discipleship and spiritual growth resided with the new convert's desire for assimilation and spiritual formation. Especially among those churches with good consistent functional programs and classes, participants expected new converts to take advantage of all available opportunities offered by the church. While each congregation recognized the importance for new converts to develop quick, meaningful relationships, churches placed a considerable amount of the responsibility for the development of those relationships on the new convert. Churches expected new converts to seek out relationships rather than to have them cultivated by the leadership and members of the church. All the participants believed and identified their churches as relational. Every participant discerned that regular attendees perceived

themselves as belonging to the church regardless of whether or not they were members. No church or participant considered membership as the concluding step of the assimilation and discipleship process. Churches believed that new converts became involved and remained in the church because of the church's effective relational qualities, programs, or classes. Eight of the ten churches offered either new convert classes, discipleship classes, membership classes, or a combination of each and evaluated them effective in developing the convert's individual growth in Christ. All the focus groups that offered new convert and discipleship development and had new converts among the participants testified to personal positive results from their experiences. Another basis for this evaluation by the churches came primarily through the new converts' increased interest, involvement, and consistent church attendance. Participating churches identified that faithful church attendance among new converts represents the most reliable gauge pertaining to effective assimilation and discipleship. Regular attendance further reflected the new convert's sincerity and desire to grow. A new convert's desire to participate in discipleship programs served as the acceptable effective result among the participants of the focus group. Whether a new convert eventually became a member or not, membership held little or no significance regarding the association of effective assimilation and discipleship.

Churches identified their preparedness and readiness to meet the needs of new converts as a demonstration of effectiveness. Most of the participating churches contribute any success of assimilation and discipleship with purposefully being prepared to address the needs of new converts with a variety of developmental options. Seven of ten churches included spiritual gift analysis and other tools as a means of evaluation

incorporated as a part of new convert, discipleship, and membership classes. These seven churches perceived their assessment of new convert's interests, talents, and gifts, for the most part, effectively obtained. Participating churches used how quickly new converts assimilated into small groups, Sunday school classes, ministries, service, mentoring relationships to determine and evaluate effectiveness and their ability for stimulating spiritual development.

With the exception of two of the churches in the less than ten years of existence category, eight churches identified the strength of classes and/or materials used for the development of new converts as a measurement of effectiveness. Half of those responding could identify by title or author the specific materials used in assimilating and discipling new converts. In every case, each church that used materials identified and perceived them as effective. Churches greater than ten years contributed the successful assimilation and discipleship of new converts to adequately prepared staff, lay leaders, teachers, and mentors involved in the instruction and training process. In most cases this conclusion resulted from either the church or the staff's evaluation regarding the effectiveness of materials and people and not an evaluation by the new convert.

Since no participating church sought the evaluation from new converts that participated in their assimilation or discipleship programs, I interviewed three individuals that the local pastors selected and served on the focus groups from two different locations. Considering the privacy of the participants, I changed the names of the individuals. The testimonies they shared, however, reflect their observations and experiences.

Jim and Sue came to Christ as the result of the sudden death of Jim's brother. Although Sue attended church, Jim never attended and demonstrated little desire for God or the church. After Jim's brother's memorial service, he attended church the next Sunday. Jim came forward and received Christ as Savior. Sue reaffirmed her commitment to Christ. Through the established assimilation and discipleship process the church already had in place, the following week Jim and Sue attended their first new converts class. Jim and Sue shared, "Considering the size of the church and the need for instructional development and had it not been for the new convert's class, we would have never made it. It would have been difficult for us to grow in our faith." Based on Jim and Sue's testimony, they evaluated their experience and the class offered by the church effective and successful. Their spiritual development resulted from the class and methods the church utilized in its assimilation efforts.

Paul represents a new convert from a different church:

My growth in my faith resulted from the good instruction I received from the leader of my small group. Our church immediately attempts to place new believers in a group as soon as possible. Because of my small group, I wanted to grow and develop spiritually. What the church offered was very effective in developing me as a Christian. It taught me how to be a Christian and how to think differently.

Paul's experience demonstrates the benefits of receiving the quick assimilation and discipleship ministries from the local church.

Among churches that did not offer classes on a regular basis, those that participated in new convert, discipleship, or membership programs when offered, testified and experienced spiritual development. Through the intentional efforts of eight of the ten churches with some kind of assimilation method or strategy, new converts evaluated their experience successful and effective for the most part. The greater concern

among all the participating churches in response to this study expressed greater pleasure in witnessing the spiritual growth and assimilation of new converts into active ministries of the congregation rather than receiving them into membership. Each church evaluated their efforts effective if new converts demonstrated spiritual growth resulting from their formal or informal methods.

Research Question #2

What methods and strategies did the participating members of the churches identify that did not result in new convert assimilation and members gained by profession of faith?

Most of the participating churches evaluated their efforts for assimilating and discipling new converts as adequate, taking into consideration the size of the congregations and the number of established Christians active in the church and involved in the process. Each group observed and shared about areas of ineffectiveness as well. The following represent issues contributing to ineffectiveness that all identified.

Every focus group perceived that they could do a better job in making connections with new converts. While all identified the importance of relational dynamics and believed their church to be a friendly and welcoming congregation, the groups recognized the challenge in connecting established attendees or members with new converts. This issue reoccurred in the discussion of every focus group regardless of size or years of existence. Four of the participating churches recognized the issues of connectedness resulted from their lack of any intentional plan to address their inefficiencies. One of the average-sized churches in the greater than fifty-year category observed that less than 50 percent of new converts stated they assimilated and developed

in their faith. While the group recognized a breakdown in the church's strategies and methods for assimilating new converts, the participants did not associate the breakdown to any ineffectiveness regarding their approach for connecting new people. For two of the four churches in the greater than fifty-year category, the participants were not aware of the materials used for assimilation and discipling new converts. Over half of the churches that participated placed more responsibility for connecting with the church on the new convert. Many rely on the initiative of the new convert to assimilate and grow. This expectation of the new convert proved true even if the church offered good assimilation and discipleship methods and strategies.

Groups identified the challenges they face with getting new converts to commit to methods for spiritual development. For every congregation regardless of how organized, follow-up and follow-through represented a challenge. Two of the three churches with less than ten years of existence identified this problem. For the younger congregations, this issue remains a challenge because they do not have the time and resources available to keep up. For two of the churches with greater than fifty years of existence, the concept for follow-up functioned within old paradigms; follow-up remains primarily the pastor's job. For the remaining churches that perceived themselves overall effective in assimilating new people, each admitted that too many people escape out the back door. Either the lack of trained people or people available for training hinder and complicate the follow-up process.

Another dynamic contributing to ineffectiveness involved the issue of evaluation. No congregations do any kind of evaluation of their methods for assimilation and discipleship from the new convert's perspective. Churches cannot really know if what

they offer works unless they ask the individuals participating in the process and programs. The churches with a staff hold regular internal evaluations of methods and strategies but attain no constructive feedback from the new convert.

The most noticeable observation for me of ineffectiveness among the participating groups involved church membership. No group recognized failure to obtain members as an issue of ineffectiveness. Every group perceived the culmination of the assimilation and discipleship process complete when the new convert transitioned from convert to active regular attendee. The church equated a measure of success by the new converts when they became actively involved in some aspect of the life and ministry of the local congregation. While most churches in this study produced maturing disciples, all perceived membership as nonessential to the overall concept and the process of assimilation and discipleship. Participants concluded that allowing people a place to belong contained greater importance than challenging new converts to become members. The need to focus on connecting and developing relationships with new converts emerged as a greater priority than membership.

Research Question #3

How do the effective methods and strategies identified by the participants in the study correlate to those found in the literature, and what discoveries, similarities, and differences compare between the two regarding the effective assimilation of new converts into the Churches of Christ in Christian Union?

Areas of consensus and dissimilarities pertaining to effective methods for the assimilation and discipleship of new converts emerged between the literature considered

and discussions shared among the focus groups. The following issues surfaced among the focus groups for comparison and contrast.

Every participating focus group recognized the necessity for cultivating and developing meaningful relationships with new converts. Without this important element of connection between members of the church and new believers, new converts missed an essential element in the spiritual formation process. Focus groups further recognized the psychological implications regarding the impact of relationships as discussed by Obst and Tham relating to a sense of well-being and community (350-59). Focus groups also perceived themselves effective in relation to Hunter's concept of belonging (462-71). Participants identified that most people involved at their churches experienced a sense of belonging. Searcy and Henson further stress the importance for developing relationships. They recognize that relationships must ultimately lead to friendships and represent the glue most effective for keeping guests and the church bound together. They conclude that new people must make friends within four to six months or they will not stay (977-1011).

With the exception of two churches, most perceived themselves effective in connecting with new believers. Schaller identifies these dynamics as unifying factors. New converts must sense a reason for becoming a part of a local church. Unity, or the sense of unity, built and based around a cause or theme, fosters, creates and develops stability (22-31). Most of the participating churches evaluated themselves effective regarding connecting new converts into their assimilation and discipleship ministries. However, most also identified a great need for improvement. Churches identified making connections with new converts as a very subjective aspect of the entire assimilation and discipleship process.

The focus groups recognized that more opportunities presented for new converts to make connections in the church would add the greater potential for assimilation and development. This observation compared to Schaller's and Searcy and Henson's general conclusions. Schaller's research and study about this topic revealed that adult converts or new members who do not become part of a group, accept a leadership role, or become involved in a task during their first year tend to become inactive (77). Each of the ten focus groups discussed, related, and identified with Schaller's research but understood the concept through the association and importance of regular church attendance.

Searcy and Henson identify that congregations must intentionally prepare to meet the needs of new people. They summarize that the lack of preparation and training of established church members represents the primary cause for failure regarding issues of hospitality and assimilation. Assimilation represents well-planned biblical hospitality through service (317-28). Pohl's research also supports these observations. Every focus group generally related to this explanation of effective assimilation. Participants perceived their expectation and reception of new converts as a normal experience for their congregations rather than the exception. This expectation for people coming to Christ resulting from effective ministry reflected the importance of their commitment to preparation whether intentional or as the need demanded. Over half of the churches contributed their preparation for receiving new converts as a key element for effective assimilation and discipleship. Two churches identified preparation for receiving new converts as the foundational DNA of their church essential to their overall purpose and any measureable success. Two of the significant elements of Gi-Hong's diamond model

stress the importance of the priority of evangelism and the preparation comparable to the acknowledgement of the previously mentioned focus groups (234).

The literature, however, reflects areas contributing to ineffectiveness even among items identified and thought effective or unnoticed by some focus groups. Because all the churches referenced and placed a lot of the responsibility for developing relationships with new converts, the opposite surfaced in assimilation discussions among the authors. Schaller identifies that one of the primary barriers present in all churches involves the existence of unintentional exclusionary dimensions. He demonstrates the dynamics of this reality through an extensive discussion regarding the perceptible differences between membership and fellowship circles (73). Schaller stresses that leaving too much of the responsibility for making connections and permeating through established relationships represents more of the church's problem and perception rather than the new convert's. Exclusionary realities exist and prevent most new attendees from entering even if ministries, services, and small groups exist in the church (82-83). Stutzman acknowledges that barriers erected by established older churches remain obscured and unconscious to current members. Many established congregations develop comfort zones that inhibit outreach. Stutzman clearly states that the church must take responsibility for the reception and integration of new people into the fellowship (13-36). No focus group when asked about areas of ineffectiveness, adequately discussed or recognized the impact and implications of any of these potential barriers pertaining to the development of relationships and the assimilation of new converts.

Several authors reference the importance of evaluating the assimilation and discipleship process. While the churches with paid staff members acknowledged internal

evaluation of their methods and strategies among the staff, no focus group formally or informally sought the reflection of the new converts' experience as it related to their personal and spiritual development. Schaller states that most churches never discover why individuals leave the church. From his experience, most people left the church because they could not penetrate the inner circle (81). For Stutzman observations about the church from outsiders become extremely important. Without outside communication, the church risks the perception of friendliness by the longtime membership (24-26).

The most significant area of contrast between the insights gained from the literature review pertained to the issue of church membership. This contrast by the focus groups regarding church membership becomes extremely important to evaluation concerning the effectiveness of gaining members by profession of faith. Every focus group concluded that becoming a member of the local church as a nonessential goal of the assimilation and discipleship process. Each believed that the individual growth and development of the convert is more important than becoming a member. Several of the authors in the literature review clearly disagreed with the focus groups specifically in relationship to the biblical and theological purpose of membership. The literature perceives church membership as the culmination for effective assimilation and discipleship.

Schaller discusses issues that prevented people from becoming members. One issue in his study discloses that many local churches place no priority for the reception of members. Congregations never ask new converts to become members (51-66). Searcy and Henson stress the impact of churches encouraging and demonstrating the importance for church membership as it relates to the body of Christ. Recent research reveals that

little or no emphasis placed on church membership represents the main reason most new converts do not become members. Aligning with the body of Christ represents an important step for new believers. The Church belongs to Christ (1115-79).

Searcy and Henson recognize that membership reflects a means of accountability for the new convert. Church membership demonstrates the convert's willingness and submission to the greater authority of the Church. For Searcy and Henson, membership represents the commencement ceremony of the assimilation process. It reflects a means for measuring the spiritual development of attendees (1183-246). Stutzman also associates the importance of membership with participation in the greater body of Christ. He concludes that belonging to a church becomes essential to discipleship and vital for spiritual life. Separation between conversion and church membership cannot exist if properly understood (55). None of the focus groups made any similar association regarding assimilation, and discipleship, and church membership.

Summary of Major Findings

The participants among the ten focus groups discussed and identified their approach to assimilating and discipling new converts in association with the reception of members in The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Through the groups' interaction and discussion, areas of effectiveness and ineffectiveness surfaced. The following represent the three major findings that emerged from the participating churches.

1. Every group recognized the importance and necessity for developing meaningful relationships with new converts. The groups identified, however, the primary responsibility for cultivating and pursuing meaningful relationships depended greatly on the desire and subjective experience of the new convert. Groups perceived that the

subjective experiential nature of the entire assimilation and discipleship process contributed to the difficulty in discerning the level of commitment and development of the new convert. The entire process requires commitment and patience. All groups also expressed the need for improvement.

2. With the exception of two of the churches under ten years in existence, all other groups offered either some kind of formal or informal new convert class, discipleship class, or membership class, or a combination of all three. Most offered these classes on a regular basis or as the influx of new converts required. Few churches evaluated the assimilation and discipleship process. None offered or sought an evaluation regarding their assimilation and discipleship process or programs from the new converts' perspective. If any assessment of the process occurred, churches with staff relied on the staff's subjective evaluation and perception of effectiveness.

3. Focus groups perceived the reception of members as nonessential regarding the association for effective assimilation and discipleship. This result becomes extremely significant to the relationship between effective assimilation and the concern of the related research regarding members gained by profession of faith. Pastors and lay leaders both discern that assimilation and discipleship complete when new converts demonstrate maturity and discover functional roles among small groups, places of service, or ministry in the church.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Discerning effective assimilation and discipleship methods and strategies represent a tremendous challenge for congregations concerned with the faithful development of new converts. Churches many times lack the implementation of intentional and purposeful methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their procedures. Too often congregations assume that new converts mature, become responsible and active in ministry, and ultimately take membership.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the perceptions of effective or ineffective methods of evangelism and assimilation strategies, during the current council year, used by the pastors and local church leaders of ten churches within three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. The results led to recommendations for effective assimilation based on the addition and discipleship of those making a profession of faith.

The Importance of Developing Meaningful Relationships

After completing the interview process and participating in the discussion with ten different congregations, evidence surfaced that the churches expressed a real desire in bringing lost people into a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ. Each group demonstrated a basic understanding of the dynamics involved with general evangelism practices and the church's efforts in developing new converts in their faith. Most of the longer-established churches effectively offered a variety of classes regularly or as the need demanded on a consistent basis. Some methods appeared more informal and

unstructured when compared with other participating churches. Methods and strategies for assimilation and discipleship were not the same and reflected many different styles and approaches. Every church recognized the importance for developing real and meaningful relationship with new converts. Each realized that new converts not only needed instruction in their faith but also must feel connected and experience a sense of belonging. Most participants recognized that connection and belonging many times preceded conversion in compliance with Hunter's Celtic model. Churches must encourage new converts to become responsible and develop a sense of purpose for maturing in their relationship with Christ.

I noticed, however, while every church recognized the need for developing strong relationships with people, all placed too much responsibility for formulating those relationships on the new converts. Focus groups expected new converts to seek out and develop relationships. Participants expected new believers to take advantage of the options offered for spiritual development. Most perceived themselves effective regarding their approach, taking into consideration what most identified as the subjective element present within the assimilation and discipleship process. Barna sympathizes with that subjective element. He states that effective churches realize they can only absorb and grow as many people as they can support in healthy relationships (512). For Barna this observation does not constitute making an excuse for growth but rather challenges the growth process. Considering Barna's observation, I still sensed that too much responsibility for connecting and developing relationships remained with the new converts.

A summation of the literature more specifically supports the general observations made by the focus groups concerning the importance for developing relationships. Gi-Hong, Hunter, Pohl, Coleman, and Searcy and Henson all were among sources that consider and stress the necessity for developing relationships with lost people as well as with new converts. Believers must desire to connect with people at any point along their spiritual journeys before and after conversion. The dynamic of relationship building encompasses vital components of the whole process for making disciples. Support from the research suggests that churches must take more responsibility in assisting and creating opportunities for nonbelievers and new converts to connect and grow. I did not sense the urgency among the focus group participants. The role of responsibility specifically concerning new converts as understood among the focus group discussions revealed an obvious difference between the observations of the groups and the literature. For example, Gi-Hong stresses the importance of building relationships with nonbelievers through the discovery of personal interests. These kinds of relationships are essential for reaching nonbelievers (241-42). Similar to Gi-Hong's observation, Hunter believes the establishment of relationships with nonbelievers contains the necessary element of the inclusive and welcoming nature of the church. Through fellowship, nonbelievers came to belief and commitment in Christ (397-459). None of the participants discussed or made these associations pertaining to their perceptions of relationship building. Too many group participants, including pastors, assumed that new converts took advantage of and experienced opportunities for relational connections and spiritual formation through classes and programs offered by the churches. Program-driven approaches assume the

nonbeliever and new convert take the initiative for the development of relationships, assimilation, and spiritual growth.

For Pohl, Jesus models the invitational and inclusive nature for the Church in his approach and spirit of hospitality in ministry (16-29). Coleman suggests that local congregations initiate and take more responsibility for the assimilation and discipleship process. This responsibility represents a basic truth in evangelism because Jesus always took the initiative whether ministering to the masses, small groups or inner-circle (89-98). Congregations among the focus groups that were positioned for growth and had experienced it those groups took more of an active role in assisting new converts with making the right connections into the appropriate programs with people trained by the church to encourage maturity and spiritual growth. Focus groups that recognized this dynamic experienced less disconnect between beliefs and behavioral practices.

The ministry of Jesus offers the best biblical model exemplifying the significance of relationship building. While Jesus ministered, interacted, and responded to the needs of the multitudes, he invested the largest percentage of his time and efforts in building unique relationships for the spiritual development, preparation, and continuation of his ministry through the disciples. He modeled and mentored before them an effective method of evangelism and purposeful relationship building. He offered practical instruction necessary for the cultivation of genuine relationships and corrected them when they strayed from foundational principles. Coleman notices this association between belief and practice. Jesus stayed with people to develop their faith. Coleman recognizes eight components contained within Jesus' biblical model. These components included (1) selection, (2) manageable group size, (3) consecration and obedience, (4)

impartation—reflecting the character of the leader, (5) demonstration—showing believers how to follow, (6) delegation—allowing the disciples to put their experience into practice, (7) supervision, and (8) reproduction (27-98). Jesus expected the disciples to follow and lead by his example.

No matter how well a congregation's programming and use of the latest materials functions, the greatest goal of the entire process involves connecting people to meaningful and real relationships. Relationship development includes a very subjective dynamic that all the focus groups uniquely identified but recognized as their greatest challenge and area for improvement. Connecting with new attendees and new converts therefore, must be more intentional and people driven rather than program driven. Programs, processes, and procedures come and go, but the basic needs deep within the human heart never change.

Limited Evaluation of the Assimilation and Discipleship Process

All focus groups that offered a form of assimilation and discipleship development attempted some kind of evaluation of their procedures. Groups identified the pastor as the primary evaluator pertaining to the effectiveness of the assimilation and discipleship programs and materials used by the church. Because the pastor usually was the most informed and closely involved with the development of new converts, lay participants considered his or her observations reliable. The larger churches with staff also included the evaluations and observations of the staff in relationship to the progress and development of new converts. No participating focus group was aware of any structured evaluations, whether formal or informal, taken from among new converts that participated in assimilation and discipleship programs. The pastor and staff determined if

methods or strategies effectively met the developmental needs of new converts. If participating churches included the reflection of new converts with the assimilation and discipleship process, a fuller and more comprehensive evaluation of effectiveness could result.

Barna admits that the evaluation of spiritual growth represents a difficult challenge for the church and becomes difficult to measure (512). The literature stresses the importance of evaluation for the assimilation and discipleship process at every level. Schaller determines the assimilation process is effective based on the number of connecting points available for nonbelievers and new converts. The more opportunities allowing individuals to make meaningful connections into the church increase the potential for additional involvement (38-48). Searcy and Henson recognize that assimilation begins when visitors walk through the door. Information that churches gain from those individuals becomes the most important communication a congregation receives. This kind of evaluation involves intentional and purposeful collection of information. It requires a lot of dedication from the volunteers and staff of the local church. The result breaks down internal barriers and produces effective assimilation of new converts into the fellowship and ministry of the church. Hearing the experience of new people offers the most reliable evaluation of the assimilation process (332-748). Coleman identifies that Jesus modeled evaluation principles through personal supervision and practical instruction (89-98). Participants among the focus groups were not aware of any specific or intentional evaluation from nonbelievers, from first-time attendees or from the experience of new converts. Searcy and Henson's method even comes up short. They directed most of their evaluation efforts toward the first-time and second-time

visitors and not at other levels in the assimilation process. Considering the focus groups, evaluation of the assimilation process remained the subjective observation of the pastor or, in some cases, the pastor's staff.

The ministry of the Apostle Paul offers a good model for establishing and developing new people in the faith. He responded to the specific needs contained within the congregations he established. Whenever possible, he returned to locations, responding by letter or face-to-face, addressing unique assimilation and growth situations offering encouragement and practical biblical solutions. Paul's evaluation did not also just reflect his own personal observations pertaining issues preventing spiritual growth but also responded to challenges encountered by those attempting to develop in Christ. This approach he demonstrated best in his correspondence with the church at Corinth and in his epistle to the Galatians. In both of these epistles, Paul addressed assimilation concerns and challenges inquired by the members of those congregations. He corrected faltering theology in response to the evaluation exchanges between him and new developing converts. The biblical theological reflection of the literature review reference specific information pertaining to the Apostle Paul's approach.

Established congregations must become more sensitive to the challenge new people and converts experience in relationship to the church's assimilation methods and strategies. Congregations need to base more of their evaluation regarding the effectiveness of methods and strategies from those individuals most directly affected by their programs. Schaller's research indicates that most churches fail to discover why people leave congregations (82-83). This fact alone stresses the importance for evaluating the assimilation process. Failure to gain this important information represents a

breakdown in the overall process of spiritual development. The information gained from the experience of new converts increases the potential success and purpose of the entire process specifically as it relates to people considered for membership in The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.

Contrasting Perceptions Regarding Church Membership and Assimilation

The response of the focus groups pertaining to church membership resulted among one of the most surprising revelations personally of the entire study. No congregation, regardless of the number of years of existence, stressed the importance of new converts becoming members of the local church. All participants perceived that their congregations encouraged membership but none believed it related to the culmination of the assimilation and discipleship process. Nine out of ten focus groups considered the assimilation and discipleship of new converts totally effective and complete when individuals became actively involved in some aspect of ministry or group directly associated with the local church. Faithful attendance emerged as the primary evaluation for a new convert's sincerity and commitment level. Whether a new convert became a member bore little significance for pastors and lay participants. Since new people and converts experienced a sense of belonging and became actively involved in the church without taking membership, focus groups perceived membership a nonessential component or expectation of developing believers. Participants within the focus groups under 35 years of age expressed that church membership exemplified one of the problems of the organized church and not a necessary component to Christian faith. Many recognized that the negative response among laypersons and lay leaders pertaining to church membership coincides with the encroaching attitude concerning membership

within American culture. While participating churches perceived membership as the highest decision made by the new convert, demonstrating a commitment to greater responsibility and accountability to the local church, the association contributed nothing to the believer becoming a functioning active member of the body of Christ.

The role of membership among the participating focus groups contrasted with the general associations observed within the literature considered. Searcy and Henson defend that the local church bears responsibility for encouraging church membership. Congregations accomplish this goal by providing new converts with multiplying opportunities for service through consistent teaching about the purpose for church membership and through many opportunities for the reception of new members. They relate that recent research indicates that the main reason new converts fail to become members results from little emphasis placed on membership by the church (1115). Every church that participated in the focus groups received members on an average of two or three times a year, and most opportunities for membership depended on the initiative of the new convert. Both Searcy and Henson, and Stutzman related membership with a local church to the new convert's participation within the greater context of the body of Christ.

The association of the biblical and theological relationship between the Church and the body of Christ clearly takes formation in the gospels and the writings of the Apostle Paul. Jesus made several references regarding the formation and purpose of the Church. In Matthew 28:18-20 he left behind clear instruction concerning how new converts enter into fellowship with the existing body of believers. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11-12 identifies the gifts Christ gave to the Church purposefully for accomplishing his work in building up the Church. Paul also associates the Church as the

body of Christ. H. Orton Wiley affirms these ecclesiological doctrinal positions as represented by the Church of the Nazarene and accepted by The Churches of Christ in Christian Union regarding the association of the Church as the body of Christ (103-37).

Considering the literature, the position reflected among the focus groups made two errors regarding church membership in association to the assimilation and discipleship of new converts. First, focus groups need to recognize that the assimilation and discipleship process reaches a point of culmination when new converts become members. Even though church membership does not save anyone from their sins, it does represent submission to the Church as the Church in turn submits itself to Christ the head. Secondly, congregations within The Churches of Christ in Christian Union need to recognize they are not asking new converts to become members of a local collection of believers. Instead, the local church invites new converts to become active participants within the body of Christ identified by the authority of Jesus and the New Testament as the Church.

This theological revelation from the information obtained from my discussions among pastors and participants of the focus groups contains the greatest implications regarding The Churches of Christ in Christian Union's understanding and evaluation of effective assimilation and discipleship practices and members gained by profession of faith. This research further assists in the evaluation of differences between the number of new converts reported annually and the number of members gained by becoming members. Therefore, the goal of the denomination for recording a member gained by profession of faith asked and required annually indicates an incomplete correlation. The difference between the number of individuals effectively assimilated and discipled as

defined by the focus groups and received as members does not reflect the complete experience of every new convert. From the admission of those who participated in the focus groups, the study concludes that churches do better assisting new converts in spiritual growth assimilation and development than with becoming members.

Implications of the Findings

The Churches of Christ in Christian Union have much more to learn about the greater dynamics associated with the assimilation and discipleship process of new converts. While all focus groups recognized the importance and impact for developing relationships before conversion and with new converts, the study disclosed that too much emphasis for creating positive connections with the church became the responsibility of the new convert. Many of the participating churches in the study discovered and developed good new convert and discipleship classes but placed too much emphasis on the strength of their programs over the harder work of incorporating new converts into discovering real relationships and connecting them to ministries of the church. Participating churches tended to rely on the strength and charisma of the teaching and mentoring abilities of established members and expected new converts to take advantage of all growth and development resources offered.

No participating church left new converts to develop and mature on their own. Many identified using good, effective programs and trends currently utilized by other church organizations and denominations. A few congregations developed their own materials for establishing new converts in the faith. No church, however, sought the feedback regarding the effectiveness of the methods and strategies offered to the new convert that participated in the assimilation and discipleship programs. Larger

participating churches with staff relied on the subjective evaluation of the staff member to assess the effectiveness of the church's approach for developing new converts rather than converts themselves. Perhaps gaining the insights and perspectives of new attendees and new converts could strengthen and cause churches in The Churches of Christ in Christian Union to be more effective in preparing and gaining members by profession of faith.

No participating church emphasized membership essential to the assimilation and discipleship process. This consistent observation by each participating church raised some general theological concerns. Churches either ignored or were unaware of basic ecclesiological doctrine taught and reflected in the theology accepted within the overall context of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. No focus group related church membership to the believer's participation in the greater body of Christ. All understand church membership within the limited confines of the local church setting. None associated membership as the culmination of the assimilation and disciple process for new converts. Based on the focus group's position regarding church membership, this suggests that the question asked on the annual church report pertaining to members gained by profession of faith does not represent a true reflection of the number of new converts effectively assimilated and discipled by congregations a part of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.

Limitations of the Study

This study only considered and gained insights of effective assimilation and discipleship methods and strategies from ten congregations of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union. Over two hundred congregations represent the total number of churches

in the denomination. The ten churches used in the study do provided a good cross-reference and a good representation of the overall concept used by all for developing new converts and receiving new members.

Due to the kind of study conducted, time and insights from the participants were limited. Although the time and information received produced valuable insights and discoveries, the probing questions used to stimulate discussion kept the time spent among groups organized yet limited other potential insights.

Unexpected Observations

Most of the participating congregations were aware of and disclosed effective methods and strategies for assimilating and discipling new converts. Some of the lay participants in the focus groups received the benefits of the church's programming. I did not expect this disclosure because the number of new converts reported varied from the number of members gained by profession of faith among some of the participating churches. This observation reflects not as much among the churches considered for this study but more noticeable among other reporting churches within the same period. The real breakdown lies not within the number of people the denomination disciples but among the number of people received into membership.

The years of existence had little effect on whether congregations offered methods and strategies or not. The congregations less than ten years of existence still were discovering themselves in conjunction with methods and strategies for effective assimilation and discipleship limited by the number of trained teachers and mentors available to disciple new converts. Some congregations greater than fifty years of existence admitted being stuck in comfort zones and old discipleship paradigms. The

honesty and experience contained among pastors and participants of all groups contributed to the overall reliability of the study.

Recommendations

Since the passion for lost people resonated in the information shared by each focus group, congregations of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union need to discover how best to put that passion into practice. Methods and strategies concerning connecting with new people and guests and assimilating new converts as articulated by Searcy and Henson, Schaller, and Stutzman need incorporation into foundational evangelism and discipleship practices.

Secondly, congregations need to seek the evaluation and observations of new converts that receive the benefit of assimilation and discipleship development for discovering the effectiveness of methods and strategies. This additional step will allow the pastor and staff to meet the unique needs and issues facing those seeking a relationship with Christ and develop important opportunities for relational connection and assimilation.

Finally, churches need to develop a better understanding concerning basic foundational Wesleyan theology pertaining to the purpose of church membership as it relates to Christians belonging to the body of Christ and becoming active agents within his kingdom. Church membership reflects more than numbers reported at the end of the year on an annual report. Church membership represents the total agreement of the new convert to the principles that govern and demonstrate the very character and nature of the kingdom of God. It encompasses much more than the recitation of local church

membership vows but reflects the submission and accountability of the believer to a host of people of faith that belong to the body of Christ and his Church.

Postscript

The results of this study revealed areas of success but also disclosed strategic issues that can make the efforts of the congregations within The Churches of Christ in Christian Union more effective. The challenge of developing real relationships with lost people and bringing them into a dynamic encounter with Christ remains. The privilege of assimilating and discipling those God sends represents the highest goal and purpose.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER TO PASTORS

February 17, 2011

Church
Pastor
Address
City/State/Zip

Dear Pastor,

Greetings in Jesus' name!

During the summer of 2005, I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary. After five years of class work and concentrated studies in evangelism and church growth, I am in the midst of the dissertation process. I am conducting a study of churches within our denomination evaluating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our methods of discipleship resulting in members gained by profession of faith. The primary goal of the study is to determine how well we as an organization are developing new converts in the faith. This effort will attempt to determine if they are becoming members and ultimately discovering a place of service and ministry in the local church. The study will utilize a qualitative approach of a selected focus group. I will personally meet with this group at some agreed and determined date in the near future collecting their observations regarding their perceptions of your church's effectiveness or ineffectiveness in developing disciples into active members.

First, I need to know if you and your church are willing to participate in this study. If so, I need you to select between six and ten individuals to participate in the focus group. I would suggest choosing two or three current church board members, two or three active laypersons, a staff pastor and of course yourself. Secondly, determine a date when all the members of the focus group can meet so that we might coordinate our schedules. I need to complete the evaluation by the end of March. I will plan to meet at your location. Inform the participants that the session will be recorded in order that the discussion and observations of the group might be adequately evaluated and a true representation of the participants' collective perceptions is presented.

Please e-mail (directordoc@cccuhq.org) me or call (740-412-0655 or 474-8856) as soon as possible indicating that you are willing to participate in this study, that you are organizing the focus group and have provided available opportunities for me to meet and conduct the evaluation.

Thanks again for considering and being willing to participate in this study. I believe that the results will be helpful for your church and for other churches across our denomination. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Grace and Peace,
Ralph Hux

APPENDIX B
COMPLIANCE FORM
Ralph Hux
Dissertation
Participation Compliance

Focus Group: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Focus Group Discussion Generators

Dissertation Project

Are conversions the exception or the norm for your church?

Does your church have a plan/process/procedure for developing new converts in the faith? If so, how often is the plan/process/procedure offered? Would you evaluate the plan/process/procedure effective?

In your opinion, what essential principles are important and necessary for effective discipleship in the local church?

Considering the inclusion and advancement of new converts into the life and ministry of your church, what do you believe is working best for your congregation? How would you rate the overall effectiveness of these efforts?

If individuals from your church were asked to define their relationship to the church, do you believe most people would respond that they “belong” [perceive themselves as members of the church] or “attend” [simply perceive themselves as regular attendees] of (Church Name)?

Do most new converts in your church demonstrate a desire to develop in their faith? If so, in what ways do they demonstrate this? Are they encouraged to experience the sanctified life—becoming more like Christ; find a ministry; discover and discern their spiritual gifts/talents; find a place of service?

How are most new converts disciplined in your church?

Do most new converts find a place of service and ministry in your church? If so, what do you perceive as being the most effective contribution in attaining this goal?

In your best estimation, would you say that most new converts become members of your congregation?

Considering all the dynamics of the local church, who or what is most responsible for a new convert becoming an active member of your church? Who or what contributes to this effectiveness?

What or who hinders individuals most from becoming members of your local church?

Is the importance of membership stressed at your church?

How often does your church take in new members?

How long does it take most new converts to develop from their initial conversion to becoming a member of the church?

What phrase best describes a new convert's development and discipleship in your church?

Are the responsibilities and expectations for membership clear and understood by new converts?

Do new members realize that your church is a part of a denominational fellowship?

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER FOR THE FOCUS GROUP PASTOR

March, 2011

Dear Pastor,

I would like to thank you for allowing me to conduct this focus group with you and your congregation. You are aware that I am working on a Doctor of Ministry degree through Asbury Theological Seminary. Your participation in this focus group consists of part of the collection of research, information and data necessary to complete the study.

Thank you for organizing this group of leaders and lay leaders from your congregation and for agreeing to the following:

1. Meeting with a group of leaders and members of your congregation that have agreed to participate in this study and are aware that they/you are participating in a research project.
2. Scheduling a meeting time and for allowing me to meet with your group on location.
3. You have agreed and have allowed the recording of the focus group session. This will assist me, the researcher, with the proper representation of concepts, insights, and discussion generated from the focus group participants.

My pledge to you:

4. Information shared and gained from the focus group session will be kept confidential. The information will be used to compare and contrast methods and concepts between the other churches participating in the project and to evaluate the effective or ineffective methods of evangelism that have resulted with new converts and the members gained by profession of faith.
5. Regarding the conclusion and observations made, no church will be recognized by name or singled out. The purpose of the project is to gain insight into effective evangelism and assimilation of members among ten churches of various ages from three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.
6. The results will be shared with you and all participating congregations.

Thanks so much for your help and participation.

Blessings,

Ralph Hux

APPENDIX E
COVER LETTER FOR THE FOCUS GROUP LEADER/LAY LEADER
PARTICIPANT

March, 2011

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for allowing me to conduct this focus group with you and your congregation. You are aware that I am working on a Doctor of Ministry degree through Asbury Theological Seminary. Your participation in this focus group consists of part of the collection of research, information, and data necessary to complete the study.

Thank you for participating in this group of leaders and lay leaders from your congregation and for agreeing to the following:

1. Meeting with your pastor and other leaders of your congregation that have agreed to participate in this study and are aware that you are participating in a research project.
2. Agreeing to the scheduled meeting time and for allowing me to meet the group on location at your local church.
3. You have agreed and understand that I am recording the focus group session. This will assist me, the researcher, with the proper representation of concepts, insights, and discussion generated from the focus group participants.

My pledge to you:

4. Information shared and gained by you from the focus group session will be kept confidential. The information will be used to compare and contrast methods and concepts between the other churches participating in the project and to evaluate the effective or ineffective methods of evangelism that have resulted with new converts and the members gained by profession of faith.
5. Regarding the conclusion and observations made, no church will be recognized by name or singled out. The purpose of the project is to gain insight into effective evangelism and assimilation of members among ten churches of various ages from three districts of The Churches of Christ in Christian Union.
6. The final results will be shared with your pastor and all participating congregations.

Thanks so much for your participation.

Blessings,

Ralph Hux

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